

Restorative Practices

Gregory, A., Clawson, K., Davis, A., & Gerewitz, J. (2015). The promise of restorative practices to transform teacher student relationships and achieve equity in school discipline. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 25, 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2014.929950>



SWiFT Feature in the Research

Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) behavioral instruction includes classroom practices supporting social and emotional learning, which in turn support student academic, behavioral and emotional success. The Gregory et al. (2015) study focused on one such practice—Restorative Practices—and the effects on student-teacher relationships and equitable school discipline.

Research Summary

What

Restorative Practices (RP) is an emerging social science that supports development of healthy interpersonal connections among people in relationships through social circles, schools, and the communities where they live. It is rooted in Indigenous American community practices. In recent years RP has been successfully used to repair relationships within criminal justice systems. In schools RP is predominantly employed as a proactive social and emotional support in K-12 classrooms.

Who

Gregory and colleagues (2015) measured outcomes from students in 29 classrooms situated in two large and diverse high schools in small cities on the United States East Coast. Students in these schools identified as White (54%), Latinx (31%), Black (11%), Asian (3%) and Indigenous Americans (<1%). In light of prior research demonstrating Latinx, Black and Indigenous American students can be overrepresented in discipline referrals (e.g., Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010), the study compared the experiences of these three student groups with those of White and Asian students.

How

Teachers received two full days of RP training, which included observation, modeling, and targeted planning. Teachers completed a RP implementation survey as a self-assessment of their quality of implementation. Researchers conducted a voluntary survey of 31 teachers and 412 students during the first year of implementation. The student sample self-reported racial and ethnic diversity similar to the two school's student bodies. Students were surveyed about the degree to which their teacher engaged in specific RP elements, including Affective Statements, Restorative Questions, Proactive Circles, Fair Process, and Management of Shame. Cronbach's alpha for each scale showed no statistical difference in responses across student racial and ethnic groups.

Researchers also examined the quality of student-teacher relationships using student surveys and school discipline records. This student survey included four items from a Teacher Respect scale. Discipline referrals were limited to those given for some type of adult-student conflict, which research indicates may be a driver of the racial discipline gap (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002). Due to the subjective nature of student perceptions of Teacher Respect, researchers applied the covariate of teacher-reported Student Cooperation scale.

Major Findings

This study found that teachers with high RP implementation had more positive relationships, were perceived as more respectful, and issued fewer discipline referrals to students identified with the three target groups. This study showed initial promise for RP narrowing racial discipline disparities. The positive correlation found between the degree to which a teacher implemented RP and the perceived quality of student-teacher relationships suggests a direct relationship between RP fidelity of implementation and student outcomes. This finding also lends itself to the previously established finding that a systematic focus on the implementation of school-based Initiatives is needed for the successful and sustainable implementation and highlights the importance of a systemic focus on the implementation of programs with fidelity (Forman et al., 2013).

Conclusion

The researchers demonstrated that teachers who implement RP with fidelity in the classroom were less likely to issue exclusionary discipline referrals for misconduct or defiance; and they were more likely to engage in trusting student-teacher interactions and engender student feelings of fair treatment and positive relationships with students who are Black, Latinx or Indigenous American. This perception of high quality student-teacher relationships with students of color suggests that RP may be culturally appropriate and has the potential to reduce the racial discipline gap.

Suggested Citation

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