Using Restorative Practices to Ensure Students Feel Seen, Heard, and Valued

Rylie Zyzda

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Rylie Zyzda

Capstone Project: An Action Research Project

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Abstract

This action research project was driven by the researcher’s interest in understanding students’ emotions and feelings after engaging in restorative practices. The research included two first-grade male children and the action researcher, a first-grade teacher. The participants were expected to follow classroom rules during their special subject area. Special subject areas include art, music, computer lab, character education, P.E., and library. When challenging behaviors arose during these times, the researcher disciplined the participants using two different strategies: zero-tolerance and restorative practice. The participants immediately drew a picture related to their feelings following the discipline act. Findings revealed that children feel seen, heard, and valued when using restorative practice as a discipline strategy. The researcher additionally found that participants followed specific special subject area classroom rules more frequently than other subject areas, and the discipline strategy did not influence the child’s home behavior that night. The research was conducted to spread awareness of children’s feelings related to discipline strategies.

*Keywords*: zero-tolerance, restorative practice, feelings
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Using Restorative Practices to Ensure Students Feel Seen, Heard, and Valued

“Alabama coach Nick Saban retires,” the headline flashed across the ESPN channel on January 10th. One of the greatest college football coaches announced his retirement ten days after the 2023-2024 season. Saban’s numbers are reeling and undeniable. He has seven national championships, eleven SEC championships, four Heisman Trophy winners, and 49 first-round NFL draft picks. Bryce Young, a Heisman Trophy winner and first-round NFL pick, played for Nick Saban from 2020 to 2023 and shared the impact Saban had on his life after announcing his retirement. “One year, our captains and coaches noticed a player not fully invested in our program, vision, and mission as an Alabama football team. We scheduled a meeting to discuss future steps for moving forward with this player. During our conversation, a captain mentioned cutting this player from our team. Coach followed the captain’s suggestion asking, “How will cutting him from the team help him as a man? How will this affect his future?” At that moment, I understood Saban does not see the team as a football player. He sees them as a man.” (Young, 2024). The education system brings similar steps and suggestions to the table when handling challenging behaviors within the school. School officials and building directors have used the zero-tolerance policy to discipline individuals, leading to higher expulsion, suspension, and dropout rates. The problem with school discipline policies is that the policy sees a student, not a child.

The purpose of this action research plan is to find an overall strategy to help challenging behaviors at school and throughout their future walks of life. How do children feel when they are punished negatively for their behavior? Do their feelings change when teachers shift to restorative practices (RP) as a discipline strategy? RPs in schools intend to help students and staff learn about their behavior and how it affects others, develop empathy, and build positive
relationships, thus improving school climate, increasing prosocial behavior, and decreasing exclusionary discipline (Skrzypek et al., 2020). The researcher will identify the similarities and differences in students’ feelings when disciplined by zero-tolerance disciplines and restorative practices.

Resources for the action research plan utilized the DeWitt Library at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa. The scholarly articles chosen for selection and application were within the last ten years and published in a peer-reviewed journal. The researcher chose 20 articles supporting the relevance and background of the study. Articles included qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods collection. Studies centered around the shift from zero-tolerance to restorative practices, individual perspectives on restorative practices, child development, and the components of effective conflict resolution.

The Sergeant Bluff-Luton (SBL) Primary School implemented the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) program in 2014. PBIS is a platform to recognize students meeting behavioral expectations in the classroom and school and can provide positive effects for students and staff. These positive effects include improved organizational health and staff affiliation (Bradshaw et al., 2008), enhanced staff professional trust and respect (Houchens et al., 2017), increased time for teaching and leadership (Muscott et al., 2008), improved student attendance (Freeman et al., 2015), and reduced suspensions and discipline referrals (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Noltemeyer et al., 2019) (Petrasek et al., 2022). SBL added personal touches to the program by printing orange tickets and naming them SBL Way Tickets. The tickets are handed to students displaying the SBL Way: Staying Safe, Being Respectful and Responsible, and Listening, Learning, and Leading. Students put these tickets in a classroom jar, and at the end of the week, they count the total. The school analyzes the results and keeps running data of the
total. When the school meets numerical milestones, such as 5,000, 10,000, or more tickets, the school celebrates. In the 2022-2023 school year, SBL earned 30,495 tickets by January 4th, 2023. After ten years of implementing PBIS, SBL schools chose to add another layer to the behavior management plan called restorative practices.

Before the 2023-2024 school year, the building principal, counselor, instructional coach, and one member from each grade level completed RP training. The trained staff forwarded the instructions and designed activities to practice RP with the staff of SBL. As staff was introduced and became comfortable with RP, three themes emerged: people valued one another, individuals listened to each other, and people were seen by all. The circle process is a story-telling process. Every person has a story, and every person has a lesson to offer. Circles also provide opportunities to be heard, to practice authentic listening, and to have equitable voices and power (Fishier et al., 2021). The goal of the 2023-2024 school year at SBL was the implementation of RP in classrooms. The emergence of this practice came with a specific and designated time scheduled in the school day for students and teachers to participate. Classrooms fulfill this practice on Friday. In the 2023-2024 school year, SBL earned 35,760 SBL tickets by January 3rd, 2024.

With the increase of 5,265 tickets from the following school year, the researcher will imply zero-tolerance acts to consecutive scenarios and shift to restorative practices to discipline challenging behaviors. Students will use art to describe their emotions about each disciplinary act and verbally describe their artwork to the researcher. Notes from the conversation are collected, analyzed, and later discussed with the participant and the family. The study includes parent involvement, feedback, and reflection. The participant's voice will help the education system identify strategies that make children feel seen, heard, and valued.
Review of the Literature

The Impact of Parent and Teaching Styles on Child Development

Imagine an eight-year-old girl whose bedtime routine consists of brushing her teeth, slipping into her zebra pajamas, and combing her hair with a pink brush. She travels to her room with her mother and father to read a bedtime story and say a prayer. As her parents exit, they kiss her goodnight, and leave the open door. The girl wraps herself between a zebra fleece blanket and a zebra-printed comforter as her eyes slowly shut. Her mom and dad peek into her room before they start their nightly routine and turn off all the house lights by 10:00 p.m. The house is now still, quiet, and dark. Her parents are fast asleep two bedrooms down the hallway from her, and her five-year-old brother’s bedroom is next to hers.

Frantically, the girl wakes up in the middle of the night big-eyed with her palms sweaty as she believes she heard someone in their kitchen or at the front door, moving around downstairs or hiding under her bed. She stands up in her bed to listen closely. She says, “One, two, three,” and sprints down the hallway. Her speed eases as she enters their bedroom door, tiptoes to her dad’s bedside, taps him with two fingers, and whispers her fears. When he replies, she jumps over him to be sandwiched by her dad on the right and her mom on the left. She feels safe and guarded and falls asleep in the blink of an eye.
Researchers Debbarma and Bhattacharjee (2018) questioned the impact of caring and overparenting parental styles on the emotional intelligence and adjustment of school students. Family is the first school for emotional learning and leads to predicting the child’s well-being in many domains as social competence, psychological development, adjustment, and problem behavior (Debbarma & Bhattacharjee, 2018). With previous researchers identifying many styles of parental involvement, Debbarma and Bhattacharjee questioned the impact of parenting styles and discipline methods and their effect on children’s emotional regulation and flexibility. The study included 1200 school students aged between seventeen and eighteen years old. Participants completed three data instruments: The Parental Bonding Instrument, Mangal’s Emotional Intelligence Inventory, and Bell’s Adjustment Inventory. They measured parental styles, emotional intelligence, and children's adjustment. The results show that parenting styles do have an impact on emotional intelligence and adjustment patterns. One statistic displayed that caring parenting styles predict 6% in emotional intelligence while overprotecting parenting styles predict a 3.3% variance in emotional intelligence (Debbarma & Bhattacharjee, 2018). Regarding adjustment patterns, the study found participants with higher anxiety in social adjustments perceived their mothers as neglectful, affectionless, and controlling. The study solidified that caring parental styles affect emotional intelligence and adjustment patterns positively.

The girl sandwiched between her parents wakes up in a king-sized bed with her mom getting ready for work in the bathroom and her dad lying next to her. She feels safe and comfortable, so she keeps coming back. Week by week, her parents have unintentionally trained the girl that she can be saved by running down the hallway and jumping into her parents’ bed. Their loving and caring hearts cannot tell her no. Instead, they take away
her fears. Thirty-two days and counting, she has not woken up in her bed. Is the parents’ vulnerability an example of coddling?

Parenting is thought to play a critical role in socialization and the development of guilt and empathy and has received considerable attention as a risk factor for conduct problems and callous-unemotional traits (Roberts et al., 2023). Researchers Roberts et al. (2023) conducted a study centered around the parenting styles of boys with conduct problems and unemotional traits. The study included 146 boys aged 11-16 and their parents attending alternative provision schools that serve children with behavioral difficulties in the London area. The families only responded to the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire, while the students and families provided written statements describing their respective experiences and took the Inventory of Callous-Unemotional Traits. Like Debbarma and Bhattacharjee’s (2018) findings, Roberts et al. (2023) found that parenting styles affect boys with conduct problems and callous-unemotional traits. The study also concluded that parents mentioned difficulties monitoring and supervising their children. They shared their challenges with inconsistent discipline, and students mentioned that they understood the parenting challenges their caregivers faced.

Rademacher et al. (2023) also explored how parenting styles are associated with the outcome of child emotions and behavior with 442 children between preschool and elementary grade level and their families. The study tested the relationship between parenting styles and children’s emotional dysregulation and aggressive behavior. The findings highlighted the positive influence of a warm and less strict parenting style on emotional regulation and leading to a reduction in aggressive behavior. Along with Debbarma and Bhattacharjee (2018) and Roberts et al. (2023), parenting styles and techniques influence emotional regulation.
Additionally, the study found that lower levels of parental education were associated with a stricter parenting style.

Studies highlight the effect differing parenting styles have on child development, so it is only right to ask, “How do differing teaching styles affect child development and self-efficacy?” We see a boy run up to a teacher during afternoon recess and say, “Tom told me he doesn’t like my new shoes.” The teacher hurries to Tom and tells him to apologize for his unkind words. Tom walks toward the boy to apologize in an annoyed and disturbed tone. Is the apology sincere? Does Tom not have the right to his opinion? Will the boy have to run to the teacher whenever a peer conflict arises? The example shows adult dependency. Schools and teachers unconsciously put their students into the category of seeking adult assistance. Teachers tell students there is one way to solve a math problem or one way to use a pencil. The education system forms closed-minded children.

“Telling me what you are thinking…” “Can you tell me more about it?” It is the parents' and teachers' responsibility to equip children with appropriate competencies and skills to become valuable citizens of our ever-changing and diverse world. Researchers Breed and Bailey (2018) examined the influence of a metacognitive teaching approach to cooperative problem-solving on self-direction in learning. They mentioned that self-directed learning is the learner taking initiative in the learning experience, formulating learning goals, identifying learning resources, learning independently, learning from and with others, and regulating their learning (Breed & Bailey, 2018). The research included a class of 29 second-year students in South Africa. They began with a pre-test questionnaire, and over one semester, the participants engaged in a cooperative pair problem-solving teaching style. After the semester concluded, participants took a post-test questionnaire. The findings showed that metacognition knowledge and metacognition
control had increased along with the intervention influenced self-directedness positively in the students who scored low or moderate on self-directed learning before implementing this teaching style. Like Debbarma and Bhattacharjee (2018), Roberts et al. (2023), and Rademacher et al. (2023), Breed and Bailey (2018) found that parenting and teaching styles influence behavior and learning development in children because they are the foundation of child’s life journey. Children’s minds and bodies create a place different from anywhere else with no fear and concept of reality as adults know it. The skills teachers and parents instill and enforce mold confident questioners, thinkers, listeners, and future leaders.

**Zero Tolerance School Discipline Policies**

After a month of being awakened at night by their daughter, the parents begin to rethink their response to her fears. They questioned whether she should jump into bed with them every night and wondered about its long-term effects. Therefore, they decided to sit with the girl and explain that she may not sleep in their room at night - she must sleep in her bed. To help motivate the girl, they developed an incentive system using stickers. If she sleeps in her bed, she earns a sticker. Together, they decided that when she received five stickers on her chart, she would receive a sleepover. The sleepover includes popcorn, a Blockbuster movie, and homemade chocolate chip pancakes. The girl has a sparkle in her eyes and a grin from cheek to cheek. However, if she does not earn a sticker, her parents will enforce a negative punishment such as limited screen time or taking her favorite Bratz dolls. They believe if they pair an incentive with a consequence she will start sleeping in her bed, a theory founded by B.F. Skinner includes adding a desirable stimulus to decrease a behavior, while a negative punishment removes a pleasant stimulus to decrease a behavior (Gordan & Krishanan, 2014).
Zero-tolerance policies are alive in households and school buildings. When implementing zero-tolerance policies in schools, teachers jump to enforcing suspensions, time-outs, expulsion, or taking recess time. Teachers are trained to make our schools safer by eliminating the child. The American Psychological Association’s Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) explored the effectiveness of zero-tolerance policies in schools. The objective was to identify if zero-tolerance policies made schools safer. This task force also wanted to identify if zero-tolerance policies are more effective in handling disciplinary issues and explore the effects of these policies on child development and the relationship between education and the juvenile system. The study consisted of a 20-year implementation in elementary and middle schools with collecting suspension and expulsion rates compared to the school’s safety and climate. The data found that zero-tolerance policies fail to preserve a safe environment, encourage a positive learning climate, teach students personal and interpersonal skills, and decrease the likelihood of future disruption. According to the American Psychological Association’s Zero Tolerance Task Force, zero tolerance may shift the focus of discipline from relatively inexpensive actions in the school setting to the highly costly processes of arrest and incarceration (American Psychological Association’s Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Three alternative programs have shown decreased disruption and increased relationship building: bullying prevention, threat assessment, and restorative practices.

Researchers Fabelo et al. (2011) continued questioning the need for zero-tolerance policies and began to look towards other discipline strategies for school-wide implementation. They mentioned that zero-tolerance policies are the catalyst for the school-to-prison pipeline (Fabelo et al., 2011). Teasley explored the effect zero-tolerance policies have on school safety
and whether there is concrete data to push schools towards different discipline policies. The study took place in Texas involving seventh to twelfth-grade children. Like the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008), Teasley (2014) examined student suspension and expulsion rates throughout eight years. Data showed nearly six out of ten students had been suspended or expelled from middle or high school. Over the eight years of tracking, the researcher found nothing to support school improvement in safety or behavior. With these statistics, the researcher suggests that schools move away from zero-tolerance policies and shift towards restorative justice strategies to strengthen and respect relationships and take responsibility. Teasley (2014) finished the study by suggesting schools shift to less punitive methods to create strong school classrooms and communities.

On the first night of using positive reinforcement, the girl wakes up, sits up, and contemplates whether she should hurry to her parent's room or stay in bed. She visualizes her and her friend putting on their pajamas, snuggling in their sleeping bag, and singing along to High School Musical, so she lays her head back on the pillow. It is Monday morning. The parents creep into her room and excitedly encourage her to grab a sticker to put on her chart. The girl and her parents feel on top of the world. She feels proud, shares with her teachers, and is excited to sleep in her bed again. However, nights two and three come, and she wakes up in her parents’ bed. She continues to find herself running to her parents during the night. Bratz dolls are gone, and she cannot watch her favorite Disney show. She whines and persuades her parents for her dolls and shows, but they stand their ground. She will not get them back until she sleeps in her bed. The girl's gut fills with anger and frustration.
Virginia public schools show that suspension for firearms (< 1%) and controlled substances (< 2%) constitute only a fraction of school suspensions, and the most common reasons for school suspension are more subjective offenses such as defiance/insubordination (14%), classroom disruption (12%), and disruptive demonstrations (11%) (Virginia Department of Education, 2018). Researchers Huang and Cornell (2021) explored teacher support for zero-tolerance policies and the relationship between zero tolerance and feelings of school safety from teachers and students. Using all Virginia public schools, the study collected data from 118,389 students from grades sixth to eighth and 11,276 teachers. The teachers and students completed a survey called the Authoritative School Climate Survey. It included 100 questions about teacher support for zero-tolerance policies, school climate, and safety conditions. Overall, survey responses showed that 73.8% of teachers supported zero tolerance. Most teachers also felt safe at school. The scatter plots and histograms identified that schools with higher levels of support for zero tolerance have higher suspension rates and lower feelings of safety. Teachers who did not support zero-tolerance noted contrasting discipline strategy implementation such as restorative practices and positive behavioral interventions and supports. The American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008), Teasley (2014), and Huang and Cornell (2021) suggest alternative disciplinary policies directed toward restorative practices.

After night three, the girl’s parents sit to talk with her. She shares that she feels scared of the dark, so they suggest putting a nightlight in the hallway. The girl wakes up in the middle of the night and looks toward the nightlight to ease her mind. The girl finally earned stickers two and three and eventually earned five stickers. She was over the moon,
ecstatic, and confident. The sleepover with her friend happened on Friday night and continued into Saturday night after going to the mall. On Sunday, the girl and her parents sat down to develop a new incentive. She slept in her bed for a couple of nights but ended up snoozing in her parents’ room. They started to tell her no, so she believed it was time for a new plan. Instead of going to her parents’ room, she would sneak into her brother’s bedroom with a blanket and pillow. She would tiptoe to the floor of his bed, cuddle up in a blanket, and place her head on a pillow. Her anxious self would wake up every hour, as she knew she had to sneak back to her room before he woke up. The girl’s success rate was nearly 30%. The zero-tolerance policy was not motivating to the girl.

With researchers suggesting that school districts shift towards restorative practices, the practice became increasingly popular and present in schools. Researchers Farr et al. (2020) explored the implementation of restorative practices in a Texas elementary school in hopes of eliminating exclusionary practices. Principal Karr was named the new principal at Harper Elementary School in 2016. As she entered the school, she noticed an alarming high suspension rate. To combat these high rates, she placed a focus on social-emotional learning. At the beginning of the year, she held a staff meeting and shared her plans to implement restorative practices and eliminate suspensions. She immediately noticed discomfort and closed mindsets from the staff; however, she believed this practice would show its benefits sooner rather than later. All staff members were trained in restorative practices and instructed on implementation in each classroom. At first, Principal Karr was excited and pleased with what she saw happening in the school. As week three rolled around, trouble began. Principal Khan’s mandatory implementation led to parent and family concerns, increased student misbehavior, and teacher
burnout. Students started to leave Harper Elementary School and instead enrolled in a neighboring school. The principal began to doubt herself and the implementation of restorative practices. She wondered if she would give adequate resources and training to staff and if it would be more effective to blend zero-tolerance policies and restorative practices.

**Discipline and Freedom of Restorative Practices**

The sticker chart was a motivating factor for a while, but the girl was back on the floor of her brother’s room within a few days. The parents then initiated a third step, seeking a therapist. A few weeks later, the girl walked into an office and sat face-to-face with her new therapist. The therapist sat on the floor with her and asked her to share about herself. Throughout the sessions, she finally asked the girl why she wanted to sleep in her parents and brother’s room. She responded, “I fear sleeping by myself. I hear noises and believe that someone is in the house. My room is the first bedroom in the hallway, so if someone comes, my room would be first.” The girl feels a weight lifted off her shoulders.

Restorative practices include nine components of spirituality: transformative, connectedness/belonging, common human bond, repentance, forgiveness, making right a wrong, balance/harmony, rituals, and unexplained spiritual phenomenon (Bender & Armour, 2007). Researcher Lauridsen et al. (2022) conducted a study to determine restorative practice's impact on human connection in the workplace. The study included twenty social workers and nine nursing students practicing in a psychiatric ward in the United States. The participants participated in restorative circle progress for six months of exercises, role-playing, and reflection. They passed a talking piece in a circle to ensure safety and trust. Each participant was allowed to speak and listen to others. Lauridsen mentions that the dialogue progressed through...
rounds of questions structured by nonviolent communication. Participants symbolized the ability to observe, recognize, and communicate feelings without judgment and empathize with themselves and others. The findings of Lauriden et al. (2022) study show improvements in four areas: self-awareness and compassion, emotional safety and tolerance of stress, trauma understanding and responding to vulnerability, and personal growth. In addition, participants stated that identifying a client who exhibits challenging behaviors as suffering rather than misbehaving has a positive impact. Lauriden et al. (2022) study suggests that restorative practices increase human connection in the workplace.

Similar findings from Fisher et al. (2021) show positive effects on human connection from the practice. According to the researcher's findings, restorative circles allow a connection where others can communicate in ways that honor differences and the complexity of human experience. As people practice empathy within the circle, they become capable of patience, tolerance, listening, trust, and problem-solving skills. Fisher et al. (2021) implemented restorative practices to help people who were incarnated heal and re-emerge in the community. The participants included a group of men involved in the program Making a Difference Everyday Transitional Services and women recently released from prison who live in a transitional home and are re-entering their communities. Before their first session, Fisher et al. (2021) distributed and collected pre-tests to the participants to assess their trust, communication, and relationship skills. Each session began with an introduction, followed by the first prompt centered on personal values, allowing participants to share ideas and vulnerabilities which led to a connection between them. Eventually, the circle became a story-telling process. Some topics included decision-making, personal empowerment, and peaceful conflict resolution. As the circles concluded, Fisher et al. (2021) findings matched Lauriden et al. (2022) study. Participants
felt safe and respected. They also obtained better communication skills. Restorative practices in social work and incarnated spaces show a similar conclusion; humans learn to communicate in ways that honor the complexity of human differences.

In the following therapy sessions, the girl learned and practiced strategies and techniques to help eliminate the scary and overwhelming thoughts consuming her mind late at night. She gathered paper and markers and put a speaker on her nightstand. The girl grabbed her markers and doodled on the paper when she woke up or turned on her speaker and listened to soothing tones. Occasionally, the girl slipped into her brother’s bedroom, but as time passed and sessions increased, she learned to overcome her nightly challenges. She slept in her bedroom throughout the night and woke up in her bed. The therapist presented a calm demeanor and a listening ear to engage in conversations that helped her overcome her thoughts and fears and find strategies that met her.

With the positive effects of restorative practices in social work settings and incarnated spaces, researchers wondered if restorative practices can also build a positive school culture. Pointer (2019) explored the effects of implementing restorative practices at Victoria University in New Zealand. Pointer (2019) mentions that the mission is to serve as the focus of collaborative interdisciplinary research and teaching on restorative justice theory and practice. The study involved participants attending the university and living in residential halls. The university trained its staff and resident advisors (RA) to conduct the practice in residential halls at the beginning of the year. At the end of the study, the practices indicated positive outcomes such as better communication, increased accountability, and greater emphasis on relationships.
RESTORATIVE PRACTICE PERCEPTIONS

Students expressed their appreciation for a chance to speak and listen. Pointer (2019) shares that when there was a conflict or an incident of misconduct, the restorative justice process provided a platform for both parties to come together and address the issue. Along with Lauriden et al. (2022) and Fisher et al. (2021) positive outcomes of restorative practices implementation, Pointer's (2019) findings aligned. Restorative practices have created a sense of belonging and trust in professional and personal lives.

Skrzypek et al. (2020) explored student perspectives on restorative practices in an urban middle school setting. Skrypek et al. (2020) wondered if the practice had similar positive effects on adolescents. The study involved 49 students in fifth grade and 41 students in eighth grade who participated in a restorative circle of 30 minutes daily for seven months. Researchers collected data from reflection video data and a survey inventory. The findings highlighted significant differences between grade levels and gender. Girls in fifth grade reported circles helped them learn about their behavior, while females in eighth grade felt it did not affect their behavior. Boys felt restorative practices supported their behavior and nonviolent problem-solving skills more than girls. The data showed differences and similarities in the areas in which restorative circles affect children which aligns with data from Lauriden et al. (2022), Fisher et al. (2021), and Pointer (2019). The studies suggest using restorative circles to promote human communication and expressing feelings. Humans are social animals, and connection is the focus of restorative practices.

The Concept of the Self

Each night, the girl continued to doodle or listen to calm music to help her fall back asleep. The eight-year-old girl overcame her fears because her voice and thoughts were heard and seen. The therapist provided a safe place, an outlet, and listening ears. Their
sessions were collaborative. As they met, the therapist sought to build a relationship with the girl by listening to her interests and preferences. They played with dolls to build a trusting and positive relationship. Then, the therapist gathered the girl’s perspective by listening which led to understanding each feeling and developing a plan. Eventually, the girl began to sleep through the night. No noises, sounds, or bumps woke the girl. She felt safe. She felt confident.

The education system emphasizes two words within its field: classroom management. Classroom management is the foundation of any classroom, lunchroom, and school building; however, it is often the most challenging. A first-grade teacher implements a 6x6 good behavior grid in her classroom. A fourth-grade teacher uses individual mason jars and pom-poms. A middle school teacher develops rules and expectations with her students. Within these many strategies, some work for students, particular classrooms, and particular amounts of time. Researcher Jasmina (2014) found that an efficient teacher means to know what and how to motivate students to learn. An efficient classroom manager must have the skills to plan and prepare the education process (Jasmina, 2014).

Researchers Yeager et al. (2018) explored two issues: why traditional school-based inventions work well for young children but less so for middle adolescents and why some alternative approaches to inventions show promise for middle adolescents. The study included two interventions conducted on two groups, 450 eighth-grade students and middle school staff and students. The objective of the first study was to reduce junk food snacking. Healthy eaters are often categorized as "lame" and do what their parents tell them. Yeager et al. (2018) sought to redefine this definition as healthy eaters are independent people who make the world a better
place and share the problems of people who eat junk food. The results showed that the invention worked because adolescents felt desired and respected. The second study aimed towards reducing discipline problems. One method included a zero-tolerance policy approach. The other method included restorative practice. The findings showed zero tolerance produced few benefits because students felt disrespected by authorities, whereas when using restorative practice, children felt seen. Yeager et al. (2018) found interventions with positive impact included adults honoring sensitivity to feelings of high status and respect. Adolescents show far greater self-regulation, the ability to think about the future, and the capacity to change when they feel heard.

People’s subjective well-being, self-esteem, and mental and physical health appear to depend on the level of status they are accorded by others (Anderson et al., 2015). To evaluate this hypothesis, Anderson et al. (2015) reviewed the desire for status as a fundamental motive and its effect on subjective well-being. Individuals buy a sweatshirt with a Nike logo solely because of the label. Adults buy specific cars to label themselves as “high status.” Why are individuals afforded high status? Anderson et al. (2015) investigated by measuring adult status who differed in gender, age, culture, and personality via peer ratings such as respect, admiration, and who is looked up to by others, self-reports, and ascendance to leadership positions. The results show that the desire for status is a fundamental motive. The status level affects their well-being, and individuals seek goal-directed behaviors to attain status. Anderson et al. (2015) shared that people vigilantly monitor the status of their social environment to appear socially valuable. Like Yeager et al. (2018), Anderson et al. (2015) found individual status predicted life satisfaction and positive and negative affective states. From these two studies, the researcher can conclude that individuals seek status and seek to obtain respect from others.
Gehlbach et al. (2016) also explored human connection to improve student and teacher relationships. In their research, Gehlbach et al. (2016) leveraged similarities between students and teachers to identify the effects of student-to-teacher relationships. The study involved 315 ninth-grade students and 25 teachers. The students were 60% female, 51% White, 19% Latino, 11% Asian, 6% Black, and 10% reporting multiple categories. Students received feedback on five similarities they shared with their teacher, and five weeks after the intervention, researchers used qualitative data with students completing a six-point scale and teachers rating the amount of time spent interacting with students. The data showed that students who perceived similarities with teachers also perceived better relationships. Teacher responses showed better relationships with their students as well. Gehlbach et al. (2016) study shows closer relationships when people perceive themselves as like others. Yeager et al. (2018), Anderson et al. (2015), and Gehlbach et al. (2016) found human connection deterred from status, respect, and similarities, which builds stronger relationships.

Researcher Leary et al. (2007) conducted a study involving 59 male and 58 female undergraduate students aged 17-21 to investigate the cognitive and emotional processes in which self-compassionate individuals handle unpleasant life events. In the study, participants reported on a self-compassion scale test, reported the negative events in their daily lives, responded to hypothetical scenarios, and reflected on negative personal experiences. After the study, the data found that self-compassion predicted emotional and cognitive reactions to negative everyday events, self-compassion buffered people from thinking negatively about themselves, and self-compassion led people to acknowledge their role in negative events without being consumed by negative emotions. Self-compassion is a component of individual reactions to life’s punches. When comparing Leary et al. (2007) study to Yeager et al. (2018), Anderson et al. (2015), and
Gehlbach et al. (2016), similarities are displayed. Individuals seek human connection and build relationships through status, respect, and commonalities. Leary et al. (2007) study exemplifies that self-compassion helps individuals when a conflict arises between two individuals. When individuals can care for themselves, they also have an orientation to care for others.

Fifteen years later, the girl stepped on the stage, meet the chancellor, and held a diploma between her hands. She yearned to be a teacher from as young as she can remember. She accepted her first teaching position as a third-grade teacher and received an email with her class list of 19 students. She is eager and ready to begin. Throughout the year, she underwent many challenging behaviors, but one behavior left a lasting impact. Every day at recess, one of her students lashed out at their peers. Eventually, a loud voice or physical touch came towards a classmate during their soccer, basketball, or four-square games. Her first instinct led to taking away recess time, showing him that he cannot play until he learns how to manage his emotions. After taking multiple recesses during the week, the same behaviors occurred. She felt frustrated and defeated.

Humans are social animals. Babies cling to their mother after birth to nurture the bond between the mother and the child, children seek a helping hand after tripping on a crack, and human hearts feel alive when they receive a hug or smile from another person. Human connection is profound. Each classroom, community grocery store, gas station, and NFL football stadium is full of humans, none exactly like the ones sitting or standing next to each other. Rick Rubin shared that individuals come with different upbringings, experiences, interests,
perceptions, and sensitivities, but as individuals, humans exist as creative beings in a creative universe (Rubin, 2023). One individual is a singular work of art.

It was now January, and she was preparing for her first team presentation. She felt nervous and anxious, and her fears crept in. She grabbed her tracing paper to ease her mind. At that moment, an idea flooded her brain. The following day, she sat down with the boy to chat. The conversation was unrelated to school and thoughtless. She continued to meet with the boy each week, and eventually, the conversation led to discussing the challenges at recess. They decided to create a sign to signify deep breathing. With time and patience, they worked on noticing heightened emotions, using a designated signal, and taking deep breaths. Their conversations continued, and as April came and went, the child began to regulate his feelings without adult prompting. Through the power of conversation, personal experience, and human connection, the boy felt valued, appreciated, and seen.

**Methods**

**Research Plan**

The study seeks to find a discipline strategy that gives students a voice and propels their self-understanding and self-regulation skills in the classroom and throughout life. When addressing a student’s challenging behavior, the study involves the teacher being the teacher and the student being the student. The action researcher will shift to the teacher becoming the listener and the student transforming into the teacher. The action researcher hopes to find a discipline strategy that makes students feel seen, heard, and valued, and understand and listen to student perspectives on zero-tolerance policies and restorative practices. The research questions to guide
the study include: Do students feel valued when using restorative practices to handle challenging behaviors? Do student voices help themselves, teachers, families, and staff find an individualized strategy to help them regulate their actions now and in the future?

**Research Setting**

The action research study was conducted in a first-grade classroom at Sergeant Bluff-Luton Primary School during special area subjects. Sergeant Bluff is a rural community surrounding Sioux City, Iowa. Sergeant Bluff has a population of 5,015. The first-grade classroom of the two participants includes nineteen students. Thirteen students are female, and six are male. The children are six or seven years old and speak English as their primary language. Five students receive free and reduced lunch, one is on an individualized education plan, and the following students vary between middle and high socioeconomic status.

The evaluation will take place during their special subject area that includes art, P.E., computer lab, character ed, music, and library. Each special subject area has a room in the primary school building, except character education. Character Education is a course centered on social-emotional learning, and the class takes place in children’s classrooms. The teacher is mobile and brings a cart of materials into each room. The specials block is 45 minutes on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Wednesday’s time is 30 minutes due to an early dismissal. The first-grade special subject area is 1:35-2:20 p.m. each afternoon.

**Participants**

The action research study includes two seven-year-old boys in a first-grade classroom and their families. The participants share a love for competitive activities and shine their hearts on all surrounding them. Conversational, tender, and ambitious are three words to describe one of the participants, and the second participant is joyful, courageous, and energetic. The participants were
chosen to find a strategy to help regulate their emotions during unstructured times throughout the school day.

The researcher examined the participants during their special subject areas. The special teachers frequently share challenging behaviors exhibited by the participants. Both participants are Caucasian, and English is their primary language. Each household includes their mom, dad, and siblings. The participants’ families are involved at the school by attending parent-teacher conferences twice a year, in the fall and spring. Families also communicate with the teacher through email, phone conversations, and a communication platform called Remind.

**Research Variables**

The study includes two discipline strategies: zero tolerance policy and restorative practice. The zero-tolerance policy and restorative practice are the independent variables in the study. The zero-tolerance policy imposes a negative punishment. Examples may involve limited recess time, time-out, or additional work. Restorative practice is a positive discipline strategy. The practice includes conversing with the participant, discussing the issue and emotions, developing a future of action, and a student-chosen consequence. The discipline strategy will be implemented when a student does not follow the school rules (SBL Way) during their special subject area. The dependent variable includes the two participants, their families, and their home upbringing. The participants are two seven-year-old males in a first-grade classroom. The researcher does not have data on home discipline methods. Depending on the participant’s family upbringing, the participants may respond differently to each discipline strategy at school.

**Data Collection Plan**

**Timeline for Collecting Data**
The research is conducted during the second semester of the school year. The study includes ten incidents for each participant. Five incidents will involve a zero-tolerance discipline strategy. The other five incidents include restorative practices. The teachers share if the participant followed the SBL way during the 45-minute special subject area block. Undesired behaviors include difficulty following directions, using inappropriate language, raising voice level, or physical contact with another classmate. The timeline for each participant may vary depending on when they reach the fifth and tenth discipline strategies.

**Measurement Instrument**

When a participant does not follow special subject area rules, the action researcher will use a zero-tolerance discipline strategy for five incidents. The punishment will be enforced following the special subject area. Following the discipline, the child will draw a picture representing how the negative punishment made them feel. The participants will receive unlimited time to draw a picture representing their feelings. Once the drawing is complete, the participant and teacher will engage in a conversation centered on the student verbalizing and expressing their art. The action researcher will listen as the participants explain their feelings and jot down anecdotal notes. Additionally, the researcher will contact the family, sharing the undesired behavior and the discipline strategy implemented. The family will follow up with the researcher to share the participant's behaviors at home that night.

After enforcing the zero-tolerance policy, the researcher will shift to restorative practice as the discipline strategy and implement it for five incidents following the special subject area. The practice will include a one-on-one conversation between the participant and the action researcher. The conversation will contain unpredictable statements and responses, but the following prompts will centralize the conversation: I heard you… Can you tell me in your words
what happened? How did that make you feel? What could we do differently? How are we going to solve this problem? Following the conversation, the participant will draw a picture expressing their feelings when using restorative practices. Once again, the participants will receive unlimited time to draw a picture and engage in a second conversation with the researcher to explain their feelings. To conclude, the researcher will contact the family, sharing the undesired behaviors during specials and the discipline strategy used. Again, the family will share the participants’ behavior at home.

*Storage & Security of Data*

The action researcher will store the consent forms and artwork in a folder. When the participant completes each drawing, the researcher will scan the picture, send it through email to the action researcher’s computer, and upload it on a Word document. The picture will then be dated and filed in the file folder. The file folder is in a closet in the first-grade classroom. When the researcher receives feedback from parents concerning the behaviors that night, the researcher will copy the message, remove names, and paste the response into a Word document. The Word document is on the researcher’s computer in a private folder.

*Plan of Analysis*

The action researcher will save each piece of artwork and anecdotal notes and identify differences and similarities between the discipline strategies and the two participants within the Word document. The researcher will identify differences and similarities within the strategies or if the strategy affects individuals differently. In addition, the researcher will examine parent feedback in the Word document. The researcher will analyze parent feedback by recognizing differences and similarities between the discipline strategies and individual participants.
IRB Approval

The action research conducted will obtain consent from the two participants and their families using the IRB process at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa. The researcher will contact each family and participant through phone conversations. The phone conversation includes the data collection plan, minimal risks, confidentiality, and future benefits. When obtaining verbal consent, the researcher will provide future steps to obtain written consent and guardian signatures. The consent form is put in a manila envelope with the name and secured in the participant’s backpack. The researcher will gather the envelope and file the signed consent form in a folder.

Data Collection

For this action research, the data collection is mixed methods. The data includes the discipline strategy, artwork, and family responses. The action researcher created a Word document with three pieces of data collection: Discipline Strategy, Participant Artwork, and Family Responses. The first data collection includes the discipline strategy. The table has three-column headings including the date, subject area, such as art, P.E., computer lab, character ed, music, and library, and the teacher's response on whether the participant followed the SBL way during the 45-minute block. The researcher notes the discipline strategy if the participant did not follow the SBL way.

The first data point is quantitative. The researcher will analyze the correlation between challenging behaviors and special subject areas for each participant individually. The researcher identified if specific specials were more challenging to follow the SBL way than others. The researcher then joined the two participants' data on challenging behaviors during specials and,
again, determined if specific special subject areas were more difficult for both participants to follow the SBL way.

The next piece of data is the artwork, and the data is qualitative. After implementing each discipline strategy, zero-tolerance, and restorative practices, the participants drew a picture sharing their feelings towards the discipline strategy. Each participant drew ten pictures to reflect their feelings. Five of the ten drawings represent their feelings after being disciplined through a zero-tolerance strategy. The other five drawings represent their emotions after using restorative practices as a discipline strategy. Once the participants completed their drawing, the researcher scanned and uploaded the picture. Next, the participant verbalized their artwork with the action researcher and took anecdotal notes on a Word document. The researcher chose art as one piece of data because art engages multiple parts of the brain. Researchers Magsamen and Ross (2023) state that art essentially engages the social brain and shows that art processing maps onto the social brain connectome, the most comprehensive diagram of the neural dynamics that regulate human social cognition to date.

The researcher groups the artwork into two categories: zero-tolerance and restorative practice. The researcher had five pieces of artwork for each category and analyzed each category. Then, the researcher looked for similarities and differences between the participant’s individual feelings toward zero-tolerance policies and restorative practices. From the artwork, the researcher determined an overall theme of their feelings towards the two strategies and labeled it with one feeling word. The feeling word may include sad, angry, happy, excited, etc. The researcher then compared the feelings of the participants together. The artwork and anecdotal notes show if the participants shared mutual or different feelings towards each discipline strategy.
The third data collection includes family responses which is also qualitative. When the participant does not follow the SBL way during special subject areas and engages in a discipline strategy, the researchers contact parents through Remind. The researcher informed the parents of the special subject area, the challenging behavior displayed, and the enforced discipline strategy on the message. The action researcher also asked the parents to observe the participant's emotions and attitudes at home that night. When the night concludes, the families send a message through Remind informing the action researcher of their child’s behaviors that night. The researcher screenshots a picture of the message, removed names to keep the message anonymous, and uploaded the response to the Word document.

Lastly, the researcher will analyze family responses. The researcher will group responses for zero-tolerance and restorative practice for each participant. Each participant has five parent responses for zero-tolerance and five for restorative practices. The researcher identified themes and differences between the home behaviors following each strategy. After identifying similarities and differences between the individual children, the researcher merged the two participants' home behaviors after each strategy and compared the responses to determine if a discipline strategy affects their nightly behaviors at home.

Findings

Data Analysis

Of the special subject areas, four of the six subjects showed inconsistency in student behavior. The four specials include art, music, computer lab, and library. The two specials where the participants consistently followed the SBL Way were character education and P.E. The participants engaged in each special four times, and the chart shows the number of times the participants followed the SBL Way during each special. Participant 1 followed the SBL Way
four times during character education and followed the SBL Way in three of the four P.E. classes. Participant 1 followed the SBL Way 25% of the time in computer lab and music and 50% in art and library. Overall, Participant 1 followed the SBL 37.5% in four special subject areas: art, music, computer lab, and library. Participant 1 followed the SBL 87.5% in two subjects: character ed and P.E. Participant 2 also followed the SBL way 37.5% in four subjects: art, music, computer lab, and library. In character education and P.E., Participant 1 followed the SBL 100% of the time. Participant 2 followed the SBL Way 50% in art, 50% in music, 25% in the computer lab, 100% in character ed and P.E., and 25% in the library. Chart 1 shows the participants following the SBL Way in each subject area.

Chart 1

Participants Following the SBL Way During Specials

The second data collection includes the participant's feelings towards the two discipline strategies: zero tolerance and restorative practice. The action researcher found Participant 1 felt
sad when getting disciplined by a zero-tolerance strategy. A few of Participant 1’s artwork showed himself with a sad face, shown in Figure 1, while a couple of pieces included other students playing at recess while he sat on the line. The researcher took anecdotal notes as they debriefed each picture, and a few of Participant 1 responses included: “I was sad because I had to sit on the line.” “I am sad because I was not listening on the computer, so I had to sit on the line.” “I was sad because I didn’t get to play 99Math.”

Participant 2 showed similar feelings as Participant 1. The action researcher found Participant 2 felt sad when disciplined by a zero-tolerance strategy. Participant 2’s artwork included five sad-faced self-portraits in Figures 2 and 3. Some of Participant 2 responses include: “I was sad because I didn’t get to play 99Math and instead write number sentences.” “I didn’t like sitting on the line, so I drew a picture that was sad.” “This is me sad because I had to owe recess time.” Chart 2 displays Participants 1 and 2 feelings towards the five situations using zero tolerance as a discipline strategy.

When looking at the artwork after using restorative practice as a discipline strategy, the action researcher found Participant 1 to feel happy and valued. All the art pieces displayed a smiling face. Figure 4 shows one of the five drawings showing a happy feeling. The participant also included the action researcher in a drawing and shared, “It made me happy when we talked about the plan.” Other responses from Participant 1 include: “The picture is me thinking about tapping my fingers so that I don’t annoy people or use unkind words.” “The plan makes me happy!” “I am happy when I talk about the plan.” Overall, Participant 1 felt happy when using restorative practices.

The action researcher found Participant 2 also felt happy when using restorative practices. Participant 2 drew pictures after engaging in a restorative practice displayed in Figures
5 and 6. The five pictures displayed the participant with a smiling face. As the researcher and participant conversed, the participant initiated a plan of action to help listen to the teacher and follow directions. The plan included going to sit by someone else that he may not talk to. He chose three classmates to sit by if this occurred. The second step of the plan included taking deep breaths, and lastly, the participant could ask for a break. The participant's responses include: “The game plan made me happy because I will sit by someone else, take deep breaths, or ask to take a break.” “It made me happy to talk to the teacher.” “Our talk made me very happy.” “First, I sat by my friend, but she was talking to me, so I went to sit by a different friend.” Chart 3 shows the participants' feelings when engaging in restorative practices for a discipline strategy.

Chart 2

*Feelings Towards Zero Tolerance*
Chart 3

*Feelings Towards Restorative Practice*

![Chart showing feelings towards restorative practice for Participant 1 and Participant 2. The chart indicates that both participants feel happy.

Figure 1

*Participant 1 Zero Tolerance Artwork*
Figure 2

*Participant 2 Zero Tolerance Artwork*

![Participant 2 Zero Tolerance Artwork](image)

Figure 3

*Participant 2 Zero Tolerance Artwork #2*

![Participant 2 Zero Tolerance Artwork #2](image)
Figure 4

Participant 1 Restorative Practice Artwork

Figure 5

Participant 2 Restorative Practice Artwork
Table 1 below represents Participant 1’s at-home behavior following each discipline strategy. The chart is divided into five scenarios of the action researcher using zero tolerance and restorative practice as a discipline strategy. The data point shows the parent’s feedback about the behavior at home following the school day. The researcher found the parent of Participant 1 to likely respond when the researcher disciplined the child with a zero-tolerance policy. The parents also shared the participant’s home consequences when disciplined with a zero-tolerance policy. When the action researcher shared about restorative practice implementation, the parents were more likely not to respond. The table shows that the participant did not display commonalities in his behavior when getting disciplined with a zero-tolerance policy or restorative practice. The action researcher found no trend in the discipline strategy affecting Participant 1 home behavior.
Table 1

Participant 1 At-Home Behavior Following the Discipline Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline Strategy Scenario</th>
<th>At home behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero Tolerance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Restorative Practice         |      |       |      |             |
| 1                            |      |       | X    |             |
| 2                            | X    |       |      |             |
| 3                            |      | X     |      |             |
| 4                            |      |       | X    |             |
| 5                            |      |       | X    |             |
| Total                        | 1    | 0     | 1    | 3           |

The action researcher found that Participant 2 did not show a trend in his at-home behavior. Table 2 displays parent feedback on Participant 2 behaviors at home. The researcher found the participant's parents to have direct and blunt responses when the researcher shared that their child was disciplined using a zero-tolerance policy. When the researcher shared that they used a restorative practice, the parents were more open, understanding, and conversational with the action researcher. There was more appreciation and gratification from the parents when the
action researcher used restorative practices than zero-tolerance policies. Like Participant 1, Participant 2 did not show a trend in his behaviors at home following each discipline strategy. The behaviors at home were inconsistent for Participant 2 after the discipline strategy.

**Table 2**

*Participant 2 At-Home Behavior Following the Discipline Strategy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline Strategy Scenario</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero Tolerance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Restorative Practice         |      |       |      |             |
| 1                            | X    |       |      |             |
| 2                            |      | X     |      |             |
| 3                            | X    |       |      |             |
| 4                            |      | X     |      |             |
| 5                            | X    |       |      |             |
| Total                        | 2    | 3     | 0    | 0           |
After collecting ten scenarios using a zero-tolerance discipline strategy and restorative practice five times, the action researcher received a message from Participant 2’s family. The message read, “Thank you for choosing my child! Thank you for speaking, listening, and developing a plan with our child. We implemented similar strategies at home to provide consistency between his home and school life.” The action researcher found a relationship built between the participant, the action researcher, and the family. The action researcher, participant, and family developed and implemented appropriate emotional regulation skills for the participant to use now, in the upcoming school years, and throughout his adult life. Together, as three parties, they found a strategy for the betterment of the child.

**Discussion**

**Summary of Major Findings**

The purpose of this study was to determine which discipline strategy made students feel valued. The action researcher found participants seen, heard, and valued through restorative practices. The first data collection showed a difference in behavior related to the special subject area. Participants 1 and 2 consistently followed the SBL Way during character education and P.E. and inconsistently followed the SBL Way during art, music, computer lab, and library. The action researcher identifies two themes to attribute to this difference: classroom management and teacher-to-child relationships. The first theme is classroom management. Researcher Delceva (2014) found teachers efficient classroom managers display the following skills: knowing how to plan and prepare the education process, organizing the teaching, and guiding the class. The character education and P.E. teachers take time to create classroom rules with students at the beginning of the year. Then, they practice and reinforce these rules and follow a consistent and fast-paced schedule throughout the year. Their lesson plans include an opening, middle, closure,
and focusing questions. Delceva (2014) found that 82% of elementary teachers always plan, while the remaining 18% follow the textbook. Students’ activeness and reflectiveness lead to greater engagement in character education and P.E. and following the SBL Way.

An additional theme that emerged was the power of building relationships. Rita Pierson (2013), a professional educator, once asked a group of people to think of someone you like that you do not respect and who you respect that they do not like. Children need to know and feel an adult who will never give up on them, understand the power of connection, and insist they become the best they can be. Every child needs a champion (Pierson, 2013). Both special teachers took time at the start of the year and continued throughout the year to make the children feel seen and appreciated in their classroom. They understood the importance of building relationships. It was a priority in their classroom. The participants had a higher interest level in each subject area because of the relationships built. The participants shared their excitement when having character education or P.E. for specials with the action researcher. The action researcher concludes that structure aligned with a positive classroom environment contributes to increased enjoyment with the participants.

The second data collection concluded that participants felt valued, appreciated, and heard when using restorative practices versus a zero-tolerance policy. Participants 1 and 2’s artwork for restorative practices showed that they felt happy. The participants’ artwork displayed opposite feelings when disciplined by a zero-tolerance policy. They felt sad. When the researcher disciplined the participants using a zero-tolerance strategy, they shared that they did not like watching their peers during recess while they sat on the line. Participants 1 and 2 also shared that they felt mad when the action researcher did not talk to them and instead gave a punishment. The data showed participants often displayed negative behaviors the next day in specials following
the zero-tolerance strategy. When the action researcher shifted towards restorative practices, the artwork shifted. The participants drew feelings of happiness and were open with the researcher regarding the situation at specials. Researcher Pointer (2018) found similar findings when implementing restorative practices to handle conflicts at a university. Participants of Pointer’s (2018) study shared that they have seen a massive difference in residents taking responsibility for their actions and in their understanding of the way their behavior affects others. After talking with the action researcher, the participants showed a different level of happiness. This researcher found the participants to show confidence and accountability following each talk. Participants 1 and 2 often used their plan in their special subject area the next day and received a good report from the special subject teacher. The participants felt valued, and the action researcher began understanding the why behind the behaviors when using restorative practices.

The final data collection displayed no theme in the participant's behavior at school related to their at-home behaviors. The behaviors at home were inconsistent when relating them to the discipline strategy enforced at school. From this conclusion, the action researcher identifies the importance of enforcing feedback following the challenging behavior. It must be intentional. Researchers Chiu and Alexander (2014) studied the nature of analogical reasoning in young children. The study included a computerized game-like environment by providing a group of young children with immediate, corrective feedback, while others received no feedback. Chiu and Alexander (2014) found that children’s performances were more consistent when feedback was received than not. Corrective feedback did have an immediate effect on performance accuracy (Chiu & Alexander, 2014). Researcher Price et al. (2002) explored the effects of immediate feedback compared to delayed feedback on inappropriate verbalizations with a boy who has ADHD and was disrupting his classroom. The results support immediate feedback being
more effective in reducing inappropriate behavior. When corrective feedback and specific praise were immediately provided, the target behavior further decreased. Researchers Chiu and Alexander (2014) and Price et al. (2002) found immediate feedback holds greater power in children’s academic and behavioral performance than delayed feedback. The action researcher solidified these findings with an inconsistent pattern of the participants holding onto the behavior displayed at school to at-home behaviors. Immediate feedback and discussion following a challenging behavior need to be a priority of educators and adults working with early childhood children.

**Limitations of the Study**

The action research has potential limitations. One of the limitations includes the selected couple participants and families. The research was conducted on two participants with similar backgrounds, households, and family involvement. Choosing two participants of similar upbringings could alter the validity of the discipline strategies. The action researcher chose two participants with high parental involvement in their education. Each family shows interest in the learning process and involves their child in extracurricular activities in the community. The participants' discipline strategies at home could be a limitation as discipline strategies vary from household to household. Some individuals discipline their children using time-out methods, natural consequences, positive reinforcement, reward systems, or giving consequences. The data may reflect different child upbringings depending on the household discipline strategy.

“Please don’t tell my mom and dad! Please, please, please!” The eight-year-old girl said to a neighborhood mom after playing at the park with the boys. The girl’s palms are
sweating, her knees are weak, her face is flushed, and water ambulates in her eyes. She is nervous. She is remorseful. “If Mom and Dad find out, I won’t be able to play tomorrow. I promise I won’t do it again.” The eight-year-old girl feared having anything leaked to her parents. She had consequences at home. Whether it was time out or having toys or incentives taken away, there was fear. The girl grew up with harsh consequences if she did not follow home or school rules or show respect towards others. She learned the value of expectations and formed respectful beliefs and attributes. Her parents shaped her character, and their consequences, presence, and parenting style were the foundation of forming the girl into an individual who followed school and community rules, took responsibility, and respected others.

The second limitation includes the different teaching styles and relationships between the participants and each special subject area. Each special area teacher may have a different viewpoint on following the SBL Way. One teacher might expect the SBL Way to look, sound, and feel a particular way, while another believes it looks and sounds differently. The teachers' perspectives on the SBL Way and the child following the SBL Way may differ based on their teaching style. From teachers' perspectives, the special area teachers may have different connections or relationships with each participant. The participants attended each special area in kindergarten and are currently in first grade with the same teachers. The special subject area teachers could have past experiences from previous years that have altered or boosted their participant-to-teacher relationship.

Further Study
The next step in this action research project is gathering parent viewpoints and perspectives on educators disciplining their children using zero tolerance and restorative practices. Parenting style is a constellation of attitudes towards childrearing (Tsoi et al., 2018). The research procedure would happen like the current action research by contacting families following a discipline strategy when a child displays a challenging behavior. The researcher would share the strategy used on their child, ask the parents to draw an image related to their feelings instead of the participant and discuss the piece with the action researcher. The focusing questions would include: Do you prefer using zero-tolerance restorative practices to discipline your child? How do you feel an educator uses zero-tolerance policies to discipline your child? How did you feel when the teacher used restorative practices to discipline your child? Do you believe your child responds positively or negatively to these two strategies? Tsoi et al. (2018) found parents help minimize problem behaviors and maximize self-efficacy and personal, emotional, and cognitive development. The action researcher seeks to determine, understand, and analyze family perspectives on discipline strategies and their effect on behavior.

Another future step includes analyzing behavior during special subject areas to determine if the challenging behavior increases or decreases when using a specific discipline strategy. The researcher wonders if the challenging behaviors decreased when using restorative practices or zero tolerance or increased when using the strategies. Skrzypek et al. (2020) found that restorative practices supported behavior varied on gender and grade level. The results showed the practice benefited boys' behavior and nonviolent skills compared to girls, and fifth-grade children reported benefits from restorative practices than eighth-grade children (Skrzypek et al., 2020). From these differences, the action researcher believes that analyzing the effect on first-grade children is essential to restorative practice research. The action research plan included the
action researcher and participants creating steps to reduce the challenging behaviors shown during specials, so the questions to guide this study include: Did the collaborative plan help the challenging behavior during special subject area? Were the special area teachers seeing improvements in the children’s behavior? The future research plan seeks to identify the effects of discipline strategies on the behavior of two first-grade males.

As the eight-year-old entered high school, she would put in her earbuds and click play before a big softball game, state track meet, or presentation. The tune and melody of the music she queued lowered her anxious thoughts. Her mind stopped and she understood the emotions washed over her. The music met her mood and helped her tackle the events with a clear and determined mindset. She continued to listen to music before attending dinner with a new group of friends or engaging in a new and uncomfortable event. The girl and therapist discovered that music was her match. It was her self-regulation tool. The many nights of seeking her parents to soothe her worries shifted towards using music. She pressed play on her CD player, listened intently, laid her head on her pillow, and fell asleep. The strategy carried her through anxious and uneasy moments at eight years old and continued throughout many stages. Music was her therapy.

The final step includes collecting data on the behaviors within other subject areas of the school day. The growing evidence shows that empathy and compassion are associated with more prosocial behavior in interpersonal relations (Klimecki, 2019). The researcher will collect data on the behaviors during additional unstructured times throughout the day. These areas include
school arrival, morning recess, lunch, bathroom break, lunch recess, afternoon recess, and dismissal. Determined from teacher responses that have a duty, the action researcher would collect data on the behaviors during these times. The question to guide the research includes: Does the participant's plan carry into other unstructured times? A goal for individuals who participate in restorative practice is to reform themselves into the sort of person who is unlikely to repeat the offense. Making things right allows the offender to restore a relationship with the universe and God (Bender & Armour, 2007). The study could eventually determine if restorative practices transform behaviors throughout the entire school day, at-home behaviors, and extra-curricular activities.

**Conclusion**

The study found the participants to feel seen, heard, and valued when using restorative practices as a discipline strategy. When humans express themselves, it is essential for them to feel understood. Others do not need to agree, but individuals sense value when they share their point of view and when others honor their feelings. The data found the importance of instilling empathy toward others. Listening with an open mind and heart will lead to understanding. When dealing with challenging behaviors, adults must remain steadfast in seeing beyond conflict. When we open our hearts to fellow living beings, that connection allows for shared divinity.

Early childhood is the birth of the educational world and the foundation of children’s life journey. Children’s minds and bodies create a place different from anywhere else. They have no fear and no concept of reality as adults know it. They are inspiring and give others a moment to step back and look at the world for what they know and what children see it as. They are closer to God in the way and yet indoctrinated into society. They are closer to pure essence. The skills humans instill and enforce in classrooms and communities will be taken to higher ground when
starting at the foundation. The ways adults form and shape children into welcoming, empathetic, problem-solving, and inclusive individuals is a responsibility.

In Nguyen's (2024) hit documentary, *The Greatest Night in Pop*, Lionel Richie says, “Enjoy coming home because there will come a time when you cannot come home. The house will be there. The people in the house will not be there.” He reminds us that human connection is the foundation of life, and relationships make individuals feel alive. Restorative practices center around relationships, and the strategy understands and appreciates the power of a singular conversation. It is a conversation where listening, understanding, and empathizing is present. Individuals share divinity, and the connections show we are more alike than different.

The eight-year-old girl is now a twenty-five-year-old girl who remembers dashing into her parents’ room like clockwork to save her from her fears. Whether she ran to her mom and dad or snuck onto the floor of her brother’s bedroom, this childhood experience leaves a memory, but the memory she continues to hold onto is a feeling. It is a confident, proud, connected, and determined feeling. She had a space to talk and an ear to listen. She found her champion and saw herself as a girl and a human, not a troubled child. Music continues to carry her through the highs and lows of life.
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