AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S ENGAGEMENT WITH RESTITUTION, RESTORATIVE PRACTICES, AND CIRCLES

by

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Abstract

Canadian schools have long employed punitive discipline, a colonial paradigm that is hierarchical and exclusionary. Using Participatory Action Research, two Indigenous and nine non-Indigenous educators collaborated to implement a restorative model into an elementary school in northern British Columbia. Our hybrid of Restitution and Restorative Practices (RRP) and Circles included regional Indigenous protocols. A thematic analysis of participant interviews revealed patterns in the key areas of belonging, cultural safety, trauma informed practice, shame, and decolonizing education. RRP was experienced as an egalitarian model and Indigenous protocols supported community building during Circle practice. Implementation of RRP and Circles (RRP/C) did not represent enough structural change to decolonize discipline, but this hybrid was a relational and holistic model that integrated the Indigenous values of consensus building, interconnection, and harmony. Concerns with the model and its implementation included cultural racism, resistance, vulnerability, shame, and safety.

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Glossary

Aboriginal

An umbrella term that refers to the original inhabitants of a place. “Using the term Aboriginal is growing in disuse as people are encouraged to specify First Nations, Inuit or Métis, or use Indigenous.” (FNESC & FNSA, 2019, p. 249)

Circle

“Circles are a traditional First Nations format for discussion and decision making.” (FNESC & FNSA, p.19). In a classroom setting, participants sit in a circle so everyone can see and hear the speaker. A facilitator leads the discussion by posing a question and then passes a talking piece, inviting participants to share their thoughts, views, and feelings. Only the person who is holding the talking piece may speak while everyone else listens.

Colonialism

“When a foreign power takes control of lands, territories, and people in another region, resulting in an unequal relationship, an exploitation of resources, and policies of assimilation.” (FNESC & FNSA, 2019, p. 249)

Decolonize

In a school context, to decolonize means to free the educational institution from the impacts of colonization. This involves identifying the structures, worldviews, ideas, and attitudes that perpetuate the dominant position of Eurocentric education.

Elder

“A respected position of importance in Indigenous communities, held by those whose wisdom and knowledge guide and support the community. Being an Elder is not defined by age, but rather because they have earned the respect of their community through wisdom, their actions, and their teachings.” (FNESC &FNSA, 2019, p. 250)

Indigenize

In an educational context, to indigenize means to learn about the Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing in a local region and to then incorporate this understanding into teaching practices, curriculum, or the structure of the school.

Indigenous

The original people of a territory or region. In Canada the term may be used interchangeably with "First Peoples" or "Aboriginal." (FNESC &FNSA, 2019, p. 251)

Restitution and Restorative Practices or RRP

A framework that can be used in place of conventional and punitive school discipline models. When harm has taken place, everyone involved comes together in a structured meeting that is guided by a standard set of restorative questions. The group discusses how the harm impacted people and then there is an amends-making process so that relationships can be repaired.

Talking Piece

"In traditional settings, an object like a talking stick or feather may be used to denote who is the speaker of the moment. It is passed from person to person, and only the person holding it may speak. You can use any item that may be special or has meaning to the class. You could engage the class in choosing what that object is. For example, it could be a feather, shell, a unique stone, or a specially made stick. It should only be used during Talking Circles so it retains its significance." (FNESC &FNSA, 2019, p. 20)

References

First Nations Education Steering Committee [FNESC] & First Nations Schools Associaton [FNSA]. (2019) *BC first nations land, title, and governance: Teacher resource guide.* https://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/PUBLICATION-Governance-BCFNLTG-2019-09-17.pdf

Acknowledgement

I owe a debt of gratitude to my colleague, “Consultant” who supported this project and answered copious questions about Restorative Practice and how she incorporates Indigenous practices and protocols. As well, I am grateful to my educational colleagues who selflessly embarked on this journey with me. At every turn, I was inspired by your thoughtful reflections, the ways that you prioritized caring for the well-being of students and each other. Finally, thank you to the School District for supporting this research project and especially to the Indigenous Education Department for providing critical resources and time to this project.

A special thanks to three excellent educators who inspired my approach to this research. First, to Dr. Theresa Healy who taught me that research is an act of social justice. Second, to Dr. John Sherry who shared his passion for group work and his insight into shame and vulnerability. Finally, to Dr. Linda O’Neill who introduced me to a wealth of knowledge on trauma informed practice and gave me a language for what my heart always knew to be true: all children deserve safety and unconditional positive regard.

Chapter One: Introduction

Historically, it was common practice for Canadian public schools to use corporal punishment to discipline students (Axelrod, 2010). While corporal punishment is no longer condoned in Canadian schools, punitive consequences such as expulsion, suspension, detention, and social exclusion are still used. Exclusionary School Discipline (ESD) practices have deleterious effects on children and impact their academic success and health (Gonzalez, et al., 2019). Awareness of adverse childhood effects (ACEs) and the benefits of trauma-informed practices (TIP) are helping to shift schools away from punitive models of discipline and toward relational discipline models (Keels, 2021). Furthermore, schools in Canada are seeking ways to decolonize education and to uphold the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). Restitution and Restorative Practices (RRP) is a relational discipline model with an orientation to solving problems and fostering student connections to adults and peers. It may also have the potential to contribute to decolonizing discipline since it decreases the role of institutional authority and requires practitioners to be open to a different worldview (Llewelyn & Howse, 1999a). RRP aligns with Indigenous approaches to community peacekeeping (Llewelyn & Howse, 1999a) and Indigenous child rearing practices (Smith, 2016). Employing Circle practices (CP) in combination with RRP, further contributes to strengthening relationships. RRP and Circles have been used in schools in Canada and internationally. This research project observed the process and potential benefits of implementing Restitution and Restorative Practices (RRP) combined with Circle Practice (CP) in an elementary school in northern British Columbia.

Significance of the Research

RRP is a model of peacekeeping that can be used in a school setting to resolve discipline problems. This project combined RRP with Circle practice that included regional

Indigenous Circle protocols. Therefore, this project implemented a hybrid model of RRP and CP that I have referred to as RRP/C. When this paradigm is practiced in schools, it has the potential to strengthen relationships, promote a trauma-informed school culture, and explore concepts of decolonization and indigenization in education. I will address each of these points in turn.

Strengthening Relationships

Belonging is a fundamental human need that benefits mental and physical health and increases longevity (Holt-Lunstad, et al. 2015). Many experiences of poor health are rooted in a lack of belonging including addiction, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, suicidality, and attachment disorders. Belonging is equally important to the well-being of students in schools. (Baumeister & Robson, 2021) A poor sense of belonging is a risk factor in bullying (Arslan, et al., 2021) and cyberbullying (Wong, et al., 2014). It is also one of the reasons attributed to low Aboriginal enrolment and graduation (Mackay & Myles,1995). While lack of belonging has risks for well-being, robust connections with peers and staff lower the risk of misconduct (Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012), contribute to academic success (Fong, Chen, Zhang, et al., 2015), improve the subjective well-being of students (Tian, Zhang, Huebner, et al., 2016), and increase the likelihood that peers will intervene to stop bullying (Norwalk, Hamm, Farmer, et al., 2016). Belongingness is also important for staff and can contribute to lower levels of workplace stress and increased job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). A secondary school in Wales reported a decline of 60% in staff absenteeism after implementing an RRP model (Hopkins, 2015). Therefore, strengthening relationships through the use of RRP has the potential to benefit the well-being of both students and staff.

Promoting a Trauma-informed School Culture

In a trauma-informed school, staff recognize that children who have experienced adversity exhibit behaviours that are the result of their experiences and their neurobiological responses to trauma (Hodas, 2006). In getting to know students, school staff seek ways to create safety and predictability for each individual student. RRP is a flexible model that can operate from a trauma-informed lens (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015). RRP views misbehaviour as need fulfillment and encourages RRP practitioners to understand the root causes of a child's behaviour (Evans, Lester & Anfara, 2013). RRP also empowers children by providing a process to resolve problems in a mutually agreeable way and work towards repairing relationships. Educators become facilitators who support healthy relationship building. Both the philosophy and practice of RRP and CP can promote a school culture of trauma-informed care.

However, RRP needs to be used with caution and care. RRP can be unsafe for some children who have experienced adversity since they are required to examine their feelings, admit to mistakes, and trust adults enough to work through restorative steps. For some students, accepting a detention – a predictable, scheduled amount of time with an established procedure – might feel safer than talking out a problem. The risks for traumatized children can be mitigated through knowledge and careful reflection and action but it means that staff need to be more informed about caring for traumatized children in conjunction to adopting an RRP model.

A consultant from the Indigenous Education Department carefully selected a restorative program that would help us be trauma-informed in our practice. *Circle Forward* (2015) is a book of restorative practice written by Carolyn Boyes-Watson and Kay Pranis and is specifically designed for educators to use in schools. These authors recommend using

Circles in conjunction with RRP because Circles can create a relational, safe, and caring community. They also explain to educators the necessity of introducing RRP approaches to students tentatively and slowly, all the while building a rapport. To begin with, students can have the choice to observe rather than participate in Circles. When using RRP for moderate to complex disagreements, a facilitator should hold pre-conferences with students to gauge safety and readiness. Facilitators can be creative and incorporate grounding techniques into their practice. They can alter the environment with music and sensory objects or use play and movement to help students regulate. The flexible nature of RRP and Circles allows facilitators to make adaptations for students that support trauma-informed practice.

Decolonizing School Discipline.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) released its Summary Report and Calls to Action. This document describes the many ways that Indigenous children and families were harmed during the Residential School era. Students endured isolation and homesickness; hunger and starvation; fear; physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; disenfranchisement and restrictions to their cultural expressions, identities and use of language. This system established large-scale educational and economic disparities and forged a relationship of distrust between Indigenous Peoples and Canadian schools. Educators have a duty to actively engage with the process of reconciliation and work toward rebuilding trust.

There are two Calls to Action under the Education section of the TRC's (2015) report that are relevant to this research project: Call to Action 6 and 10. Call to Action 6 calls on the Government of Canada to repeal Section 43 of the *Criminal Code,* a law that justifies the use of corporal punishment. Section 43 of the *Criminal Code* states:

> Every schoolteacher, parent or person standing in the place of a parent is justified in using force by way of correction toward a pupil or child, as the case may be, who is under his care, if the force does not exceed what is reasonable under the circumstances. (*Criminal Code*, 1985, s 43)

Past and present advocacy groups have tried to have Section 43 repealed, with the most successful court case to date, the *Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law v. Canada* taking place in 2004. The Supreme Court of Canada did not repeal the law since it was deemed constitutional, but it placed conditions on Section 43 to protect children from unreasonable harm. Under these new conditions, a parent can only spank their child when they are between the ages of two and twelve and only if the parent uses their open hand and does not strike a child's face or head. Additionally, a parent may not act in retaliation or harm a child who is incapable of learning from punishment due to a disability. The ruling also prohibited corporal punishment in schools but allowed educators to continue to use physical restraint to remove a child from a classroom in cases of non-compliance or situations when a child is not safe.

The history of Residential School abuses and the history of past punitive practices helps us to understand that Canadian schools have long operated from a punitive and colonial mindset. While in practice, Canadian schools no longer use corporal punishment, they still operate within the intellectual bounds of a model where a person in authority is considered an expert and dispenses consequences according to their own cultural values and individual determinations. Call to Action 6 is relevant to the purpose of this research, which is to explore a model of discipline that is non-punitive, does not exercise power over and aligns with Indigenous ways of maintaining harmony in a community (Llewellyn, 1999a).

Call to Action 10 calls on the federal government to co-author new legislation with the "full participation and informed consent" of Indigenous peoples that includes seven key principles, including assurances that Indigenous parents and communities can have "responsibility, control, and accountability" (TRC, 2015, p. 320-321) The TRC also recommended engaging in the educational practices as outlined in Article 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (p. 145). Article 14 states:

> Indigenous Peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. (UNDRIP, p. 13)

With the support of the Indigenous Education Department, our school district is encouraging educators to incorporate Ways of Knowing (epistemology) and Ways of Being (ontology) that align with First Nations values in our region. Our small research project included two Indigenous staff and nine non-Indigenous staff, including myself as a non-Indigenous researcher. Our small participatory action group attempted to engage in the spirit of Call to Action 10, by co-constructing a restorative and relational discipline model with the help of our Consultant (TRC, 2015).

Tiffany Smith (2016) in her research into decolonizing education in Saskatchewan writes about the necessity for educators to become aware of their own worldviews and those of Indigenous Peoples:

> [D]ecolonizing needs to begin within the mind and spirit of educators so that they can seek to accept that there are worldviews that exist other than the dominant Western perspective and acknowledge that current Canadian systems of education exist within a Eurocentric framework. (p. 49)

In short, for education to make space for Indigeneity, educators need to decolonize their minds. This is not an insignificant feat. It can be difficult for someone raised in a Eurocentric mindset to perceive their worldview as one among many, particularly because it is the dominant viewpoint and it is the foundation for our institutions, such as our systems of government, education, and justice.

RRP and Circles are processes that call upon participants to operate from a non-hierarchical and non-binary point of view. This contradicts the Eurocentric mindset from which public schools traditionally operated in Canada. Michel Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punish* (1979) explained how European authorities used binary division such as sane/insane or dangerous/harmless to brand and separate people (1979). In terms of how this binary division enacted on culture, James Youngblood Henderson (2000) explains how colonization spread or diffused European epistemology because authorities viewed Europe as inventive and civilized and non-European parts of the world as uninventive and savage. Schools in Europe, and later in Canada, operated under a hierarchy because educational authorities considered themselves to be experts and considered Indigenous children, parents and communities to be ignorant. Discipline practices stemmed from these same ideas: the expert educator meted out the punishment proportionate to the offence committed by the ignorant and uncivilized student.

RRP differs from a Eurocentric epistemology because it is relational and not hierarchical. RRP validates the points of view of all students and can include the values of family and community. Furthermore, in a Circle, conversation does not flow as a dialogue or discourse between differing and contradictory points of view; rather, all points of view are recognized as true.

It is important to acknowledge criticisms of restorative approaches. While Breton (2012) is a proponent of Restorative Justice (RJ), she is concerned that it is losing credibility, especially with Indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States. She discusses the need to decolonize RJ as it operates as an alternative within the framework of larger justice systems and is only employed when colonial authorities deem it appropriate.

> If the restorative justice movement fails to address the colonial crimes embedded in our history, it will risk losing credibility in this country, as it seems to have already done in Canada. Many First Nations now reject restorative justice, and precisely on these grounds. The core vision of going to the roots of harm and doing what it takes to put things right is experienced as empty rhetoric, invoked only when colonial power structures deem it advantageous to do so. (p. 60)

Breton favours a restorative approach for its focus on peacemaking and addressing harm, but she believes the Canadian and American justice systems have hijacked restorative justice. First Nations, such as the Navajo, are fighting to reclaim their traditional peace-making practices and insisting theirs be the primary process and not left to the convenience or discretion of government or judicial system oversight (Yazzie, 2000).

Llewellyn and Howse (1999b) believe that part of the problem is researchers are using a punitive mindset to evaluate a restorative process. She considers RJ to be a comprehensive system of justice that can and should be the process by which colonial crimes, such as the Residential School system are addressed. She argues that in Canada, where justice has been synonymous with punishment and people weigh success from the lens of retribution, it can be difficult for people to accurately assess the value of RJ. She proffers the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission as an approach that, “addressed gross

human rights violations in the country's past through a process aimed, not at the punishment of guilty individuals, but at determining what happened and why," (p. 356)

Llewellyn (2002) also tells us that RJ is not rooted solely in Indigenous peace keeping practices; rather they align with the way that Indigenous peoples addressed harm all over the world. Restorative practices have their origins in Western and non-Western traditions, and it was the prevalent form of justice throughout human history. Living in smaller communities, the purpose of a system of justice was to consider the needs of the person harmed, evaluate what led up to the problem and then focus on forms of reconciliation that kept community relationships strong. The modern legal system, which is relatively young by comparison, positioned judges, as representatives of the crown, to be authorities on justice and to also represent victims since penalties were paid to the crown.

The debate surrounding RJ is complex and steeped in history, culture, politics and social inequity. This suggests the importance of being vigilant, thoughtful and respectful when implementing any model that claims to align itself with Indigenous values. However, the imperative for caution should not induce so much fear that we fail to try. Smith (2016) explains that educational leaders need to have both a flexible and an agentic mindset, the former to be open to diverse epistemologies (Ways of Knowing) and the latter to advocate for Indigenous students. Before proceeding with this research, I knew it was important to co-construct a model of RRP that included an Indigenous perspective. It was key, therefore, that we included a consultant from the Indigenous Education Department to help lead the implementation and guide how our participants practiced RRP/C.

Background of the Research

The opportunity for this research presented itself during a period when our school had a shortage of administrative and learning resource staff. Our student population was large

enough that we merited more than one full-time administrator as well as a Learning Resource Teacher to oversee support services to students. Unfortunately, due to a shortage of human resources, neither were available. My school principal asked our staff for suggestions on how to respond to discipline problems in a way that reduced referrals to the office. I proposed employing an RRP model as I had prior experience in using RRP while working for another school district and found the philosophy positively changed my approach to classroom management. My administrator also had some experience with the RRP model and suggested contacting experienced staff at the Indigenous Education Department (IED). The IED employed a staff member who trained staff and students in RRP/C across the district. For the duration of the first year of this project, the IED offered the RRP/C trainer two days per week to model and consult with our staff during the 2017-2018 school year. The administrator offered me 2.5 hours per week of my teaching contract to take on the role of RRP Teacher and work through discipline referrals using a restorative process. She strategically gave me the half hour after lunch since the peak time for office referrals was typically following the outside play time at lunch.

The RRP/C trainer was our teacher and consultant and an important educational leader for this research project. Throughout this paper I refer to her as the Consultant. She is a member of a First Nation in our region, she is an important knowledge keeper, and she was able to model regional Indigenous protocols for Circle practice. It was by her recommendation that we selected *Circle Forward* by Carolyn Boyes-Watson and Kay Pranis (2015) as a resource to guide our practice. She supplied our staff with several copies of this resource and our school librarian purchased more so that we had ten copies available within our school building. In addition, our Consultant created posters and laminated pocket-sized

cards of the restorative questions so that staff had a quick guide to the restorative process. The questions can be found in Appendix A.

A Choice School in a Northern District

The context in which we conducted this research is unique when compared to previous research into restorative school practices. In Canada, restorative approaches began with incorporating Restorative Justice (RJ) in the legal system and then moved to schools with high-risk youth who were sometimes involved in court proceedings (Vaandering, 2014). Previous research, such as that conducted by Cassidy and Bates (2005) therefore occurred in schools in large urban settings where students were considered at risk or belonged to minority groups.

Our school is a single-track French Immersion elementary school located in a small town (less than 100, 000 people) in northern British Columbia. It is also referred to as a Choice school since students who reside in any of the school district's catchment areas can choose to enroll. The school population throughout this project was a little greater than 400 students. A significant number of students come from families whose parents have pursued post-secondary education and earn middle incomes. Nonetheless, the school population is comparatively large for the community and has a racially and culturally diverse population. In the past, students with learning disabilities or special needs were discouraged from attending the program because it was mistakenly believed that second language acquisition was too great a challenge; however, this mindset has been challenged by increasing understanding of neurodiversity. French Immersion is therefore becoming more inclusive. During this research project, our school administration was supportive of inclusive education and the student population was becoming more diverse. Staff were engaged in an on-going process of adapting their teaching styles and rethinking classroom management strategies and

discipline. I felt hopeful that in this context of changing philosophies and practices, that this could be a fruitful time to introduce RRP/C.

This project took place in a community and school district that engages in Circle practice. CP and RRP can be used independently but it is a common practice to combine Circles and Restorative Practices. In our school district, Circles are a time when people come together to speak on a shared topic to form understanding and to strengthen relationships and community. Circles are sacred in many Indigenous cultures and therefore the word is capitalized throughout this paper. For this project, our school staff learned to use regional Indigenous Circle protocols.

Conceptual Lens

Feminist Relational Theory

Llewellyn, Archibald, Clairmont, and Crocker (2013) argue that a relational model like RJ needs to be viewed from the lens of a relational theory. This enables researchers to shift the scope of their questions beyond quantitative measurements of criminality, like crime rates, to consider the experiences of people moving through a justice process and the implications this has on their relationships.

> Restorative justice takes the relational nature of human beings as a conceptual starting point for understanding the meaning and requirements of justice. From this starting point justice must take account of our connectedness to one another. Attention to the multiple and intersecting relationships in which we live makes clear the ways in which wrongdoing causes harm not only to the individuals involved but also to the connections and relationships in and through which individuals live," (p. 297).

This perspective also applies to RRP/C being used in an elementary school. Quantitative measures, such as office referral rates, can be useful to administrators and policy makers who

are monitoring trends or making decisions about the allocation of resources. However, this research is focused on relational questions, such as the ways RRP/C might alter relationships between students and staff or transform school culture. Llewellyn and Llewellyn (2015) further argue that a feminist perspective is a critical "vantage point" to, "…allow students and teachers to see and understand the connectedness of people and thus the relations of power that define and mobilize knowledge," (p. 12) Thus, from a feminist perspective, this research attempts to decentralize dominant and oppressive pedagogies to consider how RRP/C decolonizes educational thinking.

Critical Theory.

Feminist Relational Theory is a form of Critical Theory, which is also relevant to this research. As an educator currently working in an elementary school, I want my research to be academically meaningful but also positively influence quality of life and learning for people. Susanne Schwarz McCotter (2001) describes a critical theorist as a researcher who seeks to address social inequities and effect social change by providing equal access to opportunity. In this project, I asked a group of educators accustomed to mainstream and hierarchical punitive models of discipline to adopt RRP/C, a more egalitarian and inclusive model reputed to improve student belonging and school culture. Furthermore, I would be asking staff to consider the ways that RRP/C might decolonize and indigenize our school and our teaching. By using the lens of Critical Theory, I would endeavour to situate the changes in our school within the broader context of social justice changes, especially in relation to the TRC (2015).

Researcher Motivation

I was motivated to implement a restorative model into my school because of positive experiences I had as an educator in a previous northern school district. As a new teacher, I was baffled by classroom management and discipline. When a student exhibited poor

behaviour, I tried to evaluate the size of the infraction and then provide a meaningful consequence equal in size to the wrongdoing. I did not feel comfortable in this role. It was counterintuitive to the teacher I wanted to be and counterproductive to the kinds of relationships I wanted with my students. Moreover, assigning consequences for infractions only seemed to be effective with students who rarely misbehaved. I felt certain there must be better ways.

Fortunately, in the span of a few years, my district offered professional development in three key areas that had a strong influence on my philosophies of education and discipline. First, they welcomed an esteemed psychologist and anthropologist, Dr. Martin Brokenleg, who presented the Circle of Courage, a holistic approach to supporting resiliency in youth inspired by Lakhóta child rearing practices and co-created with Dr Brendtro and Dr. Van Bockern (2019). This model helped me to understand that student behaviour is really a result of need fulfillment and that I could better support my students through compassion and relationship. This was an enormous relief to me. I observed my students with renewed fascination, attempting to discern what their behaviours told me about their needs and how I could adapt to fulfill them.

Next, our district provided a series of workshops on self-regulation from Stuart Shanker's *Calm, Alert and Learning* (2013). This helped me to understand how humans interact with their environment and seek out either more or less of a stimulus to self-soothe and reset their nervous systems to a state of calm alertness. This reinforced for me that student behaviour was about need fulfillment. Once again, I found myself observing my students with fascination to catch the moments when they might be using sensory-motor stimuli to find a state of comfort or calm. While the Circle of Courage helped me consider

my relationship with students, now I was also reviewing the environmental conditions in my classroom.

Finally, the district provided training in RRP for any interested teachers. I was able to complete Levels One and Two of Diane Gossen's approach to RRP (1996). I was also fortunate to receive direct classroom support from an RRP practitioner during the first year. I appreciated having a way to address behaviour problems that also protected or even reinforced my relationships with students. Interestingly, Diane Gossen's approach to using Restitution in a school setting was based on William Glasser's Choice Theory principles (Onedera, J. & Greenwalt, B., 2007). These principles bore a strong resemblance to the Circle of Courage and this reinforced for me the universality of human needs and how they influence our behaviours.

Still, I was not sure that RRP was the answer to every situation. I had questions about how it dealt with shame. I worried about what to do if a student was not willing to take responsibility. What was the next course of action in that case? I wanted to experience RRP on a larger scale where staff around me were also experiencing it and we could engage in discussion to share our experiences and explore the benefits and challenges of RRP.

The Diane Gossen (1996) approach was different from the RRP program we employed in this research because Gossen's restitution program still includes a punitive approach combined with a restorative approach and encouraged teachers to weave between a managerial role and a monitoring role. Also, Diane Gossen's approach did not employ Circles. Our school is situated in a community where Circles are culturally significant and may therefore contribute to a greater sense of belonging and cultural safety. I was grateful to my co-collaborator on this project as she had many years of experience in conducting Circles

and RRP. She was able to teach staff and students about Circles and RRP and she modelled how to employ Circles in a culturally respectful manner.

Consultant Motivation

On this project, we were fortunate to have a Consultant on loan to our school from the school district's Indigenous Education Department. As a Restorative Practice Facilitator and Trainer, she provided critical education and support for our understanding of RRP, as well as regional Indigenous Circle protocols. The Consultant shared important knowledge about Circle protocols and strengthening community in our school and in our classrooms. She was motivated by the strength of her belief in the positive outcomes of using RRP/C. She believes that children need, "...to learn how to be in relationship with each other, " and that RRP/C provides a healthier way to help children grow through their mistakes and maintain their belonging within a community group. Due to her essential role in this project, it is important to provide a rich description of her background knowledge and her philosophy toward RRP/C and its implementation.

Our Consultant was steeped in restorative practice from childhood. As she would say, "It's always been in my blood." Her father was the founder and creator of a Restorative Justice program in northern BC. She speculates that her dad used restorative practice with her and her family when she was a child because it is a paradigm she has always used in her own parenting and work life.

Early in her career our Consultant was mentored in Circle work by an Elder who was a Drug and Alcohol Counsellor at a Native Friendship Centre. Following this, the Consultant brought her skills to Victim Services and to a youth home setting. The youth responded well to house meetings conducted in Circle where they were encouraged to express their needs and staff were encouraged to create safety. Later she worked with clients who had HIV or

AIDS. In this role, she often invited guest speakers from the medical or social work community, and she noticed something intriguing. When she provided a lecture-hall style presentation with a podium and audience, her clients would disengage and rarely stay to the end of the presentation. She surmised that because this structure was hierarchical, and the guest speaker was in a role of power over the listeners that this was not inducive to building trust. Her clients had endured a lifetime of repeated harm by people in power in the church, government, or private sector and many were survivors and Elders who had attended Residential School. So, the Consultant returned to Circle work. When she invited the guest speaker into Circle with her clients, engagement increased, and clients stayed.

Our Consultant had a strong reputation in our community for the work she did. The school district invited her to enjoy their team at the Indigenous Education program. Like many Indigenous Education programs in school districts around the province, their initiatives included promoting authentic Indigenous content in schools and improving graduation rates for Indigenous students by providing a range of supports. The initiative to incorporate RRP/C in schools was led by the Consultant. At the time of our interview, she had been working in this role for seven years.

Throughout her career, our Consultant sought opportunities to further her understanding of RRP/C. She had the opportunity to learn from Kay Pranis, a trainer and writer who co-authored the resource, *Circle Forward*, that we used as a guide and support to implementing RRP/C (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015). The Consultant liked to refer to Pranis as, "...the Godmother of Circle practice." She admired Pranis for her global work with Indigenous communities and her focus on prevention. She also received training from Rita Alfred, the Restorative Justice Coordinator in the Oakland Unified School District in California (Alfred & Bendich, 2012). Alfred is celebrated for the positive impact she had on

at-risk youth by employing Peacemaking Circles and Restorative Justice in middle and high schools. Our Consultant also completed training and certification at the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) and she has the expertise to train RRP/C facilitators and educators.

Our Consultant made RRP/C her own by blending the knowledge of her mentors – Elders of diverse Nations, Kay Pranis and Rita Alfred – with her own experiences with adults, children, and youth. When she is invited into a school, she begins by teaching what she calls the four R's: relationship, respect, responsibility and reconciliation. Of these, the most important is relationship, which is why she prioritizes using Circles to form connection and community in classrooms before attempting to use RRP questions for resolving conflict. I describe her training process in depth in the Methodology section.

Purpose of the Study

Based on the work of Rita Alfred (Alfred & Bendich, 2012) and Belinda Hopkins (2004), the Consultant and I knew that the first year of implementation would be focused on training staff and persuading them to engage with RRP/C. My research questions therefore focused on the challenges of making a school-wide paradigm shift and what motivated people to participate in a model of Restitution and Restorative Practices (RRP). I also wanted to know whether Circle Practices and RRP do indeed improve relationships among staff and increase an overall sense of belonging and how or why it does so. How might a more connected staff make school culture more trauma-informed and what are the possible associated benefits? Will our largely non-Indigenous staff become more open to understanding Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies? My question is thus: Will the voluntary participation of staff in Circles as well as their voluntary use of Restitution and Restorative Practices, demonstrate to staff the extent to which RRP/C can promote a sense of

belonging, contribute to a trauma-informed school culture, and help to decolonize education? Will this in turn, encourage the staff's sustained interest in implementing an RRP model?

Summary

School discipline is a critical area of research as it can have far-reaching implications for student well-being. Past models of discipline have placed school staff in authoritarian roles to decide on degrees of exclusionary consequences that range from detention to expulsion. Exclusion does not support school belonging, an important predictor of student health and success. Apunitive model is hierarchical and perpetuates colonial practices. RRP/C is one alternative to a punitive approach. It is a relational framework that invites students to understand how harm has impacted all involved and provides space for dialogue, reflection and solution finding. RRP/C has origins in Indigenous practices that when experienced may persuade staff to consider ways to decolonize and indigenize their approaches to teaching.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

To provide context for this project, I began by researching the history of discipline practices in Canadian schools. I then explored research into the benefits and risks associated with practicing RRP/C in schools to compare with punitive forms of discipline. I especially took note of impacts on students and staff wellness. There was not enough literature on whether adopting RRP or CP provided pathways to reconciliation, so I expanded my search to include Indigenous responses to RJ in Canada and internationally.

School Discipline in Canada

Schools in Canada have long used punitive models of discipline. Churches ran the earliest schools and considered corporal punishment to be "necessary for the development of the positive qualities of obedience, respect for authority, and patience in Canadian children," (Gradinger, 2005, p. 6). School district policies explicitly stated how and when a strap could be used. For example, the Toronto Board of Education's by-laws from 1955, outlined the conditions under which a school board sanctioned tool (usually a strap) could be administered (Axelrod, 2010). The Criminal Code of Canada supported the use of reasonable force in the classroom. Teachers would only be criminally liable if they caused permanent injury, if the punishment was disproportionate to the offence or if it was committed out of malice (Axelrod, 2010).

With the secularization of schools and increased understanding of how physical punishment harms a child, attitudes toward corporal punishment in schools changed (Gradinger, 2005). Some school boards began to ban corporal punishment in the 1970's (Axelrod, 2010) and in 1991 Canada ratified the Convention of the Rights of the Child which included the abolition of corporal punishment (Gradinger, 2005). In British Columbia, section 76 of the School Act of British Columbia (1996) states: "… a Provincial school must

be similar to that of a kind, firm and judicious parent, but must not include corporal punishment." Across Canada, public school districts and teachers' unions no longer condone the use of corporal punishment.

Although corporal punishment is no longer used, the underlying punitive model remains intact in the form of exclusionary practices. Physical discipline has been replaced with office referrals, exclusion from field trips, suspension and expulsion. These collective practices are commonly referred to as exclusionary school discipline (ESD) or zero tolerance policies (Gozalez, Etow & De La Vega, 2019). The term zero tolerance policies came into use with the 1994 Gun Free Schools Act in the United States in which the discovery of a firearm meant an automatic expulsion (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015). In 2000, Ontario followed suit with the Safe Schools Act. Since then, the term zero tolerance policies has come to mean any inflexible school district policy or legislation that outlines specific punishments for specific offences (Findlay, 2008). For example, a zero tolerance policy could be applied to a situation of school bullying (Cassidy & Jackson, 2005) Both terms, zero tolerance policies and ESD, are used widely in contemporary research about school discipline. Both refer to exclusionary forms of punitive discipline.

Criticisms of Punitive Discipline

There is extensive research that explains why punishment does not work and how it can harm students. Punishment seeks to gain compliance from students by creating conditions or consequences that deter specific behaviours. Aversive controls gain compliance in the short-term but in the long-term they lead to discord, disengagement and resentment (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005). Students who are punished are likely to feel ashamed, angry and resentful and they do not receive help for the root causes of their behaviour (Cassidy &

Jackson, 2005). Punishment, or exclusionary discipline, is the antithesis of inclusive school practices, and it does not educate.

So why are people drawn to a punitive model? In the case of zero tolerance policies, the motivation was safety and fairness. Zero tolerance practices were meant to equalize the playing field by employing the same punitive responses to infractions regardless of the gender, class, or race of the wrong doer (Cassidy & Jackson, 2005). They were also put in place to reduce the presence of weapons and drugs in school buildings and therefore increase student safety. However, the policies were not fair, did not improve safety and instead, "… exacerbated the criminalization of marginalized groups," (Salole & Abdulle, 2015, p. 126). Cassidy and Jackson (2005) explained that equal application of the rules to all students does not mean that a policy is equitable since it does not allow for differences in circumstances.

> "Children who come from challenging home environments, who struggle with learning or who experience chaos in their lives are less likely to be able to conform to rules which are inflexible and do not accommodate the life worlds in which these children live." (Cassidy & Jackson, 2005, 456)

Students who experience adversity require greater compassion when they arrive at school; unfortunately, this is not their reality. In communities where children and youth are already marginalized, such as by race or income, schools typically employ punitive strategies to an even greater extent, worsening social and economic disparities (Findlay, 2008; Welch & Payne, 2010).

In 2019, Gonzalez, Etow and De La Vega, reviewed research and argued that ESD is linked to health disparities and is therefore a health justice issue. They made three arguments in support of their case. First, ESD can lead to school disengagement and dropouts, and this places students at higher risk for, "…social and economic instability, chronic disease, and

low life expectancy," (p. 48) Second, ESD leads to feelings of disconnection from school staff and peers which can lead children to engage in behaviours (e.g. substance use, gang-related activities) that increase their risk for adverse health problems. Third, when ESD practices are used with students who have experienced trauma, or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), "…they have the effect of compounding stress, deepening feelings of fear and isolation, and fostering mistrust of adults," (p. 48)

Ramey (2016) has explored the connection between punitive models and crime and has found a direct association between practices that normalize punishment early in a child's life and an increased risk of involvement in the criminal justice system during adolescence and adulthood. This social conduit is referred to as the "school to prison pipeline." Youth who drop out because they feel alienated, marginalized, or bullied, and/or youth who experience school suspension or expulsion, are vulnerable to becoming street involved or incarcerated and as adults they have difficulty with employability, and suffer health problems (Cassidy & Jackson, 2005).

Researchers opposed to the use of zero tolerance policies have also provided legal grounds to refute a punitive model. Findlay (2008) is concerned that punishment teaches children to accept a suspension of their individual rights, including their right to due process. Cassidy and Jackson (2005) also believe that current school discipline practices are unjust and that they do not uphold the obligations of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to provide respectful, safe and inclusive learning environments free of discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation and ability.

There is also concern that a punitive mindset contributes to deficit model thinking since it encourages people to view behaviour as either good or bad and to then view people as good or bad. Cassidy and Jackson (2005) point out that good and bad behaviour are social

constructs that determine who is worthy of respect. For example, an act of vandalism by a middle-class youth might be considered a prank but a youth from a low-income family could be vilified for the same act. The student who is vilified becomes labelled and is excluded from school and is then at a higher risk for becoming street involved, using substances, not achieving academically, and becoming isolated socially. Cassidy and Bates (2005) completed qualitative research in a series of interviews and observations with the students and staff of the Whytecliff Education Centre in Greater Vancouver, an alternative school for students who either dropped out or were pushed out of their previous public schools. They discovered that every student who attended the school reported feeling labelled as a troublesome student at their previous schools and parents reported receiving only negative feedback about their child. In prior schools, if a student made a mistake, everything snowballed and they had to see the principal, have a parent meeting, and frame conditions moving forward before they could return to class. One student was denied enrollment in a previously attended school district because they were on probation. They Whytecliff Education Centre has a unique perspective on discipline:

> The school is guided by the principles reflected in the vision statement, and therefore there are no rules for behavior nor does the school punish students. The administrators explained that the rules only trap them in a rule-consequence escalation and that this diverts their attention away from helping students and understanding the multidimensional causes of behavior." (p. 78)

Instead, the school staff employ an ethic of care that places relationship at the centre and looks to supporting the whole student.

How a Restorative Model Differs

A restorative model treats misconduct as harm to relationships and people and not as a violation of school rules (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). This immediately adjusts the balance of power between school administration who are positioned to be the authority on moral behaviour and students who must conform to these expectations. Instead, RRP places emphasis on mutual respect and democratic process by seeking to reach a consensus on the nature of the harm and how it impacted all involved. The aim is to mitigate the harm for all parties and restore the relationship (Evans, Lester, & Anfara, 2013). The harm is not treated lightly, and the wrong doer must face the person they have harmed and take responsibility for their actions. The harm is thoroughly explored and repaired so that the people involved can continue to draw strength from positive community involvement and relationships and so that school staff know when and how to provide support. According to Hopkins (2004) the restorative process can be small, mediated by a teacher between two students; it can be moderate in size, a restorative conference that might include a few members of the school staff or a student's family; or it can be larger and include relevant third-party members such as family, elders, caregivers, the justice system and community service providers. When the process becomes larger, restorative facilitators need to conduct pre-conferences to ensure that third party members will contribute positively and safely to the process. Peacemaking Circles are used for large group meetings so that everyone comes to the meeting as an equal and all voices are heard and respected (Evans, Lester, & Anfara, 2013).

A Restorative model is more than a set of procedures; it is a philosophy (Evans, Lester, & Anfara, 2013). RRP practitioners believe that behaviour communicates an unmet need and that only by exploring the root cause of the problem can school staff hope to support a student and contribute to filling the student's needs (Evans, Lester, & Anfara,

2013). The process must also meet the needs of the victim. Participants, including those who have been harmed, may call upon any member of their family or community to offer support, to witness or to recommend a direction, which is in keeping with Indigenous philosophies (Hopkins, 2004). Restorative Practices are not only used when a problem arises but can be used by school staff to strengthen relationships and community and it therefore contributes to preventing misconduct (Evans, Lester, & Anfara 2013).

Support for a Restorative Model

There has been some research into the effectiveness of Restorative Justice (RJ) and this can be helpful to provide a base understanding of the benefits of a relational theory of justice. Some benefits to RJ include increased victim-offender satisfaction, reduced recidivism and improved compliance with the justice system (Hayes, 2005; Latimer, Dowden & Muise, 2005; Rodriguez, 2007). Hayes (2005), makes the case that punitive models do not offer restitution to victims since offenders are punished by the state, or in the case of schools, by administrators. Research into Restorative Justice found that victim-offender conferences reduced symptoms of anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder for victims of crime because they could meet the perpetrator and understand their life circumstances and motivations instead of speculating on the unknown (Porter, 2006).

Overall, there has been limited research on the effectiveness of RRP in schools. Most research evidence comes from a few case studies, pilot studies or other institutional reports and some but not all of this research has been peer reviewed (Evans, Lester, & Anfara, 2013). The first study on the use of RRP in schools was conducted in Queensland, Australia in the 1990's, where restorative conferences were held in response to assault, vandalism, theft, drug abuse, truancy, verbal abuse, persistent disruption in class, and in one case, a bomb threat (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). This research revealed many positive outcomes

of using RRP, including: high participant satisfaction; high compliance rates with conferencing agreements; lower rates of re-offending; strengthened connections to community for offenders; increased safety for victims; strengthened relationships for all participants; reinforcement of school values; and greater trust and comfort for parents when interacting with school staff. Nearly all schools reported they had changed their thinking from a punitive to a more restorative approach (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001).

A pilot study in Scotland (McCluskey, et al., 2008a) followed the implementation of an RRP model over a two-year period with ten elementary, seven secondary and one special school in Scotland. This study revealed many of the benefits and challenges of implementing a restorative model. The research identified beliefs that contributed to the successful implementation of RRP, factors that included a recognized need for change, a strong sense of agency, a clear statement of goals balanced with flexibility, good quality training, and strong leadership. Students expressed positive changes as feeling heard, everyone being treated as equals, and collaborative problem-solving. The study also identified beliefs that contributed to resistance in adopting RP. For example, some staff had difficulty reconciling RRP with their current behavior management strategies. Some were willing to trust the use of RRP for day-to-day situations but felt that more serious situations still called for punitive measures.

In 2009, another team of researchers (Kane, J., et al., 2009), further analyzed the data from the pilot study in Scotland and published a second article attempting to determine whether school staff first needed to accept the ideology or "ethos" of RRP before successfully practicing it or whether through practicing RRP the school staff would generate, "an inclusive ethos." They presented three case studies of three schools from the data collected in the initial pilot study. They concluded that it is essential for a school to meaningfully explore the values, attitudes and expectations of all staff involved in the

implementation. Also, it is difficult to implement a restorative model in schools that have an insecure philosophy of discipline or that believe RRP conflicts with current behaviour initiatives; however, using multiple innovations was not problematic if the philosophies aligned. High schools can be particularly challenging because they have a more compartmentalized structure that limits the spread of new philosophies and processes. Therefore, schools that provided multiple opportunities for participation, collaboration and the sharing of ideas experienced greater success. Schools that fostered learning for the entire community – teachers, administrators, support staff, custodians, secretaries, parents and students – experienced greater success. To manage the implementation effectively, it is important to have both specific goals, including timeframes and targets, so that staff can observe how their practice is changing, as well as flexibility so that staff can tailor the practice to meet their needs and style. Leadership is most effective when it is not situated with the administration but rather with passionate teachers within the staff who model success through their practice and encourage self-reflection and discussion among their peers. Pupils, also, could have an enormous influence on increasing interest and enthusiasm about the effectiveness of RRP as seen by the success of the peer mediation.

Karp and Breslin (2001) studied schools in the United States who adopted a restorative model to address drug and alcohol problems. The schools reported a shift from using suspensions and expulsions towards providing supports for students that resulted in a reduction in substance abuse as well as a reduction in disciplinary issues.

Wearmouth, McKinney and Glynn (2007) published two case studies about the use of RRP within a Māori context. They reported that RRP in schools helps students resolve conflicts, makes justice visible to students and has an orientation to teaching and supporting rather than punishing and excluding. Also in New Zealand, a study found that using RRP

greatly reduced bullying because in a culture of relationship building and intelligent problem-solving, where both an offender and a victim are treated with respect and caring, bullying was unable to thrive (Gordon, 2015).

Origins of Restorative Justice

Restorative approaches, including both RJ and RRP, have origins in many Nations. Llewellyn and Howse (1999a) outline various restorative approaches from around the world. In Africa, justice practices are based on the concept of *ubuntu*, the interconnectedness of all people. When harm is suffered it is felt by everyone in the community. To repair the harm, the restorative approach must repair damage felt by the victim, all community members and the wrongdoer. This is a holistic approach that differs from the Western binary of offender and victim. In Japan, someone who has committed a criminal act will very often receive leniency by taking responsibility for their actions – confessing, showing repentance, seeking the victim's forgiveness and making amends. Whether the victim accepts these gestures and reparations, holds sway over decisions to prosecute or sentence an offender. In Europe, community justice was the common practice prior to systems of punitive criminal law. RJ is also practiced in Oceania, in New Zealand (Vieille, 2012), Australia (Little, Stewart & Ryan, 2018) and Papua New Gunea (Banks, 1999).

In North America, Indigenous peoples from many Nations use systems of justice that are relational and restorative. Chief Justice Emeritus Robert Yazzie (2000) who served the Navajo Peacemaking Courts, has written extensively on Navajo Law. He describes it as a system based on equality and consensus. In the Navajo language, a leader is called a *naat'aanii,* a person, "…who has wisdom, spirituality, leadership ability, and the respect of the community," (p. 43). The *naat'aanii* does not make decisions for others the way a judge

would, since Navajo believe each person makes their own decisions. Yazzie explains the Navajo peacemaking approach:

> When there is a problem, people look to someone who has wisdom, experience, and spirituality to teach and to give advice. The best decision is made by the agreement and consensus of everyone involved in a problem," (p.43).

Included in the peacemaking process are prayers, teachings, guidance and advice to help guide people toward healthy ways of being. The process of peacemaking is often conducted in Circle and time and space are given for people to express and discharge their feelings. Yazzie explains that peacemaking is ultimately a process of learning and healing.

Rupert Ross (1996), a Crown Attorney who travelled across Canada to learn about Indigenous justice, was also struck by the common themes of teaching and healing in response to wrong-doing. He made the comparison that colonial legal systems focus on the wrongdoer, and label them as bad and in need of punishment; whereas, Indigenous communities, such as the Cree, Ojibway and Tlingit, see the wrongdoing as a mistake or evidence of poor health and proceed to guide and counsel the person who has caused harm. When describing the Tlingit process, Ross noted the use of Circles for healing, transformation and rebuilding community connections.

Ross (1996) conducted his research during a three-year secondment with Justice Canada. Legal innovators in Canada and elsewhere were keen to integrate Indigenous law and justice practices into present day imperial legal systems in the hopes that this would reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the courts and reduce recidivism (Little, Stewart, and Ryan, 2018). An international movement of RJ grew and eventually moved into the educational sphere mainly to support at risk youth who were involved with

the courts (Vaandering, 2014). Now RRP is being implemented in various school districts internationally.

The growth of RRP practices in schools is interwoven with the trend to incorporate RJ in contemporary legal systems. According to Evans, Lester and Anfara (2013) RRP models have been implemented in schools in, "… Australia, New Zealand, England, Scotland, South Africa, Canada, and the United States," while Restorative Justice has been used in the judicial systems of, "Canada, England, Australia, Scotland, New Zealand, Norway, the United States, Japan, and several European countries," (Latimer, Dowden & Muise, 2005). Note the overlap.

Restorative practices were first used in a school in 1994 in Queensland, Australia, as a response to a serious assault after a school dance (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). RRP is still practiced in Australia. In a 2002 article, Brenda Morrison outlined a restorative program used in primary schools in the Australian Capital Territory that was effective in cases of school bullying. Macfarlane, Glynn, Cavanagh, and Bateman (2007) conducted research into components, such as RRP, that contribute to creating culturally safe schools for Māori students.

Criticisms and Concerns

Scholars have raised concerns and criticism of RJ and RRP on a number of fronts. First, there are Indigenous scholars who criticize claims that government implemented RJ is a respectful integration of Indigenous justice systems. This raises questions of cultural safety. There are also concerns that RJ or RRP might not be a safe approach to addressing intimate partner violence while others believe a restorative approach has benefits far beyond what a criminal justice system can provide. Finally, there are many challenges to implementing RRP

in schools and researchers have endeavoured to determine the obstacles and suggest strategies to circumvent. I elaborate on these concerns below.

Honouring Indigenous Justice

There is significant debate around whether RJ is truly able to honour Indigenous models of justice when it is operated from within the framework of an imperial legal system. Moyle and Tauri (2016) criticize Family Group Conferences (FGCs) which are purported to integrate Māori *tikanga* into the New Zealand justice system. In their view, FGCs are:

> …far from being an exemplar of culturally appropriate justice practice, the forum is experienced by some Māori participants as one that encloses Indigenous culture and Indigenous participants with a Eurocentric, formulaic, and standardized process. (p. 87)

Vieille (2012) shared the same view and analyzed the similarities and differences between FGCs and Māori law. She found they are similar in that they both focus on restoration and consensus. However, FGCs are unlike Maori justice since they are usually held in government offices, there is an absence of Elders and no effort is made to include *tikanga* (Māori customs, laws, or protocols). As programs implemented and managed by government, FGC's deny Maori autonomy and perpetuates a colonizing ethic of parental oversight. This causes Māori to view FGCs with distrust. Since FGC's are designed by a predominantly non-Indigenous government, they are also based in an individualistic worldview that perceives the self as distinct from the other. This differs significantly from Māori worldview.

> The Māori and a number of other Indigenous communities adopt a relational understanding of the self. The strength of Māori communities and approach to justice comes from a deep-seated sense of collective identity, which informs every aspect of living and knowing. Such an understanding fundamentally differs from that of a

> society, which views the self as a fully independent and autonomous entity (Vieille, 2013, p. 186)

Vieille observes that there is a tendency to subsume Indigenous approaches to justice under the umbrella of restorative justice resulting in the homogenization universalization of restorative justice, "…to the detriment of local preferences and practices (p. 174). Wearmouth, McKinney and Glynn (2007) considered ways that schools need to honour Māori *tikanga* in the *hui* model of restorative practice (*hui* being the Māori word for a restorative meeting). They stressed that a school administrator may not have the authority to call a *hui* and would need to seek the assistance of a Māori Elder.

Safety

While Cameron and Thorsborne (2001) report that RRP increases safety for victims, there may be times when RRP places a victim at greater risk. Anne Hayden (2012) speaks to safety concerns around using RJ for Intimate Partner Violence since a restorative process requires people to meet face-to-face. On the other hand, Yazzie (2000) argues that the Navajo approach to peacemaking is better suited to cases of domestic violence than the courts. This RJ approach helps people to communicate and release their feelings, it helps people to understand the causes of their behaviour, it educates people in better ways to resolve conflict and the process contributes to healing and restoring community ties.

Although Intimate Partner Violence is less likely to occur in a school setting, for me this raises questions about safety for victims of bullying. One way to make restorative practices safer is to necessitate that participation in the process is voluntary (Latimer, Dowden & Muise, 2005; Hopkins, 2004). Safety is equally important when considering which third party participants to invite in a restorative conference or Circle. A third-party participant might be helpful and supportive to the restorative process, or they might be

judgmental, critical, shaming, and hurtful to the victim or offender. Hopkins (2004) stresses the importance of pre-conferences to determine the role of third-party participants.

Implementation Challenges

Probably the most significant criticism of RRP is how difficult it can be to implement and sustain. Staff are required to reflect upon their own philosophies of behavior management and student discipline and gain greater professional and personal awareness. (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). Asking staff to undergo a paradigm shift or adopt yet another new initiative (some will likely perceive it as a fad) can be challenging. In the Queensland Education Department study conducted in 1996, although many positive outcomes were identified, researchers also discovered resistance to using restorative conferences (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). This resistance was attributed to a wide variety of sources. School personnel felt more comfortable using familiar strategies to curb misbehavior, such as suspensions, parent interviews, guidance and detentions. They expressed concern that a restorative conference might not be appropriate in serious cases, that the process was too time-consuming, that the offender had a poor attitude, and they were uncertain the outcome they expected could be guaranteed (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001).

Payne and Welch (2017) examined school conditions that influence the successful implementation of restorative practices. They found that grade level had no bearing on the success of a restorative model but that it was met with greater resistance in schools with a large population. Schools with a significant visible minority or low-income populations were less likely to embrace a restorative model. The type of school (vocational, academic, artistic) had no bearing on the employment of a restorative model and neither did the gender of the students.

Summary

Research into the effectiveness of RJ is more robust and research into RRP is just beginning. A few important case studies have shown the positive outcomes associated with using a restorative model as well as highlighted challenges and recommendations for the implementation of RRP into schools. There is a belief that RJ is a way to integrate Indigenous justice into contemporary legal systems and that this inclusion will strengthen Indigenous communities. Equally, there is a great deal of criticism about RJ, that it is yet another form of colonialism since the state has coopted Indigenous ideologies and control their form and function. This is a complex arena in which to engage with RRP and adapt it to school setting. However, I am bolstered by the awareness that our Consultant has grounded her model of RRP/C in the Indigenous practices of our local area.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Qualitative Research

The aim of this research is to understand how staff experienced changes to their relationships, teaching practices and worldview as they engaged with a new discipline paradigm. A qualitative approach allows a researcher to collect the subjective accounts of participants. In this study I was interested in the personal preferences, challenges, reflections, ideas, values and feelings of staff as they journeyed through these complex changes. As Carminati (2018) explains, only a qualitative approach can explore, "individuals' perceptions and feelings about those processes and dynamics underpinning decision making, accessing areas not amendable to quantitative research" (p. 2099). A quantitative approach cannot provide the same rich, descriptive data set from which to explore the meaning and process of employing RRP/C in a school.

RRP/C was not only a new paradigm in the sense that it shifted our discipline framework from punitive (hierarchichal) to relational (egalitarian), it was also a shift in culture, epistemology and pedagogy as it called upon staff to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Carminati (2018) speaks to the way qualitative research uniquely constructs meaning from within specific socio-cultural contexts:

> As such, the strength of qualitative inquiries defined by the interpretivist tradition is the understanding of how individuals, through their narratives, perceive and experience their lives, constructing meanings within their social and cultural contexts. (p. 1986)

This project took place in the socio-cultural context of an elementary school in a northern region of British Columbia. In this setting, non-Indigenous and Indigenous staff collaborated

to implement an Indigenous framework of relationship building and a model for responding to harm.

Although a quantitative approach is not specifically useful to this research, it has been used for studies on RRP where researchers were interested in changes to expulsion or recidivism rates, such as the case study of Monmouth Comprehensive School in South Wales (Hopkins, 2015). This type of research would not be applicable to this research since our implementation included a procedure to deliberately redirect discipline incidents to a restorative process. Therefore, a statistic that measured office referrals would be inauthentic because it would only reflect a procedural change and not a change in outcomes for students. For our project, statistical changes would not clarify whether RRP changes the way adults conduct themselves in their relationships with each other and with their students.

Researchers and proponents of RJ in Canada, Llewellyn, Archibald, Clairmont and Crocker (2013), raised the same concerns with research used to evaluate our current justice system: "Crime rates, arrest rates, conviction rates, compliance rates, recidivism rates, systemic costs per individual… are based on the assumption that the system, if working efficiently, ought to prevent or reduce criminal behaviour among individual citizens," (p.285). These researchers argue that quantitative measurements are not necessarily the best indicator of success for RJ. The Canadian legal system is based on a punitive model that is individualistic, formal and authoritarian; whereas, RJ is, "… community-based, informal, dialogical, participatory, and egalitarian..." (p. 284) RJ is a wholly different paradigm of justice that is relational in its orientation and therefore any evaluation of its success should reasonably include a measure of change in relationship. For example, a researcher might consider, "…the impact that the justice system has on the sort of relationships that make for safer and more secure societies…" (p. 285)

Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a collaborative approach to research that focuses on social justice and social change (Kinden, Pain & Kesby, 2008). PAR has a constructivist epistemology, that assumes a plurality of knowledge and is particularly devoted to elevating the knowledge of systematically oppressed or excluded peoples. This form of research has therefore also been an act of political activism. One example of using PAR for political activism took place in Brazil. Paulo Freire applied PAR to community-based research to bring awareness to the forces that marginalized the poor and used this knowledge to inform political action.

In our context within an elementary school, educators collaborated to identify a problem, formulated a plan to change the conditions or structure that sustains the problem, enacted the plan, and then evaluated and reflected on its contribution to change. PAR demands a high level of engagement from participants who essentially act as co-researchers who strategize, reflect evaluate and guide the direction of the inquiry (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2008). For this project, I was the academic researcher, but the Consultant designed the implementation strategy for bringing RRP/C into our school. She contributed important regional knowledge about RRP and Circle practices and forged a hybrid model of RRP/C. Staff volunteers joined our project and agreed to implement RRP/C into their daily practice in their classrooms or other workspaces on the school campus. Staff receptivity and actions contributed to the structure, direction, and pacing of implementation. My school administrator and school district provided the permissions and opportunity for this research project to take place, including providing a half day per week, (.1) of my contract, to dedicate to my role as Restitution Teacher. This role meant that discipline referrals could be redirected from the office to a restorative process. The Indigenous Education Department provided

printed resources, cards, and posters. Our school librarian purchased learning materials for participants. This research was dependent on the contributions of its collaborators.

Given the collaborative and co-constructive approach to this project, Participatory Action Research (PAR) was a good fit. Baum, MacDougall and Smith (2006), described PAR as:

> … a collective, self-reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake, so they can understand and improve upon the practices in which they participate and the situations in which they find themselves. The reflective process is directly linked to action, influenced by understanding of history, culture, and local context and embedded in social relationships. The process of PAR should be empowering and lead to people having increased control over their lives. (p. 854)

Every aspect of this project was relational and collaborative, and participants freely experimented with the model to discover their own styles and preferences. The research design needed to reflect this relational and collaborative context. PAR allowed us the flexibility to make decisions, shift directions, and grow our understanding together.

This inquiry required dialogue between participants throughout and then a final, reflective, and descriptive account of participants' experiences gained through interviews. I conducted these interviews after they had invited the Consultant to teach and model RRP/C and after they had practiced RRP/C for a minimum of six months to one year. I developed an interview protocol that was semi-structured. There were set questions intended to capture participant responses to the main questions of this research but also exploratory questions that allowed participants to decide what was significant about their experiences. In interviews, I gave myself permission to follow the lead of participants and explore topics that were of personal consequence during this project. Since the Consultant and I were also

participants, I recorded an interview in which I shared my reflections and concerns about RRP/C and had the Consultant provide a counterpoint.

Selecting an Implementation Strategy

There are procedural manuals that describe a range of implementation strategies for RRP. Morrison, Blood and Thorsborne, (2005) outlined a five-stage model that they predicted would take between 3 to 5 years to implement in a school. Belinda Hopkins (2015) implemented RRP in Wales and proposed a "5:5:5 model," that not only includes five stages but also five language areas and five core beliefs that an institution or organization needs to adopt. These models were not a good fit for this project because they assumed a context of broad support from various stakeholders across a school district and they did not necessarily include an Indigenous perspective. However, they both emphasized that the first year of implementation should be focused on persuading staff of the costs of current practices and the benefits of RRP. This aligned with the focus of our research.

In Scotland, research conducted by Kane, Lloyd, McCluskey, Maguire, Riddell, Stead, and Weedon, (2009) provided me with a hopeful direction. They found that leadership was most effective when it did not come from an administrator (non-hierarchical) and that small groups of passionate colleagues, as well as input from students, could be effective ways to grow interest within a school setting. They concluded that the first year of implementation needed to focus on providing staff with resources and time to meaningfully explore the "ethos" of RRP/C. Similarly, Ted Wachtel, an educator and co-founder of the International Institute for Restorative Practices, explained that while the goal is to transform the whole school, one person can start small and grow interest, allowing each staff member to independently decide whether to use a restorative approach and whether the approach will benefit their professional practice and relationships with students (Kimball, 2013). The case

study from Scotland and Ted Wachtel's experiences as an RRP trainer supported the idea that a small group of collaborators could effect change within a school.

Research from New Zealand supported our approach to co-constructing a model between Indigenous stakeholders and staff. Wearmouth, McKinney and Glynn (2007) stressed the importance of incorporating and honouring Māori culture by using the *hui* model, the Māori way of conducting a restorative meeting. The combination of ideas from these researchers – focusing on the first year or two of implementation, supporting staff to engage with the ethos of RRP, and engaging with the practices and values of regional Indigenous peoples – supported our Consultant's implementation strategy and our research design.

An Important Resource

Our Consultant recommended a resource that could support our paradigm shift as well as be a practical guide for educators. Carolyn Boyes-Watson and Kay Pranis (2015), authors of *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community*, are proponents of combining RRP with Circles. Their resource provides templates and lessons for conducting Circles that support restorative thinking and procedures. The book incorporates a trauma-informed lens and respects Circles as sacred to many Indigenous cultures. Since the authors recognize the diversity of Indigenous Circle practices, the templates are left open-ended so they can be adapted. The book begins with lessons about the Circle process and how to collaboratively set class values. It moves on to teaching children about the restorative process and how use Circles to respond to harm and solve problems. It also includes a range of social-emotional and social justice lessons. This book became our reference guide, and it supported the Consultant's approach to teaching RRP/C. Our school librarian purchased ten copies of this resource so that there was one available for each participant.

Implementation Procedure

As the educator responsible for introducing RRP/C to schools, our Consultant led the implementation. Her approach was a weaving together of regional Indigenous practices learned from Elders and her family as well as restorative knowledge accredited by the International Institute of Restorative Practice. She was a calm and insightful leader and started us off slow and deliberate.

First, the Consultant invited staff to a district workshop in the spring of 2017 where she explained the paradigm and its benefits. A handful of colleagues attended with me and developed an interest in restorative practices. The following school year, on September 5th of 2017, the Consultant came to our school to introduce RRP/C. In the morning, she facilitated a Circle with all teachers and support staff, simultaneously modelling RRP/C and creating an atmosphere of collegiality. She further explained the RRP/C model and responded to questions. In the afternoon, I presented Trauma-Informed Practice and explained my research proposal.

On September 13th, our Consultant visited classes and introduced herself to students so that they were familiar with her presence in the school. I posted a sign-up sheet in our staffroom and on our staff email news folder. Any classroom teacher could enroll to have the Consultant teach the RRP/C model one day per week for a six-to-ten-week period. The first enrollment period was from October 2017 to January 2018 and the second was from February 2018 until May 2018. In each classroom where she was invited, the Consultant modelled Circle Practice and taught the RRP process to students and staff. As a teacher and participant, I also signed up to have the Consultant teach in my classroom.

During the same school year, I took up my role of Restitution Teacher and began accepting discipline referrals from staff or the principal to divert them from the office.

Sometimes these referrals were complex, and the Consultant made herself available for advice or for support as a co-facilitator. As the year progressed our Indigenous Education Worker (IEW) also resolved conflicts using RRP/C. Occasionally, she and I co-facilitated when discipline referrals included enough students to warrant a Circle or when a problem was complex. Sometimes classroom teachers would request the support of the Consultant, myself or the IEW to co-facilitate a classroom Circle when peer dynamics became problematic. These Circles were intended to resolve concerns and reset the class tone.

Consultant's Approach to Circle Practice

The Consultant explained Circle as a place to be in relationship and in community. Participants stand or sit in the shape of a circle so that everyone can see each other. This facilitates good communication (eye contact, listening, speaking) and holds the focus on the shared topic. The Consultant carefully built comfort with the routines and provided examples of Indigenous and non-Indigenous protocols to use in Circle.

The Consultant always prepared an Opening that included a land or stewardship acknowledgement; she called this starting the Circle in, “a good way.” For children, she made the land acknowledgement relatable, describing how Indigenous people on this territory cared for a lake or a river with which children would be familiar. She explained that it was important for children to be able to see themselves on the land; that this was a part of their identity and sense of belonging. Perhaps they went camping at an identified lake. Perhaps they saw the ducks in the nearby river. She then expressed gratitude to the Indigenous people of this land who cared for the lakes, rivers and animals that are important to us. She then set the tone and topic. This could be done in many creative ways: with a story, drumming, a song, a poem, a mindfulness moment, or inspirational text.

Next, the Consultant would introduce her talking piece and explain its significance. Some talking pieces, such as a feather, were gifts that carried special meaning because they connected the Consultant to a family member, to a friend, to an animal, to a story or to her culture. Some talking pieces, such as the Hoberman Sphere, were a novel toy that could be used to visually represent a person's emotional state, help students regulate their breathing or be used as a fidget. The Consultant explained that the talking piece always moves in a clockwise direction toward the same side as your heart. Over time, this turned into a common phrase in our school: "The talking piece moves in the direction of your heart." This phrasing was very apropos because the Consultant emphasized that in a Circle we speak with an open heart and open mind, and we listen in the same way.

The Consultant would then prepare everyone for the first *round*: the first complete passing of the talking piece around the Circle. A round is usually phrased as a question, such as *how are you feeling today?* The first round was usually a check-in so that people could share their present state. The Consultant encouraged staff to always begin with a check-in because it was an invaluable way for students and facilitators to connect and to practice empathy. She encouraged teachers to use their first name during Circle and to also respond to the round questions themselves so that the students could see their teachers as human beings. If a student was having a hard day, the teacher could model compassion. If the teacher was having a hard day, the students could practice compassion. Sometimes a Circle only consisted of a check-in round, and we called this a check-in Circle. The Consultant suggested that a morning check-in Circle was a good way to start the day since it alerted the teacher to student's needs.

If a Circle continued past the first round, then the second and third rounds were focused on a specific topic. For the first few Circles, the Consultant kept the questions

friendly and light to help the students practice the protocols and feel comfortable connecting in Circle. For example, a facilitator might ask, “What is your favourite food?” When students became more familiar with the process, the facilitator introduced deeper questions, such as, “Is it more important to learn to read or to learn to do math?” This would help students get a sense that Circle can be a place to discuss deeper issues and to validate multiple truths. A Circle is a non-adversarial design and so the point is not to debate, but to hear and understand all viewpoints. Once the students began to understand the non-adversarial nature of a Circle, the Consultant would move into teaching RRP/C and SEL topics.

As the talking piece was passed, every participant had the opportunity to speak or the choice to pass and remain silent and listen. The Consultant emphasized that choosing to pass and not speak did not mean that you were not participating; that listening is an important form of participation and while you were listening you needed to notice your own thoughts and feelings about what you were hearing. At the same time, she encouraged Circle members to share any thoughts and feelings that arose about the topic being discussed. The number of rounds depended on the size of the Circle and the amount of time set aside.

The Closing of the Circle was usually a reflection round on what each participant gained from the Circle or noticed. The Consultant might then close the Circle with something inspirational: a song, drumming, a poem, a mindfulness moment, inspirational text, well wishes or setting positive intentions for the remainder of the day.

The Consultant also showed Educators ways to use the Circle format to teach vocabulary or subject content, or to play interactive games. She said that using Circles in multiple ways would help the children become accustomed to the format and the variety of lesson topics and formats would keep up their interest. The Consultant modelled using Circle to include Indigenous content such as the Seven Sacred Teachings. To help students and

educators feel comfortable and safe, the Consultant made it clear that Circle work is used by many cultures, faiths, and groups around the world and that each participant could find their own way to facilitate Circles. She allowed each participant to choose their own comfort level with using Indigenous practices within Circle, while noting that the Circle itself was already an Indigenous practice.

The Consultant maintained a strong focus on using Circle time for Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). The intention was to use Circle practice to teach children, "how to be in relationship with each other." Circle practice can build safety and trust so that participants can be vulnerable and develop empathy and understanding between each other. Once the protocols are learned and a sense of safety attained, the Circle becomes a place where the class can creatively solve problems or conflicts together. If someone in the community is harmed, then an educator can facilitate an RRP process within the Circle. The facilitator needs to guide this process in a way that is safe by stipulating that Circle is not a place of blame, it is non-adversarial, and it is a place of problem-solving. Each person speaks to their own part in a problem and does not speak for others. Each person then offers up suggestions for change. The Consultant stressed that it is important not to overuse a Circle for this purpose and that most of the time be spent learning, having fun, and strengthening relationships.

Consultant's Approach to Restitution and Restorative Practice.

RRP is essentially a guided conversation between one party that has caused harm and another party that was harmed. A facilitator uses a standard set of questions to frame the conversation and these questions can be found in many manuals as well as on the International Institute of Restorative Practice (IIRP) website. Our Consultant received part of her training from the IIRP and therefore used the IIRP's wording for the Restorative

Questions we employed. The Consultant designed posters and small business cards with the questions to be quick guides for educators. There are two sets of questions: one for the person who harmed and one for the person who was harmed. The person who harmed is asked:

What happened?

What were you thinking of at the time? What were you hoping would happen?

What have you been thinking about since the incident took place?

Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?

What do you think you need to do make things right?

The person who has been harmed is asked:

What did you think when you realized what happened?

What impact has this incident had on you and others?

What has been the hardest thing for you?

What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

A facilitator poses the questions and holds participants to the expectation that they listen to everything being said. A facilitator might occasionally check on understanding by having participants reflect back what they are hearing. Validating each person's experience helps people to feel seen and heard, helps people to forgive and helps repair the relationship. The person who caused harm takes responsibility and offers amends. The person who is harmed decides to either accept the amends or asks that the process continue because something has been missed. In some circumstances, RRP does not work, such as when someone refuses to take responsibility, and then the process needs to end. In this case, the conflict is referred to the office and an administrator decides the outcome and consequences.

RRP can be practiced in a variety of formats, but in our school, we primarily practiced RRP either in a large Circle (classroom size or staff size), a medium Circle (a group

of five to twelve) or in a small group of inviduals (two to four). Although it would be honouring an Indigenous approach to include family and community members in our Circles, since our staff was learning something new, we chose not include adults from outside of school district staff. One exception was a gratitude Circle that we facilitated for our Parent Advisory Committee. We hoped that eventually, once staff were feeling more confident, that we would include our parent community as well.

Restitution Teacher's Role

As the Restitution Teacher, I accepted referrals from staff and administrators. Occasionally, I had students self-refer and request help with resolving a conflict. Participation in the process was voluntary and so I let students know they could choose between an office referral (punitive consequences) or an RRP approach (restorative conversation). As often as possible, before I began a restorative conversation, I spoke to each student individually to get a sense of what happened. This dialogue also helped the student to calm down because they felt heard and validated. I would then explain the process and invite students to participate. We then agreed on a time and place to meet. I often met with students in my office or if the group was too large, I met with them in the Indigenous Education room.

I kept a poster of the restorative questions on my office wall or if I needed to use an alternative space, I brought the cards. For older students I sometimes distributed copies of the cards so they could follow along with the questions. I wanted students to know that the questions were a standard format and not questions of my devising because it helped establish that my role as facilitator was a neutral one. I explained my expectations for listening and turn taking when speaking. I let everyone know there would be enough time to share each side of the story. I wove between both sets of questions, seeking first to understand what happened, what motivations or triggers led up to the incident and how

people were impacted. I provided ample time to students to explain their points of view and share their feelings. After this, students would often naturally wish to take responsibility and apologize for their actions. Sometimes they needed support to take that step. Sometimes they were unable to take responsibility and in these cases I ended the restorative process and referred it to the office. If they were able to take responsibility, then I guided them through making an offer of amends, such as an apology, a card, or helping their peer in some way. Once the participants agreed to the amends, I supported the process by setting a time and place for this to happen. Depending on the complexity or severity of the conflict and the feelings of the participants, I also sometimes followed up with the students a week later.

I wanted to ensure that parents were aware of the incident and how it was resolved. I wrote an email for each student that I sent to each classroom teacher. They in turn could forward the email to parents. I chose this route because I wanted the staff to be aware of the conflict that took place so that they could support the relationship dynamics taking place in their classroom and monitor as needed. I also wanted the teachers to be aware of what information I was communicating to parents in the event they had questions or concerns. In the body of each email, I wrote a short summary of RRP, outlining its goal to repair relationship by reviewing what happened, who it impacted, and apologizing or making amends. For students who caused harm, I always let parents know that their child participated well in the process, took responsibility, and made amends. I wanted parents to understand that the matter had been resolved and I did not want students to then go home and face a second set of consequences. I therefore ended the email with a brief sentence or two about how to respond at home. I encouraged parents to speak to their children about what took place and how it was resolved and to praise their child for being brave and taking responsibility. For students who were harmed, I let the parents know that their child's

experience had been validated, that their peer took responsibility, that they were safe and whether I would be following up. I hoped that this communication helped introduce RRP to parents in a positive way. In the event that implementation extended beyond the timeframe of this research project, I wanted to have laid the groundwork for inviting parents to learn about and support our use of RRP/C.

Defining the Research Parameters

Except for three staff members, the Consultant, myself and one other classroom teacher, most participants in this project had little prior knowledge of RRP/C. To participate in this project, each educator had to engage with our model of RRP/C for a minimum of six months and do so within our school. Classroom teachers had to enroll in the Consultant's six-to-ten-week training program. Two participants were non-enrolling educators, our Indigenous Education Worker (IEW) and our Youth Care Worker (YCW). These two roles are very often called upon to resolve conflicts and they had ample opportunity to try RRP with students. They learned directly from the Consultant, and in fact our IEW shared an office space with the Consultant. Both the IEW and YCW facilitated or co-facilitated Circles.

Timeframe

Prior research indicated there was value in focusing the first year or two of implementation on providing resources and support for educators to explore the philosophy of RRP/C (Kane, et al., 2009). We therefore used the first full year for implementation, and I did not collect any data during this time. Teachers spent the year learning and "trying on" RRP/C. We learned from our Consultant, from books and resources, from conversation with each other and from our own experiences.

In the second year of implementation, 2018-2019, I began conducting interviews. I did this in a staggered way to ensure that every participant had engaged with RRP/C for a

minimum of 6 months to a period greater than 10 months. My first interview was in September of 2018, and most were completed by June of 2019. We had one outlier participant who joined our project late because she became a member of our staff in September of 2019. She was a keen participant, and I therefore chose to interview her at the end of that school year in July of 2020.

In the second year, the Consultant could not commit to attending our school on a weekly basis. The Consultant wanted to expand her focus to implementing RRP/C district wide so that there was a layer of support from the top-down, in other words, from the administrative layer. She remained available to interested staff by phone or email for questions and resources and she continued to offer Pro-D workshops. She only attended the school site at the specific request of staff or administration to facilitate a process for specific and complex discipline problems. I continued in my role of RRP Teacher but with reduced hours since the school now had a second administrator and could allocate more time to discipline.

Then in the third year, the Consultant was only on site for our one new member of teaching staff to model how to use RRP/C in her classroom. I supported this educator with Circle practice in her classroom as well, but I no longer held the role of RRP Teacher as I had become the school counsellor, and the roles of discipline and counselling can sometimes be at odds. Yet, interested staff continued using the RRP/C model in their classrooms. I sometimes used the RRP model with students who self-referred or were encouraged by their teacher to try a restorative process to resolve a conflict.

Recruitment of Participants

All staff, including administrators, teachers, and support staff could participate in this research project. There were no monetary rewards for participation. Staff were motivated to

participate by their own curiosity and interest in using RRP/C. I communicated with staff via e-mail and at staff meetings to extend invitations to participate.

Eleven staff participated in this study: eight classroom teachers (including this researcher), one Youth Care Worker (YCW), one Indigenous Education Worker (IEW) and our Consultant. Since the YCW and IEW did not have classrooms, they learned about RRP/C directly from our Consultant. They also had opportunities to facilitate or co-facilitate Circles and restorative conversations.

Consent

Staff were provided with an information letter and consent form. They had opportunity to read through the information letter and ask questions before consenting to participate. I made it clear that they could withdraw their consent at any time during the research project and prior to publication (see Appendix B for the Information Letter and Consent Form). Signed consent was required for conducting both oral and written interviews.

Confidentiality

I wanted my participants to feel safe in the research process. I therefore chose to keep their data and identity confidential. A breach of confidentiality might have influenced their reputation within their working environment or altered their relationships with work colleagues.

As the only researcher, I personally conducted and transcribed all of the interviews. If the transcribed interviews contained names and other identifying descriptors these were excluded in the analysis or reporting of data. Paper copies of the transcripts and the coding were kept in a safe when not in use. Digital copies were password protected on my personal computer. My interpretations of the data were shown to participants for their further consent

before results were shared with peers or my supervisory committee. Participants could withdraw their consent at any time, but none chose to do so.

To keep the identity of research participants confidential, I have referred to all participants collectively as "educators" or "participants," as much as possible since all of these staff roles contribute to the care and education of students. There are a few places in the findings where it was difficult to fully explain the significance of the data without making some reference to a person's role, such as Youth Care Worker, in the school. In all cases, I have tried to balance the needs of reporting results with the need for confidentiality.

To further ensure confidentiality, all participants in this project received an pseudonym. Their names are based on an important theme that each brought forward in their interview. Their names are: Inclusion (INC), Community (COM), Language (LAN), Curious (CUR), Readiness (REA), Intentional (INT), Holistic (HOL), Cohesion (COH), and Trust (TRU). Since many of their ideas overlapped, and to protect their identity, I have integrated and synthesized their ideas into common themes.

Ethical Concerns

Participation in this research concerned the lives and work-related health of many staff. As such, I submitted a research proposal along with an application to the Research Ethics Board as a part of this study. All staff were invited to enroll in the Consultant's training, attend staff Circles, and be interviewed. All participants could contribute to the experiences of the group by choosing to facilitate Circles with staff, share their knowledge of RRP/C and employ RRP/C in their classrooms. Staff also had the choice to not participate. There were no adverse consequences for staff who chose not to participate.

Since I was a participant, as well as a researcher, I wanted to include my own findings in the results. I thought about having someone ask me the same interview questions that I had

asked everyone else. Instead, I asked to hold a second interview with the Consultant, one in which I exposed my difficulties and my wonderings, and she responded.

Cultural Safety

The Consultant modelled Indigenous practices and gave permission to use some protocols, but she did not oblige anyone to conduct Circles in her way. She created safety by encouraging each facilitator to find their own style. Staff bore the responsibility of respectfully incorporating cultural pieces and they were welcome to ask questions to increase their understanding. The Consultant balanced promoting Indigenous content and practice while keeping the learning process safe for staff. She was quick to point out that Circles and a restorative lens to solving problems are already Indigenous.

Professional Autonomy

Educators in British Columbia have professional autonomy, meaning they can choose their approach to teaching within their classroom and can attend training and workshops that align with their own educational philosophies and practices. This autonomy is an important layer of democracy within public education and promotes richness in diversity and practice. Professional autonomy is strongly valued by staff unions and respected by this researcher. For educators to take up the practice of RRP/C, they needed to freely choose it.

Vulnerable Populations

Children are a vulnerable population within the school setting, and it was therefore important to know that RRP/C would be a safe practice for children. Responding to student conflict, teaching SEL, and working with children to reform their behaviour is a daily task for educators. In most respects, RRP/C did not add any undue pressure to students' day to day experiences. However, the RRP/C process does ask children to examine their feelings and share them aloud in front of their peers and staff members. While this practice can in most

cases strengthen belongingness and improve empathy, it also leaves people feeling vulnerable. If a student does not feel safe, then this vulnerability can be overwhelming or bring up shame responses. This is another reason students were offered the choice of a restorative (RRP) or punitive (office) response to harm. Some students may have felt a greater degree of safety if they were accustomed to the office process or if they had a pre-existing relationship with the administrator. I wanted to leave that avenue available to students.

Latimer, Dowden and Muise (2005) agreed that voluntary participation was an important safety factor for students, and this meant that our facilitators needed to provide enough information about the process for students to make an informed decision. Hopkins (2004) recommended conducting pre-conferences with students before beginning a restorative conversation. During the pre-conference, a facilitator could explain the RRP process and listen to students' concerns about safety, discuss possible accommodations and finally allow time for the student to decide in their participation. Pre-conferences were not generally held for minor conflicts, such as turn taking on playground equipment. Pre-conferences were held for moderate to severe conflicts such as physical aggression, bullying or using discriminatory language. Pre-conferences were also useful for determining the involvement of third-party participants. Third party members can offer support and insight, they can be a part of creative problem-solving and they can bear witness. Unfortunately, a third-party participant might also choose to be judgmental, critical, shaming, and hurtful to the victim or offender. Since we were novice practitioners, we limited our third-party participants to students and support staff such as the Youth Care Worker or Indigenous Education Worker. Although it would have been culturally appropriate to invite parents or community members into our restorative conversations and Circles, as novice practitioners

we decided to focus on growing our own competency and extending that invitation in future years when we had a stronger footing.

Although I was not collecting data from children, our students were the main participants in our RRP/C model. For this reason, I made it clear to participants that neither the Consultant nor I would keep data on students. Instead, each of us performed our roles and then I interviewed staff regarding their overall views on the RRP/C model. During interviews, staff sometimes shared observations about student conduct or shared stories about student responses to RRP/C. Educator perspectives on student responses to RRP/C were used in the analysis and shared in the findings but the names, ages and other descriptors that could identify students were redacted.

Staff were a less vulnerable population than the children but taking on a new model needed to be safe for staff as well. I let staff know that RRP/C could become emotional since it can lead to people being vulnerable with each other. There was also the potential for staff to become emotional during the self-reflection process or challenging their own preconceptions of discipline. The Consultant and I made ourselves available to respond to concerns and questions about the model. Staff had the freedom to discuss their perspectives and share their feelings with each other and with anyone outside of the research group. I reminded participants, that in the event that participation in this project was personally triggering, that employees of our district have free access to counselling services as part of their contract.

Research Procedures

When I began imagining how I would proceed with collecting data, I had many aspirations. I was inspired by McCotter's (2001) reflections on her experiences as a novice researcher. She met with her participants at regularly scheduled times, recorded their group

discussion and then shared the transcript at the following meeting. This allowed her to work in an iterative way as the team forged new ideas about literacy and democracy. I wanted to conduct my research in this cyclical and layered way that seemed particularly potent.

I proposed having monthly meetings where staff participants could sit in Circle and share their experiences. I provided everyone with a journal to keep a record of their learning and reflections. Attendance waxed and waned according to the life of the school (lower attendance during Report Card writing, close to holiday times) and due to the busy lives of staff (sponsoring after school sports, parenting commitments). These early staff Circles and meetings also lacked structure and intention, partly because I wanted to be flexible in my design and open to input from participants but also because I lacked experience with the implementation of a program and with research. For busy educators, meetings need to be structured and intentional. Eventually, I stopped hosting these meetings.

Occasionally staff requested to meet with me to discuss a certain topic related to RRP/C. For a time, staff also formed an Ad Hoc committee on discipline in the school to build a school-wide approach that was consistent for staff, students and administrators and abided by the values of the school. I was invited to these meetings to offer input. In this setting, I observed educators questioning their views on discipline. I did not include data from any of these meetings in a formal sense, but I wrote about them in my reflexive journal to maintain a sense of how implementation was proceeding, and this sense later helped me to form my interview questions.

My second aspiration was to use staff meetings as a time to meet in Circle. I thought this would help staff become better acquainted with Circle work and I wanted to know if participation in staff Circles would help staff feel more connected. In the first year, my colleagues sat in Circle during three staff meetings. They then decided that this was a time-

consuming practice and there were other important priorities that were not getting attention. I desisted. After a lengthy time without holding Circles for staff, I did make a final attempt in the third year of implementation. I found a way to make a staff Circle voluntary, accessible, structured, intentional and valuable. This was valuable learning for me, and I shared the experience in the Results chapter below.

A welcome addition to my research came in the appointment of 2.5 hours of my teaching contract to take on the role of Restitution Teacher. I had not requested this time, but it was a boon to our project and a sign of support from the school administrator. I had this role from September 2017 to June 2018. For half an hour each day after lunch, I worked with students who were referred to me by the principal or teachers to resolve an issue using an RRP conversation. I did not collect data from students since my research was based on teacher response to RRP/C and not student response; however, I did write entries in my reflexive journal for the sake of my own learning.

Interviewing

The raw data for this research came from interviews. I chose to use a semi-structured interview because I wanted the consistency of asking each participant similar questions for the sake of comparison and discovering patterns. At the same time, I wanted the flexibility to follow where the participant led since I could not predict what meaning they would make from their experiences with RRP/C. I wrote an Interview Protocol (see Appendix C) that I used with most participants, the exception being my two interviews with the Consultant, which had a unique set of questions. One of the interviews with the Consultant was also aimed at providing feedback for my own experiences of using RRP/C. This was in lieu of me interviewing myself.

I used recording applications on an iPad and on my phone to capture the interviews. I stored the interviews on my password protected computer. I did not use any transcription software, opting to transcribe them myself so that I could become acquainted with the data.

Evaluation of the Study

As this is a qualitative study, the value of this research is determined by its trustworthiness. According to Rose and Johnson (2020), "Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the systematic rigor of the research design, the credibility of the researcher, the believability of the findings, and applicability of the research methods. It is the overall impression of quality associated with a research endeavor," (p. 434). Below I consider four categories of evaluation: validity, generalizability, reliability, and reflexivity.

Validity

Leung (2015) defines validity in qualitative research as the, "'appropriateness' of the tools, processes, and data," to answering the research question (p. 325). There are three main research areas for this project: school belonging, trauma informed practices and decolonizing education. Belonging and safety are felt experiences that require emotional, relational, and cognitive insight. As well, confronting dominant beliefs to decolonize pedagogy demands a personal, internal journey that connects us to our culture and ontology. Although this kind of subjectivity is discouraged in quantitative research, it is considered a strength of qualitative research. Leung (2015) explains:

> While human emotions and perspectives from both subjects and researchers are considered undesirable biases confounding results in quantitative research, the same elements are considered essential and inevitable, if not treasurable, in qualitative research as they invariably add extra dimensions and colors to enrich the corpus of findings. (p. 324)

Therefore, a qualitative design was a necessary approach to understanding participants' unique experiences.

While subjectivity is valuable in qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to be transparent and to situate themselves in relation to the research. "This is accomplished by the researcher reflecting on their: cultural background; thoughts; actions; emotions; assumptions; and unconscious responses, and how these factors may influence the research process and findings," (Darawsheh, 2014, p. 563). As a non-Indigenous researcher, I was aware that I did not have the cultural competency to implement RRP/C with an appropriate degree of sensitivity to regional Indigenous practices. Therefore, I relied on the knowledge of our Consultant, who did hold those competencies. Without her guidance, this research would have been invalid.

My prolonged engagement as first, an employee of the school, and second, as a researcher also strengthened validity. I was an employee in this school for three years prior to the project, an employee and researcher for the three years during the project and an employee again for two years post project while I was writing the thesis. This meant I had a baseline understanding of how discipline was practiced in the school and that I could consider the influence of administrative and staff changes during the project. I also knew my participants well. I was accustomed to their style of speech and had experienced their integrity as educators, which gave me a high degree of confidence as I read and interpreted the meaning of their accounts. The one disadvantage was that my colleagues might not want to disappoint me by critiquing the work that we were doing; however, I found that all of the educators I interviewed were open about the challenges they encountered during implementation and their own personal misgivings.

Member checking was an important technique for improving validity. Research participants received a copy of their transcript and a copy of the results in chapter four to check that I had accurately represented the meaning of their words. The Consultant received a full copy of the thesis since her involvement was crucial throughout. Each participant provided me with feedback and only one suggested a change: to refer to the Aboriginal Education Department as the Indigenous Education Department since they had undergone a name change.

Rose and Johnson (2020) discuss the importance of fidelity to participants' perspectives. They state: "In most cases, an honest reporting of the participants' responses is more important than agreement or disagreement with the findings. Indeed, the latter often provides room for additional analysis and interpretation on the part of the researcher and can frequently enrich and complexify the findings and discussion," (Rose & Johnson, 2020, p. 441) When I began this research, I expected that RRP would lower shame responses for students but through this research discovered that was not the case. For months, I interpreted this finding as a failure of the model, and though disheartened, I had to honestly share this result. Later I realized that so-called research "failures" were just as interesting and fruitful as so-called "successes" and that the topic of shame did indeed add a richness to the results of this research.

Generalizability

Generalizability is a contentious term in qualitative research (Carminati, 2018). For decades, generalizability has been, "a valued standard" for "evaluating the excellence" of, "quantitative research and its focus on finding universal laws and statistical generalizations," (p. 2094) Qualitative research is a fundamentally different approach that does not seek to generalize statistical findings from a sample size to a broader population. It is a disservice to

the value of qualitative research to apply a metric used for quantitative research and thus researchers have been redefining how they evaluate qualitative studies.

One way to think about generalizability is to consider its transferability or relevance to other research settings. To increase the likelihood that findings are transferable, qualitative researchers have put their focus on providing, "thorough descriptions as well as a deep, rich, and contextualized understanding of human experience," (Carminati, p. 2096). Tracy (2013) recommends providing a detailed, thick description of the setting so that readers can critically examine the findings. In the first three chapters of this thesis, I provided a detailed description of our implementation procedure, our RRP/C model, the school culture, student demographics and the community context. There are, however, a few variables that I did not mention and I shall do so now.

There were administrative and staff changes during the project. New staff needed the opportunity to learn the RRP/C model after most other staff were already underway. This only affected one participant who I have referred to as an outlier. In one sense, she had an advantage because there were so many colleagues to turn to for advice in the second and third years. On the other hand, she felt like a novice who was a step behind. There were also administration changes during the project. One new administrator arrived in the second year, and another arrived in the third. They each had an influence on the direction of our project. One played an important role in responding to an incident of cultural racism in an upper intermediate class during our project. Another sought a grant to construct an outdoor space for Circles. The changes in administration and the reorganization of the building also resulted in the loss of my role as Restitution Teacher in the third year. This was an important role since it ensured choice for students between an office referral or a restorative process.

Fortunately, all but one participant, our outlier, had experienced the availability of choice provided by the Restitution Teacher role in the first and second year of implementation.

Our school was also unique since it was a French Immersion. Most students speak English as their first language and then learn French as their second language at school. There are exceptions, students who speak other languages such as Russian, Spanish or Mandarin at home. The Consultant taught RRP/C in English and the participants conducted restorative conversations in English since students can be emotionally charged in a conflict and understanding what is being communicated is critical to the process. This was already common practice in the school for discipline concerns and social-emotional lessons. Circles that focused on content learning, such as vocabulary acquisition, were usually conducted in French. A few teachers reflected on their choice to use English or French, but it was only a minor theme in this research.

While the French language itself was a lesser variable, the larger variable was that a French Immersion school is a choice program and that contributed to making the demographic of the school unique. A choice school means that students have the means to travel from other catchment areas in the city to attend the program. Many of our students came from families where one or more parents had post-secondary education, and most families were in the middle-income bracket. A few participants wondered if our unique school culture contributed to the way staff and students responded to RRP/C.

It is likely that an implementation project similar to this one, in a school similar to ours, would yield similar results; however, that does not entirely encapsulate the value of this research, which is to understand how RRP/C changes our view of education and our pedagogy. A more suitable view of generalizability for this research is from an interpretivist paradigm that assumes reality is subjective and socially constructed. “As such, results are not

reached through statistical procedures or other means of quantifications, and generalization is interpreted as generalization toward a theory rather than toward the population (Carminati, 2018, p. 2097) While the purpose of this study was not to form a theory, the hypothesis embedded in the research question pertains to the ways that a new paradigm will influence educator pedagogy toward the integration of Indigenous epistemology if the model can be shown to provide students with a sense of belonging and safety. Our goal was to elucidate the ideas and insights we gained through this process.

Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability refers to the consistency of the findings (Leung, 2015). The reliability of the data in this research depended on the ability of participants to speak knowledgably and reflectively on their practice of RRP/C. As much as possible, the Consultant and I tried to provide equal access to the same resources and opportunities to learn RRP/C. Eight of the ten research participants were classroom teachers and signed up to have our Consultant teach and model RRP/C in their classroom. As well, all participants had access to *Circle Forward* by Boyes-Watson and Pranis (2015), an up-to-date volume that explained RRP/C practice and provided numerous templates for responding to diverse problems within a school setting. Some participants also read about the topic in their personal time or attended district workshops. All the participants were staff members who worked full-time in our building. All the participants had a minimum of three to a maximum of twenty-five years of experience as educators working with children, addressing discipline concerns, and resolving conflicts. All the participants had completed, at minimum, an undergraduate degree and therefore all participants were literate and articulate.

Even though we tried to provide the same opportunities for education to all participants, the data that participants provided was influenced by their personal level of

engagement with RRP/C. During the interviews, I asked participants to describe which parts of the model they employed and how often. Among our eleven educators, all had participated in Circles and all but one had facilitated Circles. All but two educators had facilitated restorative conversations by the time of interview. If an educator had not participated in some aspect of RRP/C, I confined my questions to their interest or reluctance to participate and did not interpret their perceptions of RRP/C as experiential.

Reflexivity

Kim Etherington (2004) advocates the use of a reflexive research journal, especially with an approach that is heuristic and where the researcher has the double role of participating and collecting and interpreting data. I used my reflexive journal as a place to record my learning, my own emotional responses, and my analytic reflections through all stages of this research.

In broad terms, my journal entries fell into one of three categories. First, I wrote journal entries from the point of view of a participant such as when I described the Consultant coming to my own classroom to model a Circle or tell a story. Second, I wrote from the point of view of a program leader attempting to implement a new model. These entries were emotional and uncovered my doubts and insecurities. Third, I wrote about thoughts I had while listening to interviews or coding data. This is where I began to form connections and consider what was significant about the data.

Thematic Analysis

I used Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2021) reflexive approach to thematic analysis to code and theme the data. Braun and Clarke (2021) outline six phases to reflexive thematic analysis: "…familiarisation; coding; generating initial themes; reviewing and developing themes; refining, defining and naming themes; and writing up," (p. 39).

Phase One: Familiarization

Apart from one written interview, a text and one email, I conducted and transcribed the remaining eleven oral interviews myself. This helped me to become immersed in the data. I reread the data several times and wrote initial ideas in my reflexive journal about the main messages each participant was trying to convey. I paid attention to which topics were raised repeatedly and noted when participants had differing views. I asked the question, *what is most important about this experience for this participant,* and then used one key word, a holisitic code, to entitle each interview and these became each participant's alias. I used attribute codes to note the date and place of each interview.

Phase Two: Coding

I generated initial codes and attempted to enter them into a spreadsheet with the intention of looking for patterns. There were too many codes for me to synthesize at once, but I did not want to take a reductionist approach as one would using Qualitative Content Analysis. I wanted to include as many codes as I could so that I could have a broad view. I next tried using a cut and paste approach, with printed pages of the transcripts and a pair of scissors. I cut out pieces of text that spoke on a main point and then moved the pieces around to look for patterns. This was cumbersome and I only did this for half of the dataset, but it did provide me with some tentative themes. Since I was finding it difficult to manage all of the data at once, I then decided to start over and recode each interview separately. Within each interview, I was able to collate similar codes and separate disparate codes. In this manner I was better able to synthesize the data and discern patterns.

Phase Three: Generating Initial Themes

Continuing to work with one interview at a time, I created theme maps for each interview. The theme maps were like word webs with tentative themes identified in the center

and codes branching out. This helped me to group codes into themes and subthemes. I then typed up the themes, subthemes, and their supporting codes in an outline format. I reviewed each outline and grouping of codes to check for internal homogeneity. I verified codes against the raw data, eliminated some codes or regrouped codes. I then compared the outlines of each interview and by this time I could see several broad themes that spanned the whole dataset. I assigned colours for each umbrella theme and then I went back to the raw data and highlighted the texts in the colours that supported these themes. I used the same colours for the whole data set. I was then able to collate all of the codes in the dataset into themes and typed them into a table.

Phase Four: Reviewing Themes

Once I had the codes for the whole data set collated in a table, I was able to review my themes. There was not enough data for some themes, such as the interplay between school culture and implementing RRP/C. It arose as a query for many participants, but there was not enough similar data to form patterns. Some themes, such as challenges and obstacles to implementation and practices, had to be separated because participants reported on a wide range and it did not make sense to group them all together. There was also one theme that kept growing and shifting and changing its identity. It was becoming a catch-all for codes that held meaning but didn't seem to fit anywhere. I essentially had to weed this theme out. Some codes found homes elsewhere and some were discarded. When I was done, I was left with participant responses to paradigm shift. I realized that because the participants were grappling with the collision of old and new ideas and these codes were philosophical in nature, I had been struggling to code and group them appropriately.

Phase Five: Naming and Defining Themes

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest writing a detailed analysis and, "identifying the 'story' that each theme tells," (p. 92). Writing summaries of each theme helped me to verify the internal homogeneity and the external heterogeneity and make further decisions about what data belonged in a theme or subtheme and what did not. I had already entitled each theme but as I developed each coherent story, I changed several theme headings.

Phase Six: Writing It Up

I went back through my dataset to find vivid examples that captured the essence of each theme. This write up became my Chapter Four: Findings.

Summary

From May of 2017 until June of 2020 (39 months), I collaborated with a Consultant and participants to implement RRP/C into a choice school in a northern BC district. The Consultant provided training and support to participants. I conducted interviews, experimented with the role of Restitution Teacher and supported participants. Together, we co-constructed a model of discipline that fit the local culture and values of our district and Indigenous population, with the intent of decolonizing disciplinary practices, increasing Indigeneity in our school, working from a trauma-informed lens and strengthening the relationships in our school.

Chapter Four

The essential question of this research was to understand whether RRP/C contributed to school belonging, trauma-informed practice (TIP), and decolonizing education in an elementary school in Northern BC. A secondary question was whether these potential benefits would motivate the research participants to sustain the use of RRP/C beyond this project. Research participants found that Circle practice promoted community building, inclusion and empathy and they believed this gave students a greater sense of belonging and significance. There were some aspects of Circles and RRP that inherently contributed to TIP but on the whole, participants thought that TIP was an approach that practitioners were responsible to uphold, and which required knowledge and training. Finally, it was determined that RRP/C alone could not decolonize school discipline as that would require top-down structural changes in a variety of domains; however, RRP/C could contribute to indigenization.

Circles and School Belonging

When reflecting on school belonging, research participants mainly referred to the contributions of Circles. TRU liked to call them Sharing Circles because her students came to know one another through communication and empathy: “They share more. They have learned more about each other and see each other as people with feelings. They have found ways to relate to each other which weren’t there before.” Sitting in Circle gave, “…all kids a sense of being part of the class…” (TRU).

Familiar and New

Circles were a relatively familiar practice for most research participants. From newer teachers to the more experienced, all educators saw the benefits in forming relationships with their students and the formats of either a class meeting or Circle were common. LAN said

that facilitating Circles, “felt very natural,” because she’d been conducting classroom meetings, “for just about my whole career.” CUR estimated that she had been conducting Circle check-ins for the last 20 years. COM, first saw Circles modelled during her practicum and decided to adopt the approach: “I’ve always had a talking piece of my own, just like a little wand or something.” She liked to check in to see how her students were doing on a personal level: “how their day was yesterday or how their night was or what they were doing on the weekend,” (COM).

Participants did however note distinguishing features to the way we practiced Circles in the RRP/C model. LAN and CUR thought that other types of class meetings spent more time on class news or housekeeping tasks, whereas RRP/C Circles maintained a stronger focus on SEL. The other distinguishing feature of our Circle practice was the use of Indigenous protocols.

Circle Protocols

Our Consultant introduced Circle protocols adapted from regional Indigenous cultures. Many research participants credited the Circle protocols with providing the structure and safety that students needed to be vulnerable and form belonging. There were four important protocols that participants referred to: the circular shape, the talking piece, the right to pass, and Circle openings.

Communication and Empathy: A Circular Shape. Research participants agreed that the shape of a Circle provided opportunities to practice social communication and empathy. The circular shape afforded students the opportunity to make eye contact, read body language, and speak and listen to their peers and teacher. (INC) Students witnessed their peers’ feelings (TRU) and increased their understanding of each other’s feelings (CUR).

Students heard each other's perspectives, (LAN), and they learned to have a broader view of each other (INT). Essentially, they learned how to listen. (COM)

The circular format also prompted educators to model empathic listening. When INC sat in Circle, she found herself naturally reading body language, noticing when a student was downcast, gently inquiring about their circumstances, and then providing examples to students about how to care for their peer. INT also intentionally modelled empathy during Circle and liked to challenge her students to consider the perspectives of others:

> Yes, like if someone's bullying you, how is that person, that bully, feeling? Maybe there's something going on at home. So, it's a good time for me to bring up that opportunity. Maybe that child is being bullied? Right? We don't know what's going on with this child that is bullying you. We have to think, we have to have empathy, we have to think about this person. Maybe we can help this person and then that person won't be a bully anymore. So, it makes- it makes them think really, how we could solve these issues.

INT observed that this growth in empathy translated to an increase in acceptance and respect between students.

Significance and Inclusion: Using a Talking Piece. The use of a talking piece gave "every student a chance to speak" (INT). The talking piece was passed from the facilitator in a clockwise rotation to each student in the Circle. This ensured equitable speaking time to all class members and since people could not interrupt each other, it led to a non-adversarial style of communication in which all viewpoints were included and respected (CUR). Participants remarked that quieter students spoke up more during Circle than in other learning settings. TRU was pleased by this phenomenon: "I was so happy to see kids opening up and sharing in Circle, where normally these students didn't raise their hands." TRU

noticed that her students felt significant receiving the talking piece and then passing it on to a classmate; they enjoyed being heard and hearing the thoughts of their friends in turn.

The talking piece was important to INT because she wanted every student to know they mattered. When a student held the talking piece, she listened with her full attention and responded to each child in a way that affirmed their ideas as notable and their feelings as valid. INT observed the impact this had when a highly reflective student who usually declined to speak, brought forward meaningful topics that revealed her compassionate nature. Subsequently, her classmates gained a broader view of her identity and character. On one notable occasion, the student brought up the topic of suicide because a high school student in our community had died by suicide. Although that was an unexpected and difficult topic, INT appreciated that her student felt safe enough in Circle to bring up the topic. She did not think the topic would have come up in the regular course of a school day, outside the context of a Circle.

HOL also appreciated the formality and equity of the talking piece. She disliked making assumptions about student wellness based solely on external evidence and preferred to genuinely check-in: "...sometimes we assume we're all feeling like a community, you know. But you don't know until you ask, and you invite them." By passing a talking piece, HOL knew she would be reaching out to each student in turn.

The Consultant liked to share the story of how her talking pieces came to her. She would reveal the special relationship she had to the person who gifted her the talking piece or speak about the animal who gifted the feathers to make the talking piece or describe the significance of the place that brought her the talking piece. She explained the proper care of the talking piece and when she passed on her special object to the children to be held and touched while sharing their own stories, they in turn felt significant, connected and included.

Safety and Respect: Honouring the Right to Pass. Apart from the facilitator, no one was obliged to speak in a Circle. Every Circle participant had a choice to speak or to remain silent upon receiving the talking piece. They could hold the talking piece in silence to reflect on their thoughts and feelings and then they could pass the object to the next person. Our Consultant explained that even when Circle members chose not to speak they still had the important role of engaging their hearts and minds to witness everything being shared. The Consultant held this protocol in high regard, and no one was permitted to scrutinize the reasons the individual chose to pass. This protocol provided safety since it alleviated the pressure to share if someone was not ready. INT credited the combination of the first three protocols with providing increased structure and inclusion while simultaneously respecting student safety.

Belonging and Interconnection: Opening Circles in a Good Way. The Consultant always began Circles in a "good way" and by this she meant taking a moment to acknowledge our interconnectedness. Sometimes she began by acknowledging the environment to which we belong. For young children, she made her land acknowledgement relatable. For example, she would name a local lake and have the children imagine a time they visited the lake and how they enjoyed being in that place. Maybe they went swimming or had a picnic. Maybe the lake provided them with fish to eat. She would explain how local Indigenous ancestors looked after the lake and how it is important that we continue to be stewards of the land. The Consultant wanted her openings to remind Circle members of the value of interconnection:

> The way I remind myself of the importance of the opening and the values is to remember that everyone has a deep desire to be in a good relationship, even those who push us away and show us with their behavior. Everyone wants to be loved and

> respected and that is because we are all interconnected. We as human beings are connected to all living creatures and are part of this natural world. If we are disconnected, we have a hard time connecting to the Circle process. That is why the opening ceremony and reminding ourselves, as a whole, of the values we hold are important. Opening and values connect the person to everyone in the Circle and connect them to our natural world and the animals.

The consultant extended student belonging to include the interconnection between people, animals, and the land. She explained that Indigenous stories made mention of landmarks so that children could, "see themselves on the land." When the Consultant opened Circle in a "good way" I observed that children were more attentive and earnest in their participation. The children were being invited to consider the ways they are a part of a larger whole and how their words and actions contribute to the whole. The Consultant honoured their ability to understand and contribute to interconnection.

Benefits of School Belonging

Research participants thought that school belonging, and community building had many payoffs for students, including engagement in learning, the development of social skills, and mental well-being.

Student Engagement. COM had noticed that when her students were better connected, they had positive feelings about attending school:

> Yeah, I'd like to think, in my class that they feel happy to come to school and you can tell the ones that really like to share, like they really want to tell me about what they did last night or what they're doing on the weekend.

Conversely, when students lacked a sense of belonging, COM had noticed that her students tended to misbehave or disengage from learning. COM observed how a sense of belonging

helped a student to make progress: “I think also just feeling like he was part of it, like, you know, people wanting him in the group. And we had, you know, check-ins and that sort of thing. So, I think for him there was growth.”

Social Development. LAN believed that when children learned to be in community, it contributed positively to their social development, namely their development of empathy: “…children see each other and where they are coming from and [are] compassionate for each other.” (LAN) HOL thought that to learn compassion, children first needed to experience it from adults. She thought that adults provided security and belonging to children during a Circle by actively listening: “I feel, like one of the things, the best things that we can do for children, is listen to them, like truly with our full focus, listen to them.” This was one of the reasons that HOL appreciated the formality and equity of the talking piece in Circles. She disliked making assumptions about student wellness based solely on external evidence and preferred to genuinely check-in: “...sometimes we assume we’re all feeling like a community, you know. But you don’t know until you ask, and you invite them.” By passing a talking piece, HOL knew she would be reaching out to each student in turn.

Validation and Normalization. Being in a group setting where people feel safe to share their feelings can help other participants to realize they are not alone in an experience (COM). For HOL this was particularly poignant during a class when students created life sticks. They took the fallen branches of a tree and wrapped them in different coloured strings or lace to represent significant events in their life. Afterward, they had the opportunity to share as little or as much they liked in Circle. Students started to see how they were alike. “It’s almost like they bonded and then they kind of calmed down a bit.” She specifically recalled two students who learned that their families changed in similar ways due to divorce.

The class also learned about a peer who had been seriously ill as a child. HOL saw that the experience helped to remove misapprehensions and build understanding.

Processing Feelings and Grounding. REA felt that one of the advantages of Circles was it provided time and a safe space for students to process their feelings: "I find that [Circles] give children the ability to sit, um, and be heard in a respectful, safe environment. And to really get a chance to process their thoughts and feelings around things and events that have happened."

COM also noticed that her students became more capable of identifying and expressing their feelings and subsequently became more inclined to, "manage problems or issues that come up, instead of just tattling or getting upset." CUR agreed and explained that in a classroom where upwards of twenty children must all get along, "…for six hours in a small space," there needs to be some way of, "dealing with all those emotions that come up," and a Circle is a "safe spot." CUR noticed how her students improved over time:

> I've seen, you know, when I have done the Circles, the way they can verbalize after a couple of weeks. They can verbalize what's happening, how they see somebody else's emotions or their own and they can express that in a very clear way.

When CUR's students were able to communicate their feelings and perspectives it created a sense of harmony in her classroom. CUR felt that the skill of identifying and verbalizing feelings helped students cope with strong emotions and improved their ability to self-regulate.

Circles were also described as a calming experience that gave students time. Time to connect, to think, to express their feelings, and to regulate. LAN described Circles in this way:

> It's like a grounding exercise as you come in and, whatever point in the day you decide to do the Circle, it kind of grounds the kids and brings them back to, um, whatever issue. Or gives them time to express themselves, to think.

INC felt that Circle practice brought about a significant change to her class culture. Being in Circle together helped students to connect, to be seen and to care about each other.

Benefits for Educators

Educators valued building relationships for the sake of student well-being and belonging, but they in turn also felt gratified and fulfilled by their relationships with their students. COM derived personal enjoyment from facilitating Circles: "Yeah, I really enjoy them," and when asked to elaborate stated, "I feel like my class is a little community and that's good for me." (COM). As with many educators, COM liked to see how her students changed throughout the year: "So, it's also good for me because I know what's going on in their lives. Um, and it's interesting to see from the beginning of the year to the end, how many more are starting to share." For teachers, seeing students' progress affirmed the value of their work.

COH described how Circles helped to create a feeling of class harmony: "I've always found that creating, having those times for Circle… it creates a community in your classroom. It creates cohesiveness in your classroom." Building relationships was so important to COH that when the Consultant facilitated Circles in her classroom, she felt disconnected from her students. She enjoyed learning new approaches, but she preferred having the active role in forming relationships with her students.

TRU valued the reciprocity of being in relationship with her students. She liked that she could know her students and that her students came to know her in authentic ways: "It has allowed my class to see me as someone who has real feelings. The kids saw me become

emotional when talking about how much I care for them." Repeatedly, throughout the project, educators showed how important it was to their personal fulfillment and job satisfaction to form relationship with their students.

Circles and Cultural Belonging

The Indigenous protocols were integral to creating safety and belonging in Circle. The Consultant also spoke of their potential to provide cultural belonging for Indigenous students and staff. In her previous community work, the cultural belonging experienced in a Circle helped her clients to engage in learning and forming relationship with service providers. When she met with clients in Circle: "Just, it was like an automatic response: I need to be respectful; I need to listen." When the Consultant raised the question with fellow Circle practitioners, Elders or participants, they concluded that it was due to ceremony: "[Our clients] respected ceremony. And so, when somebody was in ceremony they would stay until the end."

Along with a respect for ceremony, the Consultant also attributed her clients' increased engagement with a human need for sheltered connection:

> I think what it is, is the connection that we make. The connections that we make with each other when we're in Circle. I think there is just this innate place where, um, that we feel connected to one another. That we feel connected to, not just one another, but to our environment around us, whether it be the land or the building, or- or, um, each other, or even just the animals, you know what I mean? There's just that interconnectedness that we feel, and I think that's where people are feeling safe. They feel safe in Circle.

The Consultant further explained that when someone feels unsafe in Circle it is because they are unaccustomed to the ceremony and, "the feeling of connectedness," and therefore they

feel exposed. Eventually, a person can become reconnected and, “become safe again to that ceremony but it takes time,” (Consultant). She brought up her work with Residential School survivors to illustrate the resiliency of people to return to ceremony and interconnectedness after experiencing trauma and adversity. The Consultant called it returning to the “teaching of communication” or “the ceremony of communication”. She believes that Schools are also communities where safety and interconnectedness can be gained through Circle work and RRP because they teach children to communicate and be in relationship with one another: “...how to be; how to walk in this world; how to act in this world. How to be the best that they can be.”

Although Circle protocols and ceremony created safety for the clients in her community work, the Consultant understood that non-Indigenous students and staff might feel uneasy adopting new cultural practices or be fearful of making mistakes. For example, CUR wanted to be open to Circle work expressly because of its Indigenous origins and a desire to integrate indigeneity into her classroom; however, she struggled with the fear that she might misrepresent a cultural practice to her students.

Cultural Exploration

To encourage staff, our Consultant would often point out the universality of RRP/C design, that it is practiced globally by many cultures. She invited participants to draw upon their own cultures and to make Circle practice their own. Educators respected and used many of the Circle Protocols, but they also found ways to adapt Circle practice to their own style. INC was enamored of the circular format and so she moved her students’ desks into a circular shape to support new classroom routines. Each morning, she facilitated a check-in Circle to gauge student wellness and after lunch she facilitated problem-solving sessions as needed.

COH valued the role of ceremony in Circle, but she adjusted the protocols to her style. For introspective topics, she liked to use an artificial plant as a talking piece because it was quiet, and she had noticed that students were more comfortable being vulnerable when they had a sensory fidget. When it was a light-hearted topic, COH liked to use a ball because you could playfully toss it to the next speaker. She also decided to include pieces from her own cultural values. She selected items for the Circle opening, a candle and scarf, which were given to her as gifts and carried special meaning. At the close of Circle, she always shared words from a Buddhist hymn: "May we be safe. May we be happy. May we be healthy. May we live with ease." (COH)

The Consultant reminded research participants that the Indigenous protocols were also new to many of our students and stressed the importance of pacing and explicit instruction to help people become comfortable. One lesson from *Circle Forward* that I found helpful, invited students to make their own talking pieces and imbue them with personal meaning (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015). Afterwards, I invited students into Circle to present their talking piece and if they wished they could share some words about its personal significance. This helped students to gain more understanding and familiarity with the protocol.

Cultural Racism

Despite keeping to a slow pace and gently introducing RRP and Circles, an incident of racism took place when our Consultant was invited to COH's upper intermediate class. During an icebreaker game played in Circle, a student made an offensive remark and the Consultant tried to set a limit. The student refused to take responsibility and said the language was commonplace on his sport's team. Later she attempted to use RRP, but the

student made racist comments about irrelevant Indigenous practices. Some of the students concurred and said that Circles were stupid.

Research participants worried that racist attitudes would prevent students from engaging with RRP/C. REA worked with many of the students in COH's class and observed that some of the students in this cohort regarded Indigenous education with disdain:

> My perception from them in talking about it and then also seeing their interactions with, even just Aboriginal Education, I- I wouldn't say that it's a racial thing but I feel like they haven't bought into it, and- and don't appreciate the cultural piece of Restorative Practice. So, I feel like sometimes that's why it doesn't work. They're just so apprehensive to it. Because some of the students that have, it hasn't worked and they haven't wanted to be a part of it and don't like it, aren't even, they don't have anything good to say about, um, learning about Aboriginal culture in the classroom. So, I find that pattern a little bit, more and more. But also, like I said, the students that I find it doesn't work for are quite strongly opinionated and they- they don't want to accept the harm that they've done. They're willing just to place blame constantly on the other person.

Staff wondered how to implement RRP/C in a way that was culturally safe. How would educators protect and support students for whom Circles and RRP are culturally significant? How do we persevere through incidents of racism? How do we keep Indigenous presenters or Elders safe when they visit our school? As educators, we have to support all students, so, how do we support students who are fearful of the new and because of their privilege, feel justified in criticizing a cultural practice?

Privilege and Dominant Values

COH was the teacher in the classroom where the incident of racial harm occurred. Cumulatively, she had experience employing RRP/C in three different elementary schools in two different regions of Canada. She was uniquely positioned to provide insight into the cultural values and dynamics taking place in this classroom compared with her prior experiences.

The first school where she taught was in a northern community in Québec where the student population was predominantly Cree. In this community she met with the greatest success and found that RRP/C supported high risk youth to positively re-engage in school life. The second experience took place in BC in an inner-city school. Here again, Indigenous students were receptive to working collectively and supporting each other. RRP/C was a successful approach in this classroom. Our school was her third, a school of mostly privileged, non-Indigenous students whose parents had attended post-secondary schooling and earned middle to high incomes. At our school, in an upper intermediate class, RRP/C faltered.

COH tried to understand the root of her cohort's apprehension. She believed her students struggled with the collaborative and communal values at the core of RRP/C. Her students were highly competitive, always vying for the top positions: academic, athletic, or social. They were fearful of losing their position and wrestled with high expectations and bouts of insecurity because their personal worth was tied to their classroom rank. It was difficult for her students to be open, vulnerable, and supportive in the ways COH had previously experienced. She fought to remove the grading system from her classroom so that it would be harder for students to make comparisons, but this was met with resistance from parents and students. Even with changes to the grading system, students persisted in finding

new ways to compete. Privileged students with higher social standing made minimal effort to relate to the experiences of the few peers who came from lower socio-economic backgrounds. These interactions led students to be marginalized and feel shame. The students who perceived themselves as the elite thought Circle practice was a waste of time. When these students would not take responsibility for their cruel and harmful language, the rest of the class lost their sense of safety. Even though COH highly valued the paradigm of RRP/C, she had to limit her use of Circles by selecting topics that were less introspective because it was not safe for many of her students to be open. COH wondered how she could help students with a competitive and individualistic worldview, who were also emboldened by their privilege, to accept communal values such as mutual support and care?

Cultural Safety

When COH looked back upon this year, she spoke of need to tailor her pacing to the culture of the current classroom. The same Circle lessons that worked in her previous schools were met with resistance. For Circle to be safe, she needed to give herself permission to introduce the practice more slowly, adjust to the needs of the group and anticipate failures. She thought that when teachers put too much pressure on themselves, they were more liable to go quickly or make poor decisions. Even with this insight, however, she wondered whether safety was even attainable for this cohort and contemplated removing a student from her class during Circle practice. She knew that removing a student from a group might have created safety for the rest of the class, but it also contravened RRP/C's philosophy of inclusion and being non-punitive. At the same time, she recognized that this incident fit within a larger context of cultural privilege, and she wanted to set a firm boundary against racism.

COH was discouraged by this experience and I, in turn, wondered how to reinvigorate a teacher-facilitator who felt disheartened and exhausted. The possibility that racist reactions could occur to RRP/C figured largely in the ideas we formed around safety, not only for students but for teachers. Facilitators needed to feel safe and supported in their practice. This experience reinforced what the Consultant advocated when introducing RRP/C, that safety requires explicit instruction and careful pacing. In response to these incidents, the Vice Principal collaborated with the Consultant to provide a series of lessons on cultural sensitivity.

Racism, Discomfort, and Resistance

> REA believed that racism was a source of resistance for students but also for parents: I think, the unwillingness to participate for some people. And it's not just students. I find there's pushbacks from parents, that, they're like, why do you have to do this? This is ridiculous. And so, I think it's limited in that it's not fully accepted by people. Because they- they- they know, or they've been told, that it's part of a First Nations practice. And so, a lot of people still, I don't know, they still have that racial piece. And so, it's limited there, in that because it's housed in the Aboriginal Department and people are becoming more aware that it's a cultural practice for First Nations, and I think it's a great one that everybody should use, um, there's, they're apprehensive and unwilling to participate. So, there's pushback with it.

Research participants did not connect racism to staff resistance; however, they did bring up discomfort. Our Consultant reflected on factors contributing to resistance and she believed staff and students were unaccustomed to the ceremony of Circle but also to, "the feeling of connectedness," and therefore they felt exposed. Similarly, LAN, INC and REA named

discomfort with vulnerability as the main reason staff resisted engaging with Circles. REA reflected on the challenges of creating safety for staff:

> I think people are afraid to put themselves out there. And-and, I think people in the back of their mind, are afraid of judgement. Um, because we live in a society where, you know, people judge everything. We're all guilty of it. But, I think that's the thing with Circle, is that when you have a Circle, I think it takes a while to get to a place where everybody... can feel comfortable to share stuff and know that it stays there, and that people won't place judgement. And that's a hard thing about restorative practice, is like, can we ever get one hundred percent to that point?

Discomfort, vulnerability, and safety were significant themes in this research.

Trauma Informed Practice

Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP) was a new term for some staff. Nonetheless, research participants understood that when a student had faced adversity that they needed to act with compassion and be willing to adjust their teaching practice: "It's- it's not always the learning that's the most important and it's not, you know, the reading level that's the most important. It's having them be happy to come to school. And that this is a safe place for them," (COM). LAN considered intergenerational influences when she thought about TIP:

> I have no idea what's- what happens when that child goes home or what happened in the parents' past or what happened in the grandparents' past. So, I have to be always open to, okay, that behaviour might be happening because of something that is in their past, so, just remaining open and flexible; understanding; compassionate.

CUR was cognizant of how trauma could impact learning and memory and tried to be mindful of a student's triggers:

> For instance, like if a child is suffering from trauma and something triggers them, they're not going to be able to think, they're not going to be able to pay attention to the math lesson or be able to read, even a poem, maybe they knew yesterday.

Educators were also aware of the types of trauma students in our school had experienced and named abuse, incarceration, poverty, divorce, and addiction. Staff were able to identify the adaptations our school provided to students who had experienced trauma. INT named reset time, class structure and routine, opportunities to express feelings and be validated, greater leniency for misbehaviour, and more tolerance for mistakes. REA named reduced or adapted work, visual aids and schedules to improve predictability, self-regulation strategies, mental health support, and problem-solving skills. TRU named teaching friendship skills and student attendance at breakfast club for nutrition, connection, and a gentle start to the day.

INT thought that educators were in a privileged position to provide children with the experience of being safe and seen by a caring adult. To that end, INT devoted time to listen to all students but especially listened to students who had experienced trauma, such as this young boy:

> I find, you give him more opportunities, after school or whatever, to talk to you and always to be there for him. If he needs to talk to an adult because he has so much to say, right, and so much going on and so much he saw.

When INT discovered that a student had experienced adversity, she would, "take [them] under my wing more." To her this meant providing more connection time, listening, validating feelings, reading body cues, co-regulating, adjusting expectations for behaviour and work output, providing breaks and ultimately building trust and safety.

There was some debate as to whether a teacher needed to know the nature of the trauma to support a student. Many thought that having background knowledge was helpful.

COM recognized that sometimes a classroom teacher is not privy to that knowledge. LAN and the Consultant thought that an educator did not need to be aware of the exact nature of the trauma to create safety. They both thought it was more important to be curious about what a student's behaviour and choices communicated about their needs.

Trauma Informed Circles

Research participants named safety and trauma informed practice (TIP) as important ethical considerations as well as a foundational requirement for the success of RRP/C. When considering how students who had experienced adversity or trauma might respond to being in Circle, LAN thought it would feel riskier:

> I think it would be more overwhelming sharing, for sure. When they don't know who they're sharing with, and they don't know if it's a safe environment. So, I think the goal of the person that's facilitating the Circle needs to set up a safe environment, so that those children with trauma do feel like sharing.

Staff identified the Indigenous Circle protocols as contributing positively to a structure of safety that allowed community and belonging to form. However, they also recognized that Circle protocols had limits and believed that facilitators bore the responsibility for practicing in trauma informed ways. Participants brought forward practical ideas to make Circle practice safe and inclusive. If students were feeling anxious, then they suggested providing more choice, such as allowing a student to observe from outside the Circle at first and then choose when they were ready to join. During Circle, they suggested allowing fidgets or breaks. Another idea was to invite support staff, such as an Education Assistant, Youth Care Worker, or Indigenous Education Assistant, who regularly worked with a child to attend the Circle. Research participants also suggested sensory supports such as adjusting light levels, playing calming music or offering students a choice of chair (wiggle chair, cushion, or

carpet). REA and LAN recommended explicitly teaching children to practice listening and communicating in non-judgemental ways to increase safety. Finally, from a more philosophical standpoint, TRU, HOL and the Consultant advocated using Circles sparingly for discipline and using them mainly for connection and learning so that kids would have positive associations.

Pacing and Scaffolding

Research participants believed that the Indigenous protocols increased the likelihood that children would feel safe. The "right to pass" especially increased safety since children were not obliged to share when they received the talking piece. (COM, INT) However, LAN thought the protocols alone were not enough to create a trauma informed space and that the circular shape could leave people feeling exposed:

> I don't think that you can just jump into Circle and have kids contributing. Even though they can pass. But that whole facing each other situation, looking at each other's faces, and then being on the spot. Even if you pass on saying something, you're still put on the spot for a second. So, I think, setting it up at the beginning, is really important so they feel safe.

LAN emphasized building safety in a slow and deliberate way: "…I think, how you develop that culture, is you just start out small though, by sharing little bits and then as you go along then the kids probably start to feel more comfortable." She also suggested the facilitator maintain the focus on themselves to begin with and then, "…slowly include everyone," (LAN). TRU described her approach to safety in a similar way. She thought the routines, process and language all needed to be introduced slowly and deliberately. She thought it was important for facilitators to be honest and open. She suggested beginning with a light topic, such as friendship, and keeping initial Circles short.

Lessons from Staff Circles

One goal of this project was to invite staff to participate in Circles during staff meetings so they could experience them from the perspective of a group member. Staff resisted and several complained about the length of time it took to conduct a Circle with our approximately forty staff members. Research participants also named vulnerability and lack of safety as reasons for staff resistance. Below I describe three staff Circles held at different stages in our implementation. Varying participant reactions to each adult Circle revealed some of the ways staff measured safety and the value of Circle practice.

Empowering but Adversarial. Our first staff Circle happened in an impromptu way in the spring before our official implementation began. A staff member had discovered RRP/C at a district workshop, and she was enthusiastic about the process. She invited a second staff person to co-facilitate a Circle during a staff meeting. There had been growing discord between staff and administrators and they wanted to encourage an open dialogue. Many of the staff had not experienced being in a Circle prior to this day and lacked familiarity with the protocols. They also had no awareness that a Circle was about to take place. This inevitably increased stress and reduced safety for staff. REA and COM noticed that not all staff felt safe enough to be vulnerable and they may have preferred to avoid conflict.

Despite the lack of safety and the discursive tone to this Circle, some staff found the experience validating. INC described the Circle as "powerful." She said that she felt, "good leaving that staff meeting because I felt like people were being honest and showing their, like their feelings were being heard." Another participant, CUR, described it in this way:

> We did a Circle and we each had a turn to speak. And there was some tension that had been growing and so it was a way to address it instead of sweeping it under the carpet

and to bring it to the forefront. And I think that, um, the leaders in our school also then saw that this is something that should be addressed, and we need to work with. CUR felt this Circle helped validate staff experiences by bringing problems out into the open: "...you get all of those different perspectives, and you might realize you're not the only one who is feeling this way. It's like a support system."

While CUR and INC felt this staff Circle was positive and empowering, they also recognized how hard it is to be honest and vulnerable while discussing something so charged: "I think that's when people, you know, they don't always want to say what they really feel because they don't want to hurt anyone, or they don't want to create a conflict," (INC). COM felt that staff were trying to improve morale and that Circles certainly had that potential, but she suggested starting small: "... a quick little check-in of how everyone's doing," and then adding on to the practice once people are comfortable.

At this point, participants had embraced the idea that Circles promote honest communication, and that sharing thoughts and feelings can be mutually validating. However, participants had not yet experienced the non-adversarial style of communication in a Circle. For most participants, this was a realization that took place after they had facilitated several Circles in their own classrooms. When educators were in the facilitator role and the talking piece was passed, it was challenging at first to suppress the urge to interrupt their students and correct or discuss their statements. Since research participants could see the value in each student speaking their truth, it led educators to examine the way knowledge is formed and shared.

Safe and Affirming. The next Circle took place in the fall of 2017 when our Consultant launched our project with a half-day workshop. The Consultant had specifically designed this Circle to be a gentle introduction to protocols and used it to explore common

pedagogical values among our staff. It was a way to build a sense of community and affirm our shared values as teachers. The staff enjoyed the Circle and felt positive about their roles in the school. One teacher volunteered to write a list of our combined values and create a Wordle poster to hang in our staffroom.

This Circle took place on the same day that LAN joined our staff and met us all for the first time. She was not sure she wanted to share openly with a group of strangers; however, her nervousness began to subside as others in the group took risks to share. Despite being new and knowing few people, she described her first Circle experience as a positive one. She likened it to a staff retreat or a way to "hang out" and connect. She valued Circle for the understanding and compassion staff could gain for each other and wanted it to be successful. When she considered how other staff sometimes resisted Circle practice, she thought it would be helpful to combine a slower pace with a firmer expectation about participation: "And the expectation is, that's what we're going to do. Just because you brush your teeth, you do Circle." She was convinced that staff would adapt in time and that Circles could create a positive climate and community.

Voluntary, Transparent, Validating, and Safe. In the third and final year of our implementation, I decided to host a Circle to debrief our year of Covid restrictions. Anxiety had been high all year and staff were exhausted. TRU described it like, "being on a fast-moving treadmill," and I would add that we were mentally fatigued by all the unsettling and unexpected changes. I decided to offer some debriefing Circles before staff left for the summer.

I had learned a lot from my colleagues, especially the participants in this project, and I tried to use their suggestions to design a safe Circle experience. I planned the Circle so that people could voluntarily sign up to attend and my administrator suggested reducing fear by

being transparent and letting people know the round questions ahead of time. I selected a song for the opening and a moment of mindfulness to help us relax before we started. Due to Covid, we each had to sit one metre apart and we were unable to use a shared talking piece, but I gave everyone the option to bring one of their own and share its significance. Six staff attended the Circle which made it small and intimate and meant participants had more time to express themselves. TRU wrote me later to explain how the Circle helped her:

> I really liked the debriefing. I felt that this Circle brought me closer to my colleagues. I really don't know most staff members personally at all. And most staff members know nothing about me as a person outside school. During my Covid experience, I felt very alone... so sitting and listening to the struggles and successes of my colleagues was really positive. I was feeling a lot of grief.... Being able to express some of my grief helped me because I had wanted to feel accepted or heard or understood.

TRU named the reasons this Circle successfully supported her. The Circle was a safe space because the participants were compassionate and non-judgmental, the facilitator respectfully validated each person's experiences, and the staff were able to take risks in being vulnerable. It helped that the topic was highly relatable for everyone, and that each participant was already familiar with the protocols and had experienced being in a Circle. TRU thanked me:

> I so appreciate the staff that came today. I am grateful for the safe space you provide. I believe a deeper connection between staff can be made when sharing safe spaces. I will take these connections with me as I move to [a new school]. So much appreciation to your kindness, and honest interaction with me today.

Like all of us, TRU had felt isolated due to the pandemic and the Circle gave her time to connect with her peers. She said, "I feel like this last day gave me more personal connection

than any day previous to this." She had previously called them Sharing Circles but renamed them Trust Circles: "I think these Trust Circles could be really positive as a tool to give new staff members a team of people they know they could trust in future, especially when working alone." TRU identified safety, trust, belonging, non-judgmental acceptance, connection, and sense of community as the strong experiences from this Circle.

The Relationship Between Safety and Vulnerability

When TRU reflected on the nature of vulnerability, she felt that safety helped but that participants also needed to choose to share so that they could connect and be known. She summed up her experience with the Trust Circle in this way:

> It has brought me closer to the staff who too have shared. I see my staff members as real people and not just colleagues. I trust the people who have opened up and shared. I feel close to them.

TRU's reflections on vulnerability and safety may pinpoint a closed loop problem that many participants struggled with when it came to Circles: vulnerability requires safety, but establishing safety requires taking at least some small risk with vulnerability to begin connecting. In other words, safety and vulnerability need to dovetail. One person being vulnerable cues others that the space is safe. As soon as someone is vulnerable, the facilitator needs to validate their experience in a manner that shows acceptance and unconditional regard. Other participants witness the validation and feel reassured that the Circle is safe. Establishing safety must be done slowly.

Research participants arrived at the same conclusion and transferred the learning to their Circle practice with their students. LAN had empathy for her students: "... sharing personal information, when you don't know your crowd, um, can be really scary." Several participants noticed discomfort among students when first experiencing Circles. The circular

shape and question rounds invited students to share personal thoughts and feelings which could improve belonging, but it also placed high demands on social communication and eye contact which could be unnerving, especially before safety was established. HOL commented that, "some children have a tough time with Circle. It's a vulnerable place. Um, and I've seen, you know, like, the loudest kid in the room just like not be able to participate, you know."

LAN believed the solution was the same for adults and students: careful pacing and gentle modelling. For her students, she chose friendly topics that were conducive to starting communication and she proceeded slowly. Rather than ask her students to share first, she took the initial risk to be vulnerable by sharing her own personal thoughts and feelings. Working in this way, her students began to feel comfortable and share more and then she could bring up more complex or introspective topics. She thought the same approach would help staff: "…as it's done, a little bit more and a little bit more, um, that safe space is created and then they start to feel more comfortable, just like kids."

Circles as a Support

Although there were many layers to creating safety, COH believed that some students who had experienced trauma might regard Circles as a welcoming opportunity for validation and connection if there was enough safety. The Consultant shared the view that Circles could be a highly supportive place for people who have experienced trauma:

> The way I see it is that, speaking and talking about it, and this is what I've been taught, is healing, right? Crying is healing. Talking about your past injustices that have happened to you is healing because if we bottle it up, it's going to come out in different ways. It's going to come out in drug and alcohol abuse. It's going to come out in hurting yourself and- and being negative towards yourself. It's going to come

> out in you being a bully towards other people. It's going to come out with just withdrawal and- and not wanting to deal with life anymore. Right, so, communication is really important. You know, and I often times I hear kids say, like, "Oh, I'm really glad we had that Circle and talked about it. It's like a weight fell off my shoulders." Right? Even I feel that way sometimes, too, when I talk about things is that, you know, I feel better about talking about it because if I just continually hold it in and not get the help of my community to help me heal, then it's just going to be like a, like a tea kettle that's boiling. Right, eventually it's going to boil over if we don't talk about it. So, yeah.

When the staff debriefed their year of Covid, they came to see they were not alone in their experiences, and they could process their feelings. Educators noticed the same benefits for students. When safety and trust were established, students could experience validation, normalization, grounding, and the processing of their feelings. INC stated, "…there's also a relief in talking about your trauma," but it needs to be safe, and it needs to be a choice.

Trauma Informed Discipline

The main reason to implement RRP was to provide a trauma informed and compassionate alternative to punitive discipline. RRP was less hierarchical and could therefore be a more egalitarian form of discipline that would empower students by giving them agency in the discipline process. Research participants thought that RRP could be a trauma informed model of discipline but also believed it depended on the knowledge, skill and approach taken by each facilitator.

RRP

In a punitive model, an incident is considered an infraction of school rules and educators, or administrators, are authorities who weigh the seriousness of the infraction and

select a proportionately sized punishment. This is a hierarchical, top-down approach to discipline. In RRP, an incident is looked upon as a moment of harm between people that can be resolved through a guided conversation. RRP places educators or administrators in a facilitator role and empowers peers to work through their problem. RRP is not completely non-hierarchical since adults still bear responsibility for student learning and safety; however, RRP provides more agency to students and focuses on egalitarian outcomes.

Orientation to Problem-solving

LAN, COM, and COH remarked on how their role changed by using RRP. They each found they could take a step back and facilitate solution-finding. Rather than being the creative center of problem solving, COH preferred guiding the process and not wielding power over students: "I could just say, okay, here is the problem. You guys come up with the solution and let me know what it is. So, it was nice."

INT believed the process and outcomes were more meaningful to students when they came up with the solutions themselves. She had always included her students in problem-solving because it increased their engagement, taught them strategies, and helped them take responsibility. INT distilled the RRP process down to one statement: "The kids that are having problems come up with solutions." REA compared this to previous discipline experiences where, to be expedient, staff tended to feed students the solutions or tell students how they should be feeling. Although it took more time, REA appreciated that RRP respected the authentic input from students.

A few research participants associated RRP with contemporary governing philosophies such as democracy or consensus building. COM found herself becoming more democratic in her approach because the restorative process always included time to listen to students and decisions were based on student input. COH also used the word democratic but

applied it to her students: "It creates democratic students because they're all involved in the process and the healing processes." CUR and HOL believed that the RRP process promoted the Indigenous value of consensus building:

> What I really like about the questions is that they problem-solve. And that if they come up with an idea that isn't acceptable to the other side, there is like a negotiation going on... I think it's very empowering, that part, too. (HOL)

Students learned to value including everyone's perspective and learned to resolve conflicts without attacking the wrongdoer. As HOL was fond of saying, "focus on the deed; not the doer."

Navigating a Paradigm Shift

Since moving from a hierarchical model to an egalitarian model constituted a paradigm shift, the Consultant wanted to make learning as safe as possible and keep anxiety to a minimum. She was careful to teach the RRP questions and process in a simplified and explicit way. She provided each research participant with a script printed on laminated business cards as well as a poster to hang in their classroom or workspace. When she visited classes, she explained the RRP questions, gave examples, and invited students and staff to role play scenarios.

The cards and posters were important learning aids. They were used like quick guides to help facilitators and students become accustomed to the language and process. On one side, were the questions to ask the wrong-doer and on the other side the questions to ask the person who was harmed. CUR liked the convenient business-sized cards that she could fit into her pocket to have on hand whether she was in her classroom or outside supervising on the playground. LAN found the cards and posters incredibly useful at the beginning because they helped her to think in a restorative way. Later when she felt confident that her process

was restorative, she adapted the questions to her own way of speaking. Several others, REA, INT, COH, and HOL spoke of doing the same.

In my role as Restitution Teacher, I also found the cards and posters immensely helpful. Whenever I facilitated RRP, I positioned myself where I could see the poster as a reference, and then I offered a card to each student so they could read along. To me it seemed that the script allayed our shared anxiety. If I became lost in the process, I could refer back to the poster. If a student was nervous, they could engage their mind by reading the questions on the card. Some chose to read ahead so they could predict the next step and sometimes this led them to involve themselves more in guiding the process. Failing that, students could use the card as a fidget. Eventually, as the students and I had more experiences with RRP, the anxiety over the process lowered and engagement with the process increased. Other participants noted the same.

Explicit Instruction Empowers Students

REA thought the explicit approach to instruction empowered students to use RRP. As students practiced responding to the questions and gained confidence, they increasingly contributed ideas. Over time, CUR noticed that familiarity with the process helped her students be less anxious when conflicts arose. They felt reassured knowing that problems would not be overlooked and that there was a system in place that would always allow their input in the conversation. They knew, "how to be respectful, and they knew that it was a tool that was going to make it easier to solve the problem." (CUR)

The script gave LAN's primary-aged students independence. For LAN there was nothing unique about the content of the RRP questions, they were universal in nature. Rather, she believed that RRP provided her students with a common language that empowered them to solve problems:

> If I have one take away, it's how I've seen students using that language for RRP to try and solve issues themselves. And that, like I just saw it last week again. And it was, somebody came up to me and said, Madame, how about this? How about- how about we make a card because we did this, and this will make this person feel better. And I was like, oh, that's a great idea. (LAN)

Once the students became accustomed to the language, they began to refer to the posters to resolve conflicts on their own. LAN thought it would be ideal for students from Kindergarten through Grade 7 to learn the RRP language and phrasing so that it could be a common language among everyone in the building.

The Consultant also explicitly taught the language of apology. An amends often included an apology, and so she created reference posters and taught students how to apologize, step by step. REA liked that students had to consider what makes a proper apology so that they understood it required sincere reflection and empathy for their peers. Students had to name how their actions affected others and explain the steps they would take to avoid repeating their mistakes. Then the students were coached to check in with the person to see if their apology helped and if it was accepted. If it was not accepted, then the amends process continued. Overall, there was consensus among research participants that students and staff needed explicit instruction with a lot of opportunities to observe, practice the language and discuss the paradigm and the process of RRP.

A Hopeful Question to Support Students

There was one question that was not on the card script that our Consultant introduced and many added to their repertoire: *What were you hoping would happen when you did that?* CUR found it particularly useful when students had heightened emotions following a conflict. When students were in fight or flight mode, they often struggled to understand their

own motivations and could be easily re-triggered just by discussing the problem. CUR and I both found that when we phrased this *hopeful* question with a tone of genuine interest and non-judgement students felt safer to reflect on their motivations, feelings and needs. We speculated that the word *hope* framed the question of motivation more positively and students could self-evaluate without the fear of accusation. Students might discover motivations such as a perceived threat, a perceived injustice, or feeling excluded. Once they understood their own motivations it was easier for the student to take responsibility because they knew their action was filling a valid need such as safety or belonging. It was then possible for the student to experience remorse without being overpowered by shame and they could apologize or discuss ways to move forward.

Consideration for the Person Harmed

REA liked that the RRP cards had two sides, meaning a set of questions to pose to the person who caused harm and a set to ask the person harmed. REA thought that in the fast-paced environment of a school that staff moved quickly to address the mistake of the wrong doer and didn't necessarily set aside adequate time to verify the welfare of the harmed student. In an RRP process, a facilitator would acknowledge everyone's point of view and hear how each person was impacted by the event. The person who was harmed had the opportunity to outline what they needed to feel safe. They could also gauge the sincerity of the apology or amends and potentially have more confidence that it would not occur again. (COH) If they had doubts, they could ask for a follow-up meeting.

Since RRP explored everyone's point of view, the process also uncovered that the wrongdoing was often not one-sided. When each student could acknowledge how they contributed to a situation, whether big or small, this helped to repair the relationships between everyone involved. Resolving things in this way had a more enduring effect.

Additionally, the act of harming someone else can cause harm to the wrong doer. The wrong doer can feel the weight of shame and fear ostracization. These feelings need to be processed and making amends helps to heal this wound. (COH) By contrast, a punitive model can cause harm to the wrong doer (ostracize, shame, shun, ignore) and without a restorative process, the person can struggle to rejoin their classroom community or social group. (COH) If there is disrupted attachment, a lack of safety, neglect or abuse, or chaos in the home, students are more susceptible to having a negative self-concept and experiencing overwhelming feelings of shame or fear of being vulnerable.

Grounding and Co-regulating

Research participants agreed that students need time to regulate their emotions before beginning the restorative conversation. HOL also thought that students might need something to ground with during the process, such as a fidget. Participants recommended inviting any support staff who regularly worked with a child to attend a restorative conversation. A support person might be more aware of what triggered a student, when they might need a break, and had experience effectively co-regulating with a child.

Student Choice

Since the Consultant knew that RRP was unfamiliar and that it was not going to feel comfortable for every person, she always made it clear that it was a choice. If students preferred to go to the office for a discipline process, staff allowed this. If a student wanted to try RRP on an experimental basis, staff allowed this. If a student agreed to RRP but then became uncomfortable part way through and wanted to stop, staff allowed this. Research participants expressed that in the RRP/C model, students would always need to have choice:

> I think the choice in itself is powerful. That students feel like they have a voice in the direction of where they can go. So, I think that in itself is very important. And because RRP isn't going to work for everybody sometimes. (HOL)

By having choice, students could continue to act with agency even when they made a mistake. Without this choice, a student could feel trapped and anxious because the process is unknown, or the outcomes are unpredictable. For someone who has experienced trauma, choice is essential.

RRP Teacher Role and Informed Choice

To facilitate students having choice between RRP and an office referral, my administrator provided me with a half-hour block each day to accept referrals from teachers or students to use a restorative process. Educators mainly referred what INT described as middle-sized problems, incidents that were too lengthy to resolve in class but not serious enough to warrant an office referral. LAN found it an ideal service in situations where there were students involved from multiple classes and educators did not have the option of leaving their classroom.

Over time, I came to see that choice was most authentic when it was an informed and supported decision. To present the choices, I adopted the practice of a pre-interview to meet with each participant individually ahead of time so they could explain their version of events and release some of their emotion. Then they would hear me explain the process, have the opportunity to ask questions, make requests about who was invited, and then they could decide if they thought it was worth trying. After adopting this procedure, I observed less anxiety and strong emotions during the restorative process, and I believed the critical step of making RRP a choice was empowering for students and increased safety. The only

shortcoming was this process took time and the RRP Teacher Role was only available for the duration of our project.

Safety in Going Slow

TRU believed that RRP supported children who had experienced adversity by virtue of its being a slow process. A facilitator could begin with a pre-interview to determine the readiness of the students. During the process, there was a succession of questions that each person took time to answer. There was opportunity for validation and addressing shame. The slow pace allowed time for reflection, reset breaks, and emotional support. INT did not think that RRP could harm students:

> No, because I think it makes them really think and I like that part. It makes them think about how the other person's feeling, how you're feeling and come up with solutions and maybe they were having a bad day, so, that's never harmful. For you to be able to think and be compassionate and have empathy and all that. It- it would never be harmful.

Facilitation Skills

Other educators believed the model was not inherently trauma-informed but that it was the responsibility of the facilitator to practice in a trauma-informed way. COM thought that RRP/C could potentially harm because children, "…they're not always nice or they don't always think before they say things. And maybe even the teacher, right? You know the teacher makes a comment. Words can hurt." If a facilitator could not establish safety, then RRP/C had the potential to retraumatize or cause harm. Despite these concerns, REA did not believe educators should shy away from conducting Circles; rather, she felt that teachers needed to be well trained in TIP and RRP/C facilitation. REA provided an example of the type of facilitation skills educators needed to create safety:

> …a kid that's faced adversity could get triggered by something that a student in the Circle has said and might get upset verbally or non-verbally show signs. Where, I feel like, that's part of the teacher's job to observe that. But then, where do you go from there? Do you end the Circle? Then students will ask questions. Do you remove the student? But then students will ask questions. So, it's like a delicate thing. (REA)

In terms of facilitation skills, the educator would need to know how to respond when one student spoke words that were harmful or triggering to someone else. (REA) The educator would need to know how to care for the triggered student without drawing unwanted attention from the rest of the group. They would need to consider how to respond to other students' questions about why someone was triggered. Students could be curious or searching for ways to make sense of what they heard. REA also thought that it was best to act in a preventative way by building a safety plan prior to the restorative conversation.

Safety Plan

For students who had experienced trauma, REA advocated using the pre-interview to create a safety plan:

> Um, I know for me when I work with kids that have faced adversity, I always check-in, throughout anything, that they are comfortable and even before we're going to sit and maybe have a conversation that- that could affect them, I make a plan with them, as to, okay, if we get to a point where your body is telling you that you can no longer discuss this or you're feeling uncomfortable, you know, what can I do to support you in that?

REA shared that sometimes it's as simple as, "…developing a signal where they could say, okay, time out..." so they can have a moment to reset. REA added that she is very cautious with discipline because, "…for some students, the outcome or what's decided can trigger

what they've been through and then it makes it worse, and it affects your relationship with them."

A Preference for RRP

Two staff who were adept at creating safety and often supported students through a discipline process were REA and HOL. REA and HOL both noticed an increase in participation as students gained experience with RRP. From her conversations with students, REA believed they preferred RRP because the process provided the opportunity to work through their problems and repair their friendships:

> I have students now that are, they would rather do this. And the reason is- is because usually when it's a punitive thing in the office, they don't get the opportunity to work through this. Usually, it's one of them in the office, or two, whoever's involved. But usually, I find that what happens is that one gets the big consequential piece, and they don't have the opportunity to sit as a collective group and work through the questions. So, I find a lot of students that are receptive to restorative practice, do want, they would prefer this.

HOL believed that students preferred RRP because their perspectives and feelings were being validated. HOL had noticed that as adults, we sometimes overlook injuries because they seem so small in comparison to our own life experiences. She spoke of how children have an inner knowing that adults need to honour. For a young child, even a small injury can be, "... recorded in their heart and then it's a sensitivity, you know, because it just wasn't released..." Through RRP, young students had the opportunity to express what was significant about the incident, release their feelings, and agree to an amends that felt meaningful for them.

Resistance to RRP

There were times when students preferred an office referral. Notably, REA could remember a student who made this request: "…send me to the office. I'll have an in-school suspension." REA doubted the efficacy of this route for the student but also understood their resistance. RRP could feel unsafe to a student since it required students to share their feelings. REA could recite several other reasons for student resistance, including preconceived notions about RRP/C, discomfort or intolerance of cultural protocols and systems, indifference to resolving the problem, a background of trauma, social stigma around sharing feelings (more so for boys), or the belief that they had already solved the problem. Of these, she found indifference the most challenging.

Sometimes the process was stalled when a student could not take responsibility for their actions. Research participants speculated on a variety of reasons for this difficulty. HOL wondered if students found it difficult to think within a restorative paradigm. Perhaps their household preferred punitive or retributive thinking or perhaps some children were not accustomed to being held accountable.

Our Consultant provided further insight into why children and adults have difficulty taking responsibility and connected it to shame. If a student internalizes criticism and judges themselves as flawed, the feeling of shame can be so painful that they will avoid admitting to mistakes. There are many sources of shame associated with discipline. In a punitive model, if a student was repeatedly removed from class and referred to the office and kept in isolation, the experience of ostracization was shaming and likely created a distrust of discipline processes. If students and parents had high expectations for success, then making a mistake would feel highly shameful. If there were adults in a student's life who responded to wrong-doing in harmful ways then making a mistake induced anxiety. In this case, a student would

not feel safe being vulnerable during an RRP process. For these and other reasons, students were sometimes not able to take responsibility and when this happened, RRP stalled. As CUR pointed out, taking responsibility and saying sorry is difficult for students and adults and sometimes we aren't ready.

When RRP Is Not a Good Fit

Due to various challenges – shame responses, racism, resistance, discomfort with vulnerability – research participants struggled to know if the RRP process was indeed a safer and more beneficial model than punitive discipline. There were times when despite our best efforts to support a restorative process that RRP faltered.

> I think, when you're in it and you're in a Circle, you need to have awareness and be able to read body cues and if it becomes too much for the person then you need to accept that. You can't go further that day. And then you'd have to, I think you'd have to feel it out, to see if they're willing to continue with that. (REA)

Research participants concluded that part of facilitating RRP/C in a safe way is knowing when to halt the process.

There were various reasons that facilitators chose to end a restorative conversation. Sometimes students resisted taking responsibility or were not ready to navigate the amends process. Sometimes students became visibly upset or agitated. It was important to stop and consider what might be causing an anxious response. What other needs might the student have? Is there a way to increase safety for this student? Had the student experienced trauma or struggled with mental health? Students might have been anxious about being judged or humiliated in front of their peers, or, they may have feared disappointing their parents, teachers, coaches, principals, or friends. If RRP was being used to address bullying, then the facilitator needed to consider the power differential and whether a restorative conversation

would be safe. If aggression persisted despite efforts to use RRP, then it was not safe and it was referred to the office. If parents did not agree with the philosophy of RRP and felt wary of the outcome, then we halted the process.

Ending a process was difficult. A facilitator might feel disappointed or guilty that they were unable to reach a conclusion with students. The Consultant made suggestions for ways to wrap up a restorative conversation. She believed it was important for everyone's learning to explain the reasons for ending the process. To reduce a sense of failure or shame, she suggested acknowledging the growth made up to that point, and then considering where further growth might be needed. Finally, she emphasized the importance of returning to safety, to explore and decide with participants how they would keep themselves safe until they could be referred to an alternative discipline route at the office.

Shame

Shame was perhaps the most complex topic to tease apart in this project. The motivation to shift from a punitive to a restorative process was to employ a model that was trauma informed, non-colonial and held benefits for mental health. A punitive model shamed but a restorative model was supposed to be compassionate. If a restorative model also caused shame, then that called into doubt its safety for students.

Philosophically, REA felt that RRP fit with a tenet that we frequently espouse at school, "...that it's okay to make a mistake and we don't need to be perfect..." She liked that no matter the mistake, RRP included a process for students to return to their friendship group or to their cohort by repairing the relationship, a process previously believed to be antithetical to shame. By contrast, she thought that punishment led to shame and self-isolation because a person who receives a punishment will often, "...internalize that they're a bad person and that they shouldn't be around people and that's not okay. We need to move away from that."

TRU thought that a child who has experienced adversity, "may be uncomfortable with feeling shame. They may be punished at home. They may need additional support along the way." Again, RRP was meant to be a slower, more relationally supportive model that would be safer for students.

Once people started to delve into RRP, however, shame became visible. In some ways it seemed like the shame responses were worse with RRP/C because students were asked to be so vulnerable during a restorative conversation. Some students would deflect responsibility precisely because they did not want to bear the feelings of shame that would come up. Practitioners were unsure how to support students through shame and they began to doubt whether RRP/C was safe, especially for students who had experienced trauma.

> I'm always worried about putting the- the wrong doer on the spot and making them feel guilty. You know it has to be done in the correct way. And that's also why I want to make sure like I'm taking part in learning how to do it properly. (CUR)

At other times, it seemed that RRP/C helped a student move past their shame and accept their mistakes. When I facilitated an RRP process, I observed how it gave students the agency to solve their problems and know that their caring mattered. Taking responsibility and apologizing brought the feelings of shame to the surface but then choosing to make amends, performing an act of kindness, and having this act of generosity received, helped to bring up positive feelings, repair the relationship and let go of the shame.

"Our Children Were So Honoured" (Consultant)

When I spoke with the Consultant about the concerns being raised with respect to shame, she returned to an Indigenous worldview. Her answer did not begin with the word shame, but rather, the word honour. She began by explaining that First Nations children were never punished, they were educated through story, and they were always honoured:

And so, one of the Elders told me that a long time ago, our children were never punished. They were the… We taught them through storytelling, that was their aboriginal education was through storytelling, whether it be over and over and over again throughout the whole day, there was always stories being told to them. And those stories were meant to, number one, to create, to help them walk in this world in a way that is expected of them. To be respectful of Mother Nature, of the land, of the people, of everything, right. And, number two, to connect to the land and each story had, um, a landmark that was connected to the story where they can see themselves on the land. And so, every time a child did wrong, the Elder- the Elder told me that that child would never get punished or talked to when the bad behaviour happened. They would allow that child to go through that whole day with that bad behaviour and then at the end of the day the Elder would tell that child in a group of children a story about that specific behaviour and then at the end they would ask, you know, basically, the Restorative Questions, you know. How do you think so-and-so felt in this story? And do you have a connection to this young man in this story or this young lady in this story? And what do you think that they can do to make this better? Right. What can you do, now that you've made that connection that that's what you've done? What can you do tomorrow because tomorrow is a better, a new day. Right. And so, there was that expectation with them, and so, you know at our schools we use punishment often too much, whether you take them out of the classroom or exclude them or, um, shame them in the classroom, or suspend them or anything like that. It's going to be hard to go back to those teachings, but Restorative Practice can do that because it is essentially like story telling. Right. I think our children learn from stories.

From the Consultant's perspective, Circle was a place to honour children and build relationship. I had heard this same statement from other research participants. INT and TRU both spoke about honouring what each student says during Circle so that the children knew they were significant and that their teachers cared about them.

Next, the Consultant spoke to me about mistake making. She pointed out that it is challenging for both children and adults to admit to mistakes. People can be fearful of losing connection, approval, or positive regard. They are fearful of being labelled as mean or bad. Shame is a feeling that occurs when our relationships are broken. To alleviate shame, people need the opportunity to tell their story, take responsibility and make amends. The RRP process is about repairing relationships and releasing shame in a good way.

The Consultant compared the Indigenous treatment of shame to present day mainstream society. In her community, people held shame feasts that were referred to as, "wiping the blood away," because, "once a conflict was talked about and dealt with, it was never talked about again." In present day society, it is taboo to talk about shame and so people do not have the opportunity to release it. We are taught that it is bad to feel shame and that we are only supposed to feel good. The Consultant believed that children and adults need a toolkit for managing shame, and that RRP/C could be instructive for people.

Shame Resiliency

When adults understand shame, they can model taking responsibility, exercising self-compassion, and releasing shame (Consultant). The Consultant had recommendations for facilitators to support this process. To begin with, she emphasized creating a classroom culture that normalizes making mistakes and experiencing shame. She explained that it is normal for people to make mistakes and when they do, the feeling of shame will be present, and it needs to be worked through. The Consultant pointed out that avoiding shame causes it

to come out in different ways: substance use, self-harm, self-hatred, withdrawal, hopelessness, suicidal ideation, negative self-talk, self-harm, self-blame, lashing out, bullying, being the class clown, not taking responsibility and making poor choices. Restorative support means walking alongside the students throughout the entire experience.

The Consultant continued, adding that a key part of forming resiliency is recognizing the feeling of shame and where it sits in the body. When a facilitator understands shame response, they can speak openly about shame and help kids to identify the feeling when it comes up. Facilitators can then also confidently tell kids that the RRP questions will help you manage your shame and that you will feel better after the process, but you need to begin by being brave, telling your story and being truthful. When a student comes through RRP and feels safe, it gives them the confidence to know that they can navigate their mistakes and they will be less frightened of taking responsibility in the future.

The Consultant liked to use story when facilitating RRP. She shared an analogy that explained shame in terms that children could understand. The Consultant explained that shame itself was not due to a flaw in a person's make-up, nor was a mistake an indication that someone was bad. Shame was like a cold that we catch when we make a mistake, and it causes us to cough and sneeze because it needs to come out. Repairing our relationships will help us to let go of our hurt and pain. This storying or narrative approach helped to externalize and normalize shame.

Parents can also have a shame response when their child makes a mistake. The Consultant suggested reminding parents that the social aspects of school and home are different and require different skill sets. A facilitator can communicate positive messages to parents such as pride for their child's courage and honesty, pride that they took responsibility and repaired their relationship, or pride that they are learning from their mistakes. This was a

recommendation that I included when writing email summaries of the restorative process to parents.

The Consultant also pointed out that it was common for the harmed person to feel shame. A victim does not want to be tiptoed around or feel the need to hide from view because a harm took place. They don't want to be treated like a victim, judged, or pitied. It is empowering for this person when the harm is acknowledged, and their feelings are validated. Through apology and amends-making, the person harmed can receive assurances of safety.

Harmful Shame

An exploration of shame showed how crucial it is for staff to understand the differences between restorative and punitive approaches. If a facilitator is not knowledgeable about shame or is inattentive to the potential for a shame response, then they can unwittingly increase harm. HOL described this situation:

> [Facilitators] should be well trained in [RRP] before attempting it because I've heard of Circles where the intention was to, um repair but it turned into more of a punishment in front of the class, which is very shaming. (HOL)

Shaming and humiliating students for their mistakes in front of a class is punitive and it is not trauma informed.

HOL made a distinction between two types of shame: a harmful shame and a corrective shame. Harmful shame was a type of humiliation or degradation that led people to feel unworthy. HOL believed the First Nations concept of shame was corrective; it was a way to hold a person accountable but kept, "…their spirit intact." HOL had a common expression that she frequently shared with others: when someone makes a mistake, you need to separate, "the deed from the doer."

Student safety was important to REA, and she thought we needed to exercise great care in how we conducted restorative conversations and Circles. Understandably, REA was upset when she observed a novice practitioner lead a restorative Circle in a way that led to a student being blamed and humiliated in front of an audience of their peers. For REA this raised the question of staff readiness. In her opinion, to facilitate a Circle safely required training and skill greater than what we received during our project.

Safety Considerations for Shame

Some teachers experimented with ways of making a restorative process safe. INT made it a rule in her classroom that if they were brainstorming solutions to a problem in a whole class Circle that the students could not name names. They could speak personally about their own thoughts, feelings or actions or they could speak in generalities. I borrowed her suggestion and found that it was akin to using *I statements.* Not only did it prevent blaming and shaming but students were more reflective about their own role in a situation because they were limited to speaking about themselves.

Sometimes excluding names did not work. In a restorative conversation, students were meant to uncover what happened, the motivations for it, and how it impacted people. They also needed to take responsibility and make amends. For these more sensitive conversations, I chose not to hold them in a large Circle with an audience; but rather, found a small private space in the school. I would also sometimes ask for a colleague to co-facilitate to increase the adult to child ratio in case someone became upset and needed a break. HOL agreed with these approaches. When I asked her about the most important resources for RRP she answered: “Um, a quiet space, a private space, a comfortable space, um, is helpful.”

HOL also reflected back on a difficult and complex situation that had the potential to go to a shaming place but instead was constructive. She remembered how careful we were in

our planning: "…we had many adults, trained adults, in the room." We spaced the students out and had them sit between the adults. We chose a private space where there were no onlookers. We prepared our question Rounds ahead of time. HOL was convinced that our intervention prevented the continuation of serious social bullying among a group of girls.

Overtime, I certainly believed that RRP had a greater ability to support students through an experience of shame than a punitive model because in a restorative process we talked about it, addressed it and offered a means to work through it. A punitive model could compound shame by isolating students from their cohort and shame was not typically considered or discussed in a punitive conversation. Even when students had received a punishment, I would still sometimes proceed through the RRP steps because it helped students work through their feelings of shame and repaired their relationships with their peers. There was one notable incident when two students had been suspended for fighting. The students described the shame, embarrassment and anxiety of returning to school and hearing people comment on their absence and what they had done. The two suspended students and their peers who had witnessed the fight, attended a restorative process. They acknowledged the harm they had caused, and their peers understood how deeply they had reflected on their actions and that they had taken responsibility. They also heard how anxious their classmates were about returning to class and their peers made offers of support. Afterwards, one of the student's commented to me that they felt better supported after our restorative conversation and less fearful of walking down the hallways and returning to class.

Integrating RRP and Circles

Circles and RRP can each be used separately but they are mutually beneficial in combination. In broad terms, the classroom community regularly meets in Circle to form connection and belonging which promote a sense of safety. While in Circle they also explore

shared class values and arrive at a "...a global understanding of expectations..." (LAN). All class members contributed to forming class expectations and all class members were responsible for contributing to class wellness (COH). Later, when someone in the community made a mistake that contravened a class value, then the educator guided a restorative conversation, and the students resolved the concern or settled the dispute together. Afterwards there was an amends-making that helped to release shame so that students could return to class with their dignity and sense of belonging intact.

Usually, RRP was held in a small group with only those students directly involved or impacted by the incident to increase safety and reduce shame. If the problem impacted most of the class community, then educators held the restorative conversation in Circle with the whole group. COM liked to use Circles to reset class priorities. Whenever the dynamic in the classroom had noticeably shifted, she would bring her class into Circle to explore what was happening, revisit class expectations and decide what needed to change. To decide on the format, the facilitator considered the number of students involved, the nature of the harm, and whether the topic could be discussed safely.

A Preference for RRP/C

INC preferred to use RRP and Circles in combination. She was drawn to the RRP/C model because she hoped it would contribute to a calmer, more respectful style of classroom management: "… I was looking for a way to find peace and help everyone work through their issues without it being negative all the time." She had just come through a difficult autumn and winter with her class, and it was taking a toll on her well-being and enjoyment of teaching:

> I felt like I was just constantly putting out fires. I couldn't even teach. And so, that's- that really gets to you. You feel like you don't have control. You feel like your- your

> classroom management takes priority over teaching. And that's a horrible feeling. Um, especially with all the pressures of having students at a certain point by the end of the year and that kind of thing. So, for me, I think it really, really helped. I was at the point where I needed something.

After attending a district workshop, INC immediately returned to her classroom and spent a weekend moving classroom furniture so that her students were seated in a Circle. She invited the Consultant to come and model RRP/C to herself and her students. INC began the practice of morning check-ins so that she could gauge how her students were feeling each day. INC modelled empathy to her class, stating that a tired or sad student might need more caring, patience or space that day. Then in the afternoon, she used the RRP process to help students work through the conflicts that arose during unstructured play time outside at lunch. Over time, she observed there was less conflict and disruption in class and that she in turn felt different: "It changed me, um, not having to be on guard all of the time…" Following implementation of the RRP/C model in her classroom, INC felt less stressed and was able to enjoy teaching her students.

Creating a Trauma Informed Model

Research participants thought there were some aspects of the RRP/C model that inherently promoted trauma-informed practice but for the most part, they believed that safety depended on their own relational insight, skill, and knowledge, as well as the culture of the class. While learning how to facilitate restorative conversations in Circle, some educators made the mistake of allowing students to go to a blaming place that harmed and shamed students and added fuel to the conflict. TRU learned the wisdom of setting group norms early on: "Make sure all know the rules of Circle. That people don't share what happens in Circle out of the Circle." INT also had guidelines that she used when solving conflict in Circle. No

student could name or blame another student; they could only name the problem or speak about themselves. Students were not to criticize but to accept all statements from others as long as they were kind and respectful. Her guidelines ensured safe and respectful communication.

Facilitator Training

Research participants wanted their students to feel safe and they wanted to be trauma informed in their practice, and to that end, they all requested further training. CUR felt that not everyone had an equal understanding of being trauma informed. REA thought there needed to be a certification process for teachers, that the training in our project, six to eight lessons, consultant support, and the resource *Circle Forward* (Boyes-Watson, et al., 2015), were insufficient to meet the demands of trauma informed practice. The Consultant worked toward and gained accreditation so that she could train and certify teachers. She also began to train the administrative strata of our school district, so they knew how to support educators engaging in the practice. At the time of writing, the administrators in our school were beginning to use a restorative approach when receiving office referrals.

Safety for Facilitators

Implementing RRP/C was cognitively and emotionally demanding for staff. Collectively, they underwent a paradigm shift, responded to resistance and racism, debated the merits of the model, made adjustments, self-evaluated and considered trauma informed practices and cultural safety. Research participants made suggestions on how to make implementation safer for teachers. COM suggested letting educators know that employing RRP/C can be emotional for staff as well as children. REA thought it was important for an educator to be aware of their own triggers and to also have healthy boundaries so that they did not use Circle for their own catharsis or healing process. At the same time, the Consultant

thought it was important for a facilitator, when regulated, to be able to divulge when they felt harmed because it was instructive and brought awareness to students about healthy boundaries, safety, and respect.

Educators also brought forward the importance of collaborative learning and co-facilitating. REA pointed out that Circles are safer when they are run with more than one staff person. With two facilitators, there are more checks and balances for redirecting or setting boundaries. While one person is presenting the second person can read body language and step out with a student if they are becoming dysregulated. As well, having a co-facilitator meant there was someone with whom to share the planning, evaluate practice, and reflect on student responses. CUR also felt that we needed to have ways to check in with each other to remind ourselves of the positive experiences we had in using RRP/C and to exercise self-compassion for the more difficult times. After all, we as a staff and a school were still growing and learning.

Decolonizing and Indigenizing Education

Since RRP/C is rooted in Indigenous practices, and since it is structurally less hierarchical, this project also examined the prospect that RRP/C could be a decolonizing influence within a school. This was difficult for research participants to evaluate because our shared understanding of decolonization was limited and often confused with indigenization.

Decolonizing Influence

Decolonization is the process of undoing colonial systems that have disenfranchised and marginalized Indigenous peoples. For schools, this can mean removing colonial and Eurocentric models of education, or in our case, a Eurocentric and punitive model of discipline, as well as shedding the belief that Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies have more merit than Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing.

From the Consultant's point of view, RRP/C was not enough to decolonize school discipline. Decolonization required top-down policy change as well as broader change in a variety of domains so that RRP/C could be supported and sustained. She thought that RRP/C could have an influencing role in decolonizing discipline because it might help people feel safer and it promotes harmony and understanding between people, but decolonization itself needed to be greater structural reform within the district to support the model. Following our project, the Consultant spent more time presenting RRP/C to administrators and district level employees.

Indigenization

In terms of indigenization, the Consultant was somewhat more willing to concede that RRP/C could play a role. Indigenization is the act of changing education so that Indigenous ways of knowing (epistemology), being (ontology) and doing are included and valued with the same esteem as other epistemologies or ontologies. HOL believed that implementing RRP/C was one avenue to exploring decolonization and indigenization because, "…it's another worldview. It's a different process. It respects Aboriginal ways, um, in taking away the punitive aspects."

Worldview

The Consultant viewed RRP/C as a universal design with origins in many worldviews. Some that she had particularly learned about were African, Irish and Māori restorative philosophies. In her personal practice, she incorporated the values and practices from local and regional First Nations, including her own. She shared with us a broader sense of belonging and relational thinking that she called Interconnectedness that referred to relationships between people, animals, land, and environment. However, for the Consultant it was important to respect the cultural practices and worldviews of her colleagues and

students. For her, indigenizing did not mean placing Indigenous values in a superior ranking but on an equal one. Whenever needed, the Consultant made adaptations to her RRP/C practice for the purpose of cultural safety and inclusion:

> I think sometimes that the Indigenous way of doing Circle practice, um, is absolutely beneficial but it-it's not for everybody. And so, I even ask our students, like, you know, what kind of Circle would you like? Do you want me to smudge in Circle? Do you want me to drum and sing?

Sometimes students would want to include cultural protocols or expressions and sometimes they only wanted the restorative conversation. The Consultant shared a story of an RRP process she had conducted in which the family asked to invite a Métis Elder to participate in the Circle and share some teachings. The Consultant felt privileged to learn about Métis teachings and incorporate them into the relationship building that took place during the restorative process.

Consensus Building and Harmony in the Group

Research participants varied in their conscious consideration of worldview when using RRP/C. During the course of our project, COM became aware that RRP/C had a connection to Indigenous cultures, but its cultural origin was not central in her mind when she facilitated Circles. She mainly focused on its value to her students, which was to connect and form relationship in community. REA believed that the focus on working together in community was already an Indigenous value and precisely the reason RRP/C could be an indigenizing influence. CUR spoke favourably of the non-adversarial style of communication supported using a Talking Piece and connected this to the Indigenous principle of consensus building. She believed that the value of consensus building had influenced aspects of Canadian society and was also visible in RRP/C. HOL thought Circle practices reflected

Indigenous values like those she witnessed in First Nations Council meetings: go slow, take the time that is necessary, hear all voices, and seek harmony in the group. HOL hoped that RRP/C could be revitalized and integrated into the present public school system:

> And just that peaceful way of being. That First Nations peaceful way of being, I think. Just to have the kids sit together. Just begin at the beginning and basics of listening. Hearing, not thinking about what you're going to say but truly hearing somebody. Like I think the Circle is very powerful and I think, um, it should be kept going.

Holistic Thinking

HOL brought RRP/C together with the Medicine Wheel. She liked to think holistically about children's needs and consider: "Are our kids in balance? Are they outside enough? Have they slept enough?... And belonging. Do they feel that?" For HOL, a Circle and a restorative conversation were opportunities to discover the reasons behind a child's behaviour and the types of support they might need.

Storytelling

Sharing stories was an essential part of the way our Consultant facilitated RRP/C. The Consultant enjoyed telling stories in Circle. Storytelling came naturally to her. "I've always been a storyteller, even to my own children." She added that humans have always told stories, they are good at telling stories and they are captivated by listening to stories. The Consultant observed that when she presented a story in Circle that the students were more apt to listen and to acquire knowledge. She, in turn, felt a greater ability to connect to students. She linked storytelling to RRP/C but also to Indigenous ways of child rearing and educating. Story elements such as references to landmarks and relationships between people

and nature taught children important community values such as interconnectedness, belonging and respect which were also values of RRP/C.

The Consultant believed that stories are a part of peoples' identities and that children need to learn how to tell their stories. When the Consultant conducted a restorative conversation, she thought of it as each child having an opportunity to tell their story from their point of view: "This is their version of what happened. This is their truth. This is their honest truth." Listening to and encouraging the stories of each student is the first step in a restorative conversation and the Consultant liked to take the time needed. She believed that peoples' stories need to be spoken aloud because, "...we listen to ourselves and we learn from ourselves, too." She considered storytelling a valuable skill for children to acquire when communicating about a conflict.

Equally, the Consultant thought that stories were a powerful format for teaching adults. In one interview, she told me a story to share an important value of RRP/C practice: that the purpose of a restorative conversation is to seek a peaceful resolution and help community members move forward in a good way. It is not a conversation for dredging up all past wrongs. She shared a story that an Elder told to her. It was situated in a local park, at the side of a river in our community. As she recounted the story, I could see her, the Elder, and myself on the land. The message in the story is that when we are in conflict, "…we have to focus on the present and move toward the future."

As elementary school educators, the research participants found storytelling to be a highly relatable practice. They had many experiences of the effectiveness and the positive connection they formed with students when teaching in a story format. Many participants found the Circle an ideal place to present stories on social-emotional topics. Social-emotional teachings are essentially stories about virtues, feelings, character traits and manners. They

provide learning to students on how to conduct themselves with kindness and understanding or cope with difficult situations. Inherent in the way that Circles are conducted, students are also sharing their personal stories which in turn helps them to connect and form understanding between each other (COM, TRU).

Going to Value

HOL and the Consultant both liked to present the Grandfather Teachings, also referred to as the Seven Sacred Teachings, while in Circle with students. During our research project, HOL visited many classes and told stories about one of the Seven Sacred Teachings and then the class would do a craft based on their learning. Then when it was time for a restorative conversation, facilitators could refer to Grandfather Teachings.

> The Consultant described the Seven Sacred Teachings as:
>
> …universal teachings that a lot of different First Nations communities and non-Indigenous communities [had] in ancient times. You know, how to be, how to walk in this world and be connected to land and ourselves and to people."

By exploring these universal teachings children considered which character traits were important to them and reflected on their own identities. From her point of view, the Seven Sacred Teachings "coincide" with the Teachings of Circle: "Being respectful, loving, and courageous… And having our wisdom, and sharing our knowledge, and having humility." The Consultant explained that the purpose of Circle is for children to learn how "… to be in good relationships," and this can be learned by, "…walking in the way of those Seven Teachings."

Whenever HOL or I were called upon to co-facilitate a restorative Circle, we quite often referred to the seven virtues from the Grandfather Teachings as it invited a deeper reflection from students. We especially liked to sit around a circular carpet in the Indigenous

Education room since the seven virtues were printed in words and animal images. Seeing the visuals cued students to immediately understand what we meant by the words *virtue* or *value* and helped them to activate their prior knowledge. A frequent round question that I used was, "Looking at these virtues, and thinking back to a time when you contributed to solving a problem, what was the virtue that helped you the most?" While reflecting on the past, students would bring up virtues that were equally applicable to solving the present problem. Hearing the virtues that their peers brought forward, helped them to broaden their perspective on the size of the problem. Our Consultant had what became an oft-used phrase for this strategy: "going to values." If students could recall how they solved a previous problem and how they moved on from it, they could view the present problem as manageable. Students could redirect their focus from being right to prioritizing problem-solving, interconnection and respect. How big are our problems in the grand scheme of things? Perhaps some of the pettier parts of our dispute can be let go.

At the time of writing, our Indigenous Education Department was beginning to create educational resources about local relational teachings since the Seven Sacred Teachings were borrowed from First Nations to the east of our district. Moving forward, we will be able to teach our students local Indigenous virtues and employ them in the practice of "going to values". Engaging with virtues provided students with a strong sense of connection to each other and their community, an experience that will be further strengthened by employing local relational teachings.

Regional Historical Context

HOL felt it important to instruct students about the historical use of Circles within our region in a way that would be significant and relatable for students. She found an example of a historical treaty signing that took place on a territory one hour north of where our school

was situated. As part of the treaty process, representatives of the Queen and First Nations smoked a peace pipe together in Circle. She wanted students to understand that Circles are powerful and used in government: they bring parties together and they are used for negotiations and decision-making.

Colonial School Structures

RRP/C was limited in its scope to decolonize discipline since it still had to be adapted to school schedules, class sizes, curriculum expectations and time constraints (HOL). Education and restorative practice would have looked very different in an Indigenous community. The Consultant believed it was unrealistic to expect a public school to completely shed a punitive model and only adopt RRP/C. She believed the best that could be achieved was an equal choice for students between the two models.

RRP Teacher Role. My role as Restitution Teacher was time-limited and ceased to exist at the end of our project. Research participants could continue to use RRP/C in their daily practice, but larger discipline concerns were referred to the office without the choice of a restorative process. To perform RRP/C well takes time and it requires the availability of a trained staff person dedicated to receiving referrals and facilitating RRP/C. However, a change that has come about during the writing of this thesis is that the administrators in our school, after receiving instruction from our Consultant, are beginning to use a restorative process for office referrals.

Assessment and Ranking. COH recognized how the grading system contributed to students ranking themselves. Her students had come up through each grade receiving ranked marks in school, ranked status on sports teams outside of school, and social rankings perpetuated by our broader society. These students were habituated to a competitive and adversarial system of education. Assessment practices are changing; however, and

elementary school in BC are removing letter grades in favour of language that describes student learning.

Class Size. A challenge that COH experienced in keeping her students engaged with Circle practice was the size of her class. When I interviewed COH she had twenty-eight students in her class, and she estimated it took fifteen minutes to complete one question round. She compared this to her previous year of teaching when she only had twenty students and each round would take closer to ten minutes. This was not only easier to manage but COH felt they were able to have more in-depth discussions. COH considered alternative strategies for larger class sizes such as a fishbowl model where you split the class in two. In this model, one group participates in Circle while the other group surrounds the Circle to observe and then later you can switch. She found this difficult to manage as students lost patience and disruptive behaviours emerged. COH thought that an ideal size to effectively run Circles might be eight to ten students.

Time. The length of Circle process was a challenge that arose in classroom practice as well as our attempts to run staff Circles. Our staff was quite large at forty members and therefore a Circle could take up the bulk of time in a staff meeting. There was significant resistance and staff representatives requested an end to the practice. In the classroom, some educators preferred to conduct Circles daily, some weekly and some only as the need arose. INT preferred to use Circles with intention. When a need arose, she would select a lesson from *Circle Forward* and then adjust it to suit her needs (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015). INC felt differently. She preferred a daily Circle so that she could gauge her students' emotional states or wellness. She maintained variety in her practice by alternating the format of Circle to suit her students' needs.

Incorporating Indigenous Ways into Classroom Structures

HOL pointed out that public schools are constrained by operational parameters and expectations of curriculum delivery and so they cannot fully operate in the same way as an Indigenous community where learning and restorative practice was embedded in daily life. However, HOL was intrigued by what she called the blend of "ancient, traditional and modern." She saw it as a reclamation of an Indigenous practice, "… that had gone away with colonization…" The Consultant shared that sometimes we need to be creative to adjust a practice to a classroom milieu. To have more choice over the length of a Circle, she demonstrated ways to vary the length of rounds. For an introspective question she might ask students to speak at length. Further into the Circle, when she could sense that attention was waning or she needed to be expedient, she would ask students to only answer with a single word and then pass on the talking piece. Sometimes the challenge of summarizing their thoughts into one word helped students to sharpen their focus. She also had students respond with hand gestures (eg. thumbs up or down) or used a popcorn round, where the talking piece was set aside, and students could respond out of order by standing up or raising their hand.

Summary

RRP/C is an alternative form of discipline that can be offered in Canadian public schools in lieu of punitive models. It is a relationship-based model that requires practitioners and participants to be vulnerable with each other. This makes it a helpful model to improve school belonging, but it also means that trauma informed practices, emotional safety and cultural safety are critical to the practice. While there may be other forms of discipline that are also non-punitive, compassionate, and safe, RRP/C has the distinction of being grounded in Indigenous practices and has a universal design favoured by many worldviews. While this model cannot claim to decolonize discipline, its implementation and practice can urge

educators to reflect on their own worldview, their concepts of shame, their thoughts on social emotional health, and their beliefs around Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. Circle practice and Indigenous protocols, community building, consensus and harmony, holistic thinking. storytelling, and going to value were ways that RRP/C had potential to indigenize school practices. While there are barriers to implementation, there is renewed hope in having the administrative and board level leaders start to learn this model.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The main strength of this project was its design as Participatory Action Research. Non-Indigenous and Indigenous educators together created the opportunity to explore and experience Circles and Restorative Practice. Our conversation and discourse helped us to consider the advantages of employing RRP/C in an elementary school. While there was previous research on the benefits of RRP in Canada and internationally, our project was unique. With gratitude to our Consultant, we employed a model that integrated regional Indigenous Circle protocols with RRP, which helped us to be in relationship with our students in strengthening ways. This research revealed variables that contribute to school belonging, practices that are trauma informed, potential problems in how schools address shame, and the imperative for including Indigenous ways of knowing into our pedagogy.

Limitations of Research

This research was limited to the subjective experiences of educators who volunteered to employ RRP/C. These participants shared some of the reasons they were motivated to join the project as well as some of their challenges. However, I did not interview non-participants and therefore the data does not provide a broad view of reasons for staff resistance to RRP/C. I also did not collect data from students, and there remain many questions about the ways that RRP/C relates to school belonging, trauma informed practice, shame resiliency or decolonizing education from the perspective of children.

Importance of This Research

School Belonging

Research participants spoke at length about a strengthened sense of community that derived mainly from Circle practice. The Indigenous Circle protocols were valued by staff for creating the structure and safety that allowed a sense of belonging and connection to

develop. The protocols also extended staff views of belonging to include interconnection with the natural world and this increased understanding that an important aspect of belonging is cultural.

Research participants enjoyed RRP/C. Being in Circle slowed the pace of class for a time while staff and students spent valuable time connecting. Staff delighted in observing how their students progressed in their social communication and interactions throughout the year and were especially surprised at how often quieter students participated. Staff were grateful to be able to step back and be facilitators of a restorative process rather than mete out discipline in an authoritarian role.

The way that educators feel when they do their work contributes to job satisfaction. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) conducted research in Norway with 2569 teachers in elementary and middle schools and found that staff experienced less job satisfaction and increased motivation to leave the profession when teachers felt a lack of belonging and emotional exhaustion. The factors that contributed most to emotional exhaustion were discipline problems and time pressures. Whether teachers choose Circle practice or find other SEL approaches, connection and relationship are important to student and teacher well-being.

Reflections on Finding Joy in Research

One of the most joyful experiences of this project was observing and listening to teachers talk about how much they enjoyed being in Circle and getting to know their students. When I began this research, my questions pertained more to how students would gain connection and belonging through Circle. Further into the research, my heart was perpetually refilled by seeing how much educators want and need to connect to their kids. This repeated experience sustained me through the project.

A second joyful experience occurred as I was analysing the data. A hopeful pattern emerged around the research participants high regard for the intelligent design of Circles and Indigenous protocols. As I wrote about it in the Results chapter, it unfolded in the most beautiful way. It was a moment of awe. Through this experience I gained a sense of trust that the data will always tell me something. I discovered that I love the realm of ideas and change and their application to real world contexts and concerns.

Trauma Informed Practice

Research participants identified the slow reparative process of RRP, and the Indigenous protocols used in Circles as inherent aspects of the model that contributed to safety. However, they mainly believed that safety and trauma informed practice were the responsibility of educators. Pacing, scaffolding and explicit instruction were positive approaches for creating safety. All participants wanted more education to improve their awareness of trauma informed practices as well as further training to extend their skills with RRP/C.

Reflections on Trauma Informed Research Practices

Probably the most emotionally difficult experience of this project for me was being in the position of a co-leader who wanted to encourage learning and change and then coming up against resistance. Admittedly, when I began the project, I was more concerned with creating safety for students and I neglected to consider the myriad ways that staff would feel uncomfortable throughout this project. I had expected staff to feel the typical discomfort that comes with learning something new, but I was unprepared for the open criticism and resistance that took place in our environment as people responded to our implementation. Throughout the project, I felt a tension between two important needs: stepping into discomfort to enact change and stepping out of discomfort to alleviate tension and increase

safety for research participants. At the time, I lacked the leadership experience to navigate this well.

Jo Chrona (2022), a Ts'msyen scholar from the Kitsumkalum First Nation in northwestern British Columbia, writes that there is a difference between feeling discomfort and lacking safety:

> To learn, we need to feel safe; otherwise, learning does not happen. However, safety does not mean comfort. Understanding racism and challenging biases is not comfortable work. It requires us to have challenging conversations. It requires us to sit in discomfort. (p. 16)

There were so many layers to this project that it was difficult to distinguish between discomfort and lack of safety. Although it was very uncomfortable for me to own my mistakes, my research participants taught me a great deal about creating safety when implementing a program and when conducting research. They offered the following important suggestions. First, make teachers aware that they will likely question their epistemology. Second, slow the pace of cognitive dissonance by teaching the paradigm in more depth prior to practicing RRP/C. Third, inform teachers that facilitating a Circle can be emotional and provide staff with strategies to keep themselves grounded. Four, explicitly present the model to parents to increase support. Finally, create a safety plan with educators for how to respond to resistance.

Implications for Future Practice

Compassionate Discipline

There is an increasing trend to employ holistic and relational discipline models because they are recognized as compassionate and supportive of student well-being.

In their October issue of 2021, Educational Leadership magazine highlighted the topic of "Compassionate Discipline" to support educators and students returning to in-person learning after a period of Covid-19 lockdowns. Within this issue, was a broad range of topics connected to compassionate forms of discipline including restorative justice (Lyubansky); active listening skills (Benson); apology, forgiveness, and amends (Casas & Kelly); emotional intelligence for teachers (Kise & Holm); interpreting behaviour as need fulfillment (Porosoff); radical inclusive discipline and Circle practice (McKibben); relational discipline (Keels); and addressing inequity in how marginalized students are disciplined (Jackson). RRP/C is part of a growing trend to employ compassionate and relational discipline approaches in schools.

Decolonizing Education

This project was our attempt as educators to seek an entry point into decolonizing our thinking and indigenizing our teaching practice. Research participants were able to identify Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, embedded in the RRP/C model such as consensus building, harmony in the group, holistic thinking, storytelling, and going to values. The Indigenous protocols highlighted how Circles are a safe and relational space for students to practice communication, empathy, inclusion, and respect and to experience belonging. We were most challenged when new ways of thinking, experiencing, and relating showed us the borders of our own ideologies, and caused us to question the dominant Western ideologies in which we lived and worked. We struggled with our binary thinking of right and wrong and we endeavoured to embrace a holistic view of knowledge. We also recognized some of the colonial structures within the school – competitive assessment that ranks students, class size, schedules, and time constraints – that obstruct indigenization.

The Imperative to Protect. When non-Indigenous educators become acquainted with Indigenous epistemologies it also becomes their responsibility to protect the integrity of that knowledge. Marie Battiste, a Mi'kmaq educator from Potlo'tek First Nation speaks to the balance between non-Indigenous scholars contributing to decolonization by advancing Indigenous epistemology and being critical of this process so that Indigenous knowledge is not subsumed by Western epistemology:

> Western scholars are gradually realizing how important Aboriginal knowledge may be to the future survival of our world. Not only is it important that Aboriginal cultures are preserved and encouraged, but it is also important that they are recognized as the domain of Aboriginal peoples and not subverted by the dominant culture (Battiste, 194).

The results of this research important but even more important is how the knowledge is used. Gratefully, there are Indigenous scholars, like Jo Chrona and Dusting Louie, who have, respectively, provided guidance and a framework for non-Indigenous educators to work toward decolonizing and indigenizing pedagogy.

The Imperative to Integrate. Dustin Louie (2020), an Indigenous scholar from the Nadleh Whut'en and Nee Tahi Buhn First Nations of northern British Columbia has formulated a teaching framework that combines Critical Theory and Blackfoot epistemologies. He uses this framework in post-secondary settings to teach pre-service and in-service educators how to recognize invisible and oppressive pedagogies that are perpetuated and normalized by dominant Western epistemology and ontology. This framework is applicable to this research.

Being in Circle helped research participants uncover an invisible pedagogy: that teachers believe their role is to interrupt student speech and correct student learning because

Western epistemology views knowledge as objective and linear. By being in Circle, educators experienced how knowledge can also be formed subjectively by including all perspectives. This is a holistic pedagogy that challenges educators to loosen their grip on the binaries of right and wrong. Reflecting on this single layer of epistemology provides educators with an opening to be curious about the nature of learning so that we do not engage in Circle practice mechanically. Louie (2020), shares an example of how to take an opening and model the value of Indigenous knowledge to students:

> Following an Elder visit the teacher can intentionally review what was learned and work with the students to apply it to their everyday learning (third assumption). This models for students that the knowledge they have learned is valuable. Instead of merely telling them something is important, you can show that importance by integrating the learning. This practice actually addresses both the visible and invisible forms of oppression (p.193).

When educators receive new learning, it is their responsibility to integrate the new learning in a way that is transparent to include their students. To use our own research as an example, by experiencing Circle practice our research participants gained insight an epistemology that is holistic, subjective, and non-binary. Next, educators could invite students to think creatively about how this view of learning could translate into daily classroom practices or change how students think about the way they learn and how they value knowledge. An ethical practice would be for educators to acknowledge that their understanding is limited, reveal that they felt discomfort in learning it, and then transparently model their attempts to integrate the new learning into their teaching practice. These steps would help to make oppressive and invisible pedagogy visible to teachers and to their students. Transparently sharing what we experience

puts us in an uncomfortable and vulnerable position, but it also teaches our students the value of looking inward and being courageous.

Implications for Future Research

Dustin Louie (2020) referred to his teaching framework as an ethical space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars to collaborate. In his framework he combined the work of a German critical theorist, Horkheimer, with the Blackfoot epistemology of Constant Flux and Renewal explained by Indigenous theorist Leroy Little Bear. To honour each of these contributions and to maintain their internal integrity, Louie suggested blending them in a way that allowed them to run parallel to each other. He referred to this as creating an ethical space for scholarship.

An Ethical Space for Researching Shame and Shame Resiliency

This project revealed the strong relationship between discipline and shame. As educators we did not want to be in a position of invoking shame and harming our students. A major part of our struggle was that we had no construct from which to understand how shame worked in our daily lives or how to support someone through an experience of shame. There is a need for theorists to create an ethical space in which to understand shame that can make space for multiple ontologies.

Brené Brown's (2006) Shame Resilience Theory is a theory based on research into non-Indigenous womens' experiences of shame. Her shame construct is a "psycho-social-cultural construct" that I believe would help non-Indigenous educators understand shame in their own lives and thus increase their ability to understand Indigenous shame constructs (p. 45). Brown's research indicated three main areas of concern for people experiencing shame: feeling trapped, feeling powerless and feeling isolated. These findings apply well to an evaluation of punitive and restorative models of discipline. In a punitive model, students are

referred to the office without choice (trapped), have no agency to make amends (powerless) and sometimes receive a detention, suspension, or expulsion (isolated). RRP/C is the opposite approach: students choose between two models (freedom), they have agency to negotiate their amends (power) and this process includes community (belonging). Of course, these are quick and superficial comparisons. For example, isolation is not limited to physical isolation like when someone is physically expelled from a school; it is also a psychological experience like being shunned by a social group. Brown (2006) explained that the participants in her research, "… most often experienced shame as a web of layered, conflicting, and competing expectations that are, at the core, products of rigid socio-cultural expectations (p. 46). Brown's theory is a useful construct for this research; however, it is also a relatively new model and one that requires further research as it does not yet include research into the experiences of men, children, Indigenous peoples or neurodiverse peoples. Further research into Western constructs of shame and Indigenous constructs of shame would provide a greater understanding of shame and shame resiliency. This type of research could provide schools with models or procedures to respond to discipline in ways that are healthy for students and promote resiliency.

Research into Interventions that Increase School Belonging

There is a wide variety of research on school belonging. It is well established that school belonging is an important predictor of student success in several domains including academic (improved memory, engagement, work output), mental well-being (increased self-esteem, positive mood, reduced stress) and physical health (lowered risk of disease and mortality) (Slaten, et al., 2016). However, Slaten, Ferguson, Allen, Brodrick, and Waters (2016) conducted a review of research trends in school belonging and concluded that, "students on the margins of the educational system find it exceedingly difficult to experience

a sense of belonging in school (p.9). They suggest that future research focus on understanding the needs of marginalized youth and design studies to test, "… interventions that may increase a student's sense of belonging in school (i.e., SEL interventions, student mentoring, restorative justice practices)" (p. 9). This type of research would improve our understanding of how well RRP/C contributes to school belonging and suggest interventions that could complement or run in parallel to the model. Additionally, this type of research could include inquiries into how school belonging interventions like RRP/C support neurodiverse learners since social communication plays an important role in forming relationship.

Research into the Ways that RRP/C Benefits Teachers

Teacher attrition is an important area of research right now as it has become increasingly difficult to engage or retain educators in British Columbia and globally. There is considerable research into the experiences of new teachers which indicates that burnout is the most significant predictor for leaving the profession and that factors include collegiality/support, student engagement, behaviour management, working conditions, access to teaching resources, professional learning, workload, and isolation (Buchanan, et al., 2013). Clarity about how RRP/C relates to job satisfaction or reduces burnout would be an infusion of hope for teachers and a reason for administrators and policymakers to support the model.

Conclusion

RRP/C can be a transformational approach to school discipline in Canada. Prior research has shown that a restorative approach has benefits for students and staff. There is a need for further research into the ways that staff and students experience RRP/C as well as consideration for ways to implement restorative practices and Circles ethically. It is important to practice RRP/C with a trauma informed lens and to honour the integrity of

Indigenous epistemology. The colonial constructs of the education system need to be reviewed and researched to allow for better integration of Indigenous practices. Teachers want to contribute to decolonizing education but concerns over teacher attrition and burnout are increasing. RRP/C will continue to be an important area for research in education.

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Appendix A: Restorative Questions

The person who harmed is asked:

What happened?

What were you thinking of at the time? What were you hoping would happen?

What have you been thinking about since the incident took place?

Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?

What do you think you need to do make things right?

The person who has been harmed is asked:

What did you think when you realized what happened?

What impact has this incident had on you and others?

What has been the hardest thing for you?

What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

Acknowledgement

Restorative questions exist in the public domain, meaning their origin cannot be traced and they are found reprinted with minor variations in numerous publications without citation. The above questions were adapted by our Consultant from various sources and from her own practice.

A version of these questions can be found on page 14 of:

Costello, B., Wachtel, J., & Wachtel, T. (2019). *The restorative practices handbook for teachers, disciplinarians and administrators.* (2nd ed.) Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, USA: International Institute for Restorative Practices.

Appendix B: Information Letter and Consent Form

UNBC UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Information Letter / Consent Form

January 2018

School Staff Participation in Circles: Engaging with the Philosophy of Restitution and Restorative Practices

This research is being conducted as part of the completion of a graduate degree. The data from this research will be published as a graduate thesis and become part of the public collection at the University of Northern British Columbia.

Who is conducting this research?

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Who is funding this research?

This study is being partially funded by the Aboriginal Education Department of School District --. The Indigenous Education Department is allocating one staff member to spend two days per week in our school to support in the implementation of a Restitution and Restorative Practices model. The Indigenous Education Department has also supplied a resource titled, *Circle Forward,* written by Carolyn Boyes-Watson and Kay Pranis that will serve as a guide for any staff wishing to use Circle Practices in their classroom. Two staff members from the Indigenous Education Department have provided a 3-hour in-service to our school staff on the role and benefits of using Circles and Restitution and Restorative Practices in schools.

The school administration is supplying the journals for participants to record reflections.

Participants are salaried employees of School District-- but their involvement is voluntary and they are receiving no financial remuneration for their participation.

Why are you being asked to take part in this study?

The current and enduring trend in Canadian education is toward increased inclusion and supporting the diverse needs of all students. A newer trend is towards the development of Compassion Schools, or schools that operate from a trauma informed lens. Restitution and Restorative Practices (RRP) is a model that aligns with the philosophy of inclusion and has the potential to operate from a trauma informed lens. As a staff member of a public Canadian school, your thoughtful participation and reflection can contribute to creating a new approach to supporting mentally and emotionally healthy learners. It is my hope, that staff who participate in this process may also contribute to creating a supportive and caring school culture for themselves and their colleagues.

Is it voluntary?

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to answer questions or to undergo any procedures that make you feel uncomfortable. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason. If you withdraw from the study, any information that you have provided up to that point will also be withdrawn and securely destroyed, unless you have explicitly given consent for your information to be retained and analyzed. Data will be collected from participants in the form of handwritten journal entries, e-mail journal entries and/or interviews.

What will you be expected to do?

- You are invited to attend monthly Circle meetings held on the fourth Tuesday of every month from September 2018 until December 2018. These meetings will occur after classroom instruction time from approximately 3pm to 4pm. Circle meetings will be approximately one hour in length and include a 15-minute period to write a personal reflection.

- You are invited to share your opinions, make suggestions, and raise concerns as to the purpose and direction of research and the employment of Circles and Restitution and Restorative Practices in our school.

- You are not obligated but you may choose to invite the school's liaison worker, the Consultant, from the Indigenous Education Department to model and teach Circle practices and Restitution and Restorative Practices in your classroom.

- You are not obligated but you may choose to use Circles or Restitution and Restorative Practices in your classroom. Copies of *Circle Forward* by Carolyn Boyes-Watson and Kay Pranis (2014) are available in our school library. This book contains lesson plans on how to conduct Circles in your classroom. Copies of RRP question prompts are available in poster or pocket card format from myself or the Consultant as well as digitally in our school folder. These questions can be used to guide your conversations with students when resolving conflicts.

- In June of 2018 and then again in January of 2019, I will be asking you to share your journal reflections with me and/or consent to being interviewed. Questions in the interview will pertain to your thought processes, classroom changes, relationship changes and/or any other topic you deem relevant to Circle practices or Restitution and Restorative Practices.

- As a group, we may decide to set goals that further the implementation of Circle practices and RRP. This may result in changing the course of research. Any changes to the process or duration of the research will be done so in consultations with the participants.

Are there any risks to taking part in this study?

I do not think there is anything in this study that could harm you. Some of the questions I ask might seem sensitive or personal. Please let me know if you have any concerns. Please be aware that you can decline to answer questions that are uncomfortable. If, at any point in the study, you feel uncomfortable or upset and wish to end your participation, please notify me immediately and your wishes will be respected.

Are there any benefits to taking part in this study?

You may benefit from improved relationships with colleagues. You may find that Circle practices and Restitution and Restorative Practices are of benefit to the learning environment of your classroom or the school as a whole.

How will your confidentiality and anonymity be maintained?

- I will do everything I can to ensure your anonymity but I cannot guarantee the confidentiality of Circle meetings. The other participants in the research study will be aware of your presence during Circle meetings and will hear any opinions you choose to express aloud. It is my hope that these discussions will prompt self-reflection in journals and interviews and motivate action in the workplace. Indeed, you are encouraged to share your opinions with your work colleagues outside of the Circle meetings.

- Research data that comes from journal entries or interviews will be kept confidential. Any information that discloses your identity will not be released or published without your consent. If you need to make reference to a specific event with a student in order to elucidate your thinking, then please do not include the name or identifying descriptors of the student. I will of course keep the identity of students confidential but your cooperation with this will add a second layer of protection for our students, who should be considered as a vulnerable population in our school.

- All typed or digital documents will be identified by an alias and kept in a locked filing cabinet or saved on my personal password-protected computer.

- If you choose to share your handwritten journal reflections with me then I will type them out and return the journal to you within one month. While the journal is in my care, I will maintain the journal in a locked filing cabinet.

- If you choose to share your journal reflections via e-mail then I will cut and paste the typed content into a text document, noting the date, and save the information under an alias. I will then delete your e-mail. Please type “RRP” in the subject line of any e-mail you wish me to use for this study.

- If you allow me to interview you then I will save the interview under an alias on my personal password-protected computer. I will type a transcription of the interview that excludes your name or any identifying descriptors.

- The information gathered from this study will be kept for 3 years. It will then be securely destroyed by shredding paper files and deleting digital files.

- Only myself and the three members of my graduate committee will be able to view the raw data. The three members of my graduate committee are Dr. Linda O’Neill, Dr. John Sherry and Dr. Theresa Healy. Their contact information is listed above.

Will you be paid for taking part in this research study?

Participants will not receive remuneration for taking part in this study.

Study Results

Following the data analysis, I will communicate with all study participants to verify my understanding and interpretation of the results. Please provide your contact details below so that I may contact you outside of work.

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books.

Questions or Concerns about the project

If you have any questions about what I am asking of you, please contact me. My name and contact information are listed at the top of the first page of this form.

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the UNBC Office of Research at 250-960-6735 or by e-mail at reb@unbc.ca.

CONSENT

I have read or been described the information presented in the information letter about the project:

YES NO

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this project and to receive additional details I requested.

YES NO

I understand that if I agree to participate in this project, I may withdraw from the project at any time up until the report completion, with no consequences of any kind. I have been given a copy of this form.

YES NO

I agree to be interviewed and recorded at the end of this research project (June 2018).

YES NO

I agree that any journal entries I choose to submit in either hand written form or via e-mail may be used for the purposes of this study.

YES NO

Follow-up information, such as a transcript of my interview, can be sent to me at the following e-mail or mailing address:

YES NO

Signature of Participant: _____

Name of Participant (Printed): _____

Date: _____

Consent and Withdrawal

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your access to information or support with Restitution and Restorative Practices or Circles.

- Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

- Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

_____

Printed Name of the Participant

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Research Title: An Elementary School's Engagement with the Philosophy of Restitution and Restorative Practices and Circles

Time of the Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer:_____

Interviewee Name: _____

Interviewee Alias: _____

Position of Interviewee:_____

Name of Audio-recording File on Computer: _____

Name of Audio-recording File on iPad: _____

Name of Audio-recording File on Cell Phone: _____

(*To be deleted once interview capture is confirmed.*)

Welcome the participant into the office. Offer them a seat on the sofa or on a chair. Adjust the lighting from overhead fluorescent lights to a lamp and ask the participant if this is more or less comfortable. Review the consent form, especially items of voluntary participation and confidentiality and confirm that the participant has signed the consent form. Let the participant know that I will be using three audio recording devices to ensure that the interview is captured. Once I have confirmed that the interview was captured, I will delete the copy from my cell phone. I will use the iPad copy for transcription purposes and then delete it. The interview will stay on my password protected laptop during analysis and then be transferred to an encrypted memory stick for storage. The data will be kept in a safe in my home and not on school property. Explain to the participant that I will be using the questions attached to the consent form as a way to guide our interview. This is a starting place but we can feel free to engage in a conversation on these topics.

Getting to Know You Questions

This interview is organized into sections by specific topics. I would like to begin by getting to know a little about you.

1. How long have you worked at this school?
2. Describe what it was like for you to join the staff.
3. What is your role within our school?
4. What do you like about working at our school?
5. What lead you to participate in this interview?
6. Is there anything else you would like me to know about you before we continue?

Questions Related to Circles

Teachers who were interested in learning how to conduct Circles had the opportunity to invite the Consultant to their classroom.

1. What was that experience like for you?
2. How do Circle practices fit with your own teaching style?
3. What resources do you rely upon to help you facilitate Circles?
4. How did your understanding of Circles change over time?
5. What have you observed about how students respond to Circles?
6. In what ways have Circles changed how students relate to their peers?
7. In what ways have Circles changed the relationship between students and staff?
8. What influence do Circles have on a student's sense of belonging?
9. In what ways, have your experiences with Circles changed your sense of belonging at school?

Questions Related to RRP

At our school, we use RRP in conjunction with Circles. RRP refers to Restitution and Restorative Practices. It includes the use of restorative questions to repair harm. Staff had access to restorative questions in poster form and also in card form. When people use these questions they are engaging in a Restorative Conversation.

1. Describe some of your experiences with using the RRP questions.
2. What did you observe about the students' response to RRP conversations?
3. How do RRP conversations change how students relate to their peers? To staff?
4. From your experiences with RRP conversations, what is your understanding of the philosophy behind RRP?
5. In what ways does RRP influence a student's sense of belonging?
6. In what ways does RRP influence your sense of belonging at school?

Questions Related to Trauma Informed Practices

A trauma-informed school adjusts its practices to support students who have experienced adversity. Adverse childhood events can include experiences such as divorce, abuse, poverty, an addicted parent, or a parent who is incarcerated.

1. Tell me about the kinds of adversity that some of your students have had to face.
2. What are some of the adjustments that you have made in your classroom to support students who have experienced adversity?
3. What are some of the adjustments that our school has made to support students who have experienced adversity?
4. What role, if any, can RRP or Circles have in supporting students who have experienced adversity?

5. In what ways might RRP or Circles be uncomfortable for children who have experienced adversity?
6. How can this discomfort be mitigated?
7. How could we improve upon the RRP model or our Circle practices to make them safe for students who have faced adversity?

Questions Related to Decolonizing Education

Decolonizing education means understanding the influence of Eurocentric ways of thinking on schools and taking steps to change our pedagogy and teaching practices. The school district has supplied us with posters that describe First Nations ways of knowing and the province has taken steps to add First Nations content to our curriculum.

1. Describe some of the ways you have attempted to decolonize your teaching practices.
2. What have been some of the challenges you encountered?
3. What have been some of the benefits?
4. The program we are using for Circles and RRP comes from the Aboriginal Education Department. What is your understanding of why the AbEd Department supports the use of Circles and RRP?
5. What role might Circles have in contributing to the decolonization of education?
6. What role might RRP conversations have in contributing to the decolonization of education?
7. How are Circles and RRP limited in what they can contribute to decolonizing education?

Questions Related to Implementation

Part of this research pertains to the process of implementation, in other words, the steps that were taken to introduce RRP and Circles to our school.

1. Describe your experience of being introduced to Circles and RRP.
2. What aspects of Circles and RRP felt like a "good fit" for your teaching practices?
3. What aspects of Circles and RRP were more challenging to integrate into your teaching practice?
4. What kinds of support might have helped you integrate Circles and RRP more easily into your teaching practice?
5. If you knew a colleague was implementing RRP or Circles into another school, what would you recommend?
6. What reservations might you share?
7. Where would you like to see our school go from here?
8. What parts of the RRP program and Circles are worth sustaining?
9. What could help us sustain this program in our school?

Ending Questions

1. Who else on staff could I interview?
2. What other sources of information should I look for?
3. Are there any important questions that you feel I missed?
4. As a novice researcher, is there anything I should know about your level of comfort with this interview?
5. Is there anything I could improve upon?

Thank the participant for agreeing to participate in this interview. Remind the participant that the information will be kept confidential.

Reference

The format for this Interview Protocol is based in part on a Sample Interview Protocol found in Creswell and Guetterman (2019, Figure 7.7, p. 227).