Restorative Justice

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Background

For years, we bought into the idea that successful classroom management meant having firm and clear consequences in place for students. We felt obligated to engage in power struggles with students and hand out punitive consequences to ensure that all students had access to a productive learning environment. What happened as a result was the opposite: our relationships with students were damaged, behavior often did not change, and class remained a negative environment for a number of students. Many teachers at our school district faced the same issues in their classrooms, leading administrators to search for a different approach to behavioral concerns. Our entire district opted to begin using restorative justice practices. While we were hesitant at first, our experiences with other initiatives made us cautiously hopeful that we would see improvements in both behavior and classroom community. This paper outlines our experience implementing restorative justice practices and the innovations we put in place to make their incorporation successful.

Innovations

We share about the innovations below, with a focus on how we incorporated restorative practices into our classrooms.

- Restorative Circles and Questions
- Affective Statements
- Individual Connection

Findings

Our classroom climates changed drastically in a positive way from incorporating restorative justice practices. Students learned how to build positive relationships with each other and us, and we saw an increase in equitable engagement in class. Students expressed an increased sense of psychological safety within our classrooms and were better able to communicate about their experiences and feelings.

Contribution

This paper provides teachers with insight into how restorative justice practices can be incorporated into a math classroom and the benefits we saw after a year of utilizing such practices as outlined.

Disclaimer. CPM is glad to share the promising ideas produced through the work of the Teacher Research Corps. It is expected that teachers will rely on their knowledge of their students, the mathematics they are teaching, and the circumstances surrounding their specific teaching assignment when modifying their own behavior and selecting appropriate instructional strategies. A given strategy may have a positive effect on student learning in some situations and a negative effect in others. Please use your own best judgment as you continue to improve your teaching practice.
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