# Teachers' Perspectives on Restorative Justice in Education Professional Development

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in the
Educational Psychology Program
Faculty of Education

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Summer 2022

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# Abstract

Restorative justice in education (RJE) is thought to hold potential to foster strong, positive student-teacher relationships that are critical to student well-being, especially for students who display disruptive behaviours. This study highlights how teachers experience a Restorative Justice in Education professional development (RJE PD) series and how teachers' perceptions of disruptive behaviour and their relationships with students who exhibit this behaviour transform with this experience. The research utilizes case study methodology guided by transformative learning theory (TLT) to explore changes in teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards their roles, responsibilities, and responses to disruptive behaviour of students. Nine teachers from one school district participated in the four-part afterschool RJE PD series developed and facilitated by a local restorative justice society. Three of these teachers were interviewed at the start of the series and eighteen months after the series concluded. As teachers engaged in RJE PD, they openly shared personal stories of struggle with student disruptive behaviour and this sharing helped to create a sense of connection among participants. Restorative justice (RJ) circles appeared to create spaces for some teachers to reflect deeply on their beliefs, attitudes, and practices, which provided fertile ground for the transformative learning (TL) of one teacher. The three teachers appeared to experience the RJE PD differently, vary in their understanding of RJE, and demonstrate differing levels of transformation eighteen months after the end of the series. However, they all spoke about the importance of forming positive relationships with students and the need to search for the context beneath displays of disruptive behaviour. Implications for the delivery of RJE PD are discussed including the ways RJE PD is designed and delivered so that teachers may be encouraged to deeply reflect on their beliefs, values, and practices through a restorative justice lens to improve their connections with students.

**Keywords**:    restorative justice; restorative justice in education; professional development; student-teacher relationship; transformative learning

# Dedication

*This work is dedicated to the students who communicate their needs with behaviour and the teachers who care for them.*

# Acknowledgements

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# List of Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| ADHD | Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder |
| ELL | English Language Learning/Learners |
| LAS | Learning Activities Survey |
| MS Teams | Microsoft Teams |
| RJ | Restorative Justice |
| RJE | Restorative Justice in Education |
| RJE PD | Restorative Justice in Education Professional Development |
| SFU | Simon Fraser University |
| TL | Transformative Learning |
| TLT | Transformative Learning Theory |
| TTOC | Teacher-Teaching-On-Call |

# Glossary

Affective Statements — A restorative practice that involves a person stating how an action made them feel. It is generally stated as an "I" statement.

Circle, Restorative Circle, Peacemaking Circle — These terms refer to the restorative justice practice of sitting in circle which includes the following elements: seating all participants in a circle so that all can be seen, a facilitator who guides the process, the use of a talking piece, an explicit opening and closing ceremony.

Disruptive Behaviour — Disruptive behaviour refers to any action by a student that a teacher interprets as a distraction that interferes with their teaching or with student learning in general.

Restorative Questions — A set of questions that are asked to encourage reflection and contribute to repairing relationships.

Restorative Practices — A continuum of informal to formal practices designed to develop social connections, strengthen relationships, and respond to conflict or wrongdoing.

Talking Piece — An object that is used in restorative circles to signify the participant who is currently speaking. The talking piece is held and passed to each participant, so all have an equal opportunity to speak. Participants only speak when holding the talking piece.

Thesis — An extended research paper that is part of the final exam process for a graduate degree. The document may also be classified as a project or collection of extended essays.

# Preface

Qualitative research is shaped by the worldview of the researcher and is reflected in the assumptions that come from the beliefs and values of a particular philosophical stance (Creswell, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary for me to disclose the biases, values, and context that may shape the narrative. I will begin by situating myself in relation to the research in the following thesis.

My interest in understanding my own beliefs and perceptions about the disruptive behaviour of students initially began with early teaching experiences in the 1990's. For the purpose of this thesis, disruptive behaviour refers to any behaviour that causes a significant distraction for the teacher or other students from teaching and learning. Like most beginning teachers, I was taught how to manage disruptive behaviour in the classroom both through preservice courses at university and by my teacher mentors in my practicum. Classroom control was a common theme. A good teacher, I was told, knew how to set a serious tone from the beginning of the school year and to not smile until after Thanksgiving. When students misbehaved, I was led to believe it was a direct reflection on the quality of my teaching. Good teachers had good classes and good students. They had proactive management plans and dealt with misbehaviour swiftly.

However, my teacher training also coincided with the emerging work in co-operative learning from Johnson and Johnson (2002). *Learning Together and Alone* was grounded in social interdependence theory and emphasized five basic elements of cooperative learning: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, social skills, and group processing. Although I would not have been able to articulate it at the time, this focus on teaching students specific skills to work together for common learning goals appealed to my desire to make learning less about gaining the competitive edge and more about creating more just and equitable societies. To facilitate co-operative learning, teachers were required to help students build relationships with each other. They were required to accept the messiness and noisiness of learning together, which sometimes seemed like organized chaos. At the time, I had the strong conviction that meaningful learning happened through collaboration and relationships. I very much wanted to embrace this generative learning, which seemed to contrast with traditional notions of control that had been part of my teacher education program. However, as I began my teaching career at a senior

secondary with a culture that stressed attaining high levels of academic performance among the students, my colleagues strongly influenced my perspectives. They were often dismissive of the cooperative approach because it was viewed as not appropriate for the serious teaching and learning of senior academic subjects. Caught in the tension between control and cooperative learning, control eventually began to win.

With more years of classroom experience and increased confidence, the tenet of not smiling until Thanksgiving was eventually replaced with firm yet fair rules and expectations. At least I believed they were fair. I taught senior chemistry and while I enjoyed getting to know my students and developing relationships with them, it was very much a traditional classroom. I taught lessons, students did homework and wrote tests. Students were rarely disruptive, and I began to think I had become a good teacher.

However, five years later things changed drastically when the school district moved from a discrete junior and senior high school model to a dimensional grade 8 to 12 configuration. Suddenly, I was no longer teaching chemistry only to university bound seniors. Instead, I found myself struggling to engage grade 8, 11, and pre-employment students in mathematics. When I once enjoyed teaching engaged students who self-selected to take a difficult academic course to further their aspirations, I now faced a heterogeneous group of students who often hated the subject, who were unable to stay in their seats, and who openly refused to do the work provided. I no longer had well-behaved students, and I no longer felt like I was a good teacher. However, instead of adopting a more cooperative approach to try and engage students in their learning, I worked harder at maintaining order. The notions of good teaching and learning I had adopted were squarely aligned with notions of classroom control.

Concurrent to the changes in grade configuration in the school district, I was also pursuing a graduate degree in educational leadership, where I was asked to explicitly describe my philosophical stance in education. My writing reflected the belief that learning requires vulnerability and teachers need to create safe spaces for students to take risks. It was also through this program that I was introduced to Nel Noddings' philosophical stance on the "ethic of care" in education (Noddings, 1995, 2005, 2013) and Maxine Greene's views on "plurality and wide-awakeness" (Greene, 1977, 1993b, 1993a). I began to pay attention to Noddings' interpretation of an ethic of care in education and I considered how my practices did or did not reflect caring. The work of

Greene encouraged me to stay alert to the hierarchies and power imbalances that exist in society, schools, and classrooms. I slowly began to wake up to the requirements of living and teaching in the context of an ethic of care, and it was almost impossible to go back to being asleep.

Good leaders engage others in dialogue and debate about what constitutes a good education and a good life. Through meaningful discourse, leaders draw attention to the purposes of education and help educators look squarely at their practice for alignment. As I engaged deeply in these meaningful discussions, I soon experienced a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991): my teaching practices did not align with the beliefs and values of my emerging philosophy of education. It was a rude awakening to discover that I was not the caring and understanding educator I had described in my writing, and I was appalled. Although I had undergone my own perspective transformation, I had little opportunity to demonstrate this in my teaching practice once I was appointed a vice principal just two years after these changes in my thinking began to emerge.

In the first years of school administration, I tried to stay wide-awake to my practice and better understand the tensions that exist in classrooms and schools while writing the graduation paper required in my masters program. I used the concepts of labour, work, and action from political scientist, Hannah Arendt (1958), as a framework to categorize the human activity that happens in schools. Activities of labour involve meeting the basic needs for day-to-day survival, while work is related to the creation of products to increase utility or express uniqueness. Action, however, involves bringing diverse people together to create community through dialogue, engagement, connection, and understanding to determine collectively what is important and how to be together. Like cooperative learning, engaging in action is often messy and requires the active participation of others. Action requires the creation of space free of hierarchy for people to come together and explore their identities, beliefs, and values to better understand themselves and others. Without knowing it, this was the beginning of my journey into an exploration of RJE, teacher's relationships with their students, and their views on students who exhibit disruptive behaviour.

I had kept a journal of some of my experiences in the first year of being a vice principal. In my graduate paper, I recounted the story of how, after following up on

chronic truancies, I discovered that two students had been suffering from ongoing bullying and were afraid to go to class. I started that story by writing "behaviour is a form of communication, but what is it trying to tell us?". Despite working to control my classroom earlier, it appeared that my practice also reflected my perspective on the reasons for students' behaviour. As I encountered more situations of student misbehaviour during that first year as a vice principal, I began to see that student behaviours occurred within a context that needed to be understood. In another vignette, I recounted how I was humbled to learn that another 'problem' student with poor attendance was suffering from bipolar disorder and had been absent because she had been hospitalized after a suicide attempt. Over several years as a vice principal, I discovered that many of the misbehaviours and disruptive behaviours of students who were sent to my office were not surprising, given the complexity of their lives. I learned that a student who was sent down for ripping up the test she just failed, had experienced her mother leaving the family home the night before. I learned that the boy who called out in all his classes and disrupted others repeatedly had recently been placed into foster care because his biological mother had recently died, and his stepmother was physically abusive towards him. The often-heart-breaking stories associated with the behaviours contributed to my own transformative learning. They created a deep shift in how I perceived student behaviour and I responded with much more care and compassion to all students with disruptive behaviour.

My thoughts about teachers' relationships with students shifted slightly again, as after eleven years as a school-based administrator, I obtained a Master of Counselling degree. My thesis examined notions of belonging in young adults, as I recognized that all human beings have a deep desire for connection. In my studies and afterwards in workshops, I also began to learn about and understand attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) and the behaviours associated with attachment disorders and trauma. As I had learned from my experiences as an administrator, the disruptive behaviours of students were often associated with a heart-breaking past.

I returned to working in schools as an elementary counsellor and many of the students were sent to me because of their disruptive behaviours. What became very clear was that many of these children wanted meaningful connections with their classmates and their teacher. Many had trouble learning and told me that they would rather be thought of as "bad" than "stupid". Still others were struggling with self-control

and self-regulation of their behaviours. However, classroom teachers often expressed to me that they did not have the luxury of time to fully develop warm, trusting relationships with the students. At school-based team meetings, teachers often expressed that for the student to remain in their class, their disruptive behaviour had to be eliminated or if the behaviors persisted, an educational assistant was to be assigned to help the student control their behaviours. The teachers weren't unsympathetic to the students, they often felt they didn't have the skills, time, or energy to get past the immediate impact of the behaviour on the students in their class or their teaching. From my own prior experiences in the classroom, I understood the teacher's frustrations; however, I was disappointed that they were not more compassionate to the challenges faced by many students. I struggled to help them understand that the behaviour could be expected given the complexity of a student's life, but in some cases the teachers were just too overwhelmed with managing the behaviour to look more closely at the lives of the students who exhibited the behaviour.

Shortly afterwards I returned to administration as a district principal and my role shifted to working with district staff, like school psychologists and counsellors, in supporting students who were displaying disruptive behaviours. We often recommended interventions that tried to increase closer connections between teachers and the students of concern (e.g. Pianta & Hamre, 2001). As district staff we worked to provide professional development in self-regulation and social-emotional learning (SEL), approaches that were becoming increasingly popular in British Columbia. We hoped that teachers might begin to search for the context that was associated with the behaviour, develop more compassion, and build stronger relationships with their more challenging students. Some teachers whole heartedly embraced these ideas and implemented the strategies immediately, while others were less convinced of their merit and continued to emphasize the need for control. In some instances, teachers responded with claims that expressing special care to students with challenging behaviour was rewarding their bad behaviour. It was the variety of responses that sparked my desire to further understand the beliefs and attitudes that teachers hold towards students who exhibit disruptive behaviours.

I was presented with an opportunity to look deeper into teachers' perspectives of disruptive behaviours and how they might change when the school district embarked on a project to create a restorative justice in education professional development series

(RJE PD, Appendix A) with a local restorative justice society in the hopes of building the capacity of teachers to implement restorative practices in classrooms. My role as district principal was to review the RJE PD series to ensure that the program adhered to school district guidelines and objectives; oversee the scheduling, monitor the implementation, and design the program evaluation of the RJE PD. However, as the program evaluation was developed, the data that was to be collected was a rich source to explore the possibility of teacher transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) as they engaged in the RJE PD. Transformative learning theory (TL) describes the changes adult learner experience when they can think critically, increase their self-awareness, and develop a deeper level of understanding of self. Because research suggests transformation is most effectively facilitated when there is situated learning that promotes critical reflection through dialogue and relationships with others (King, 2009), the RJE PD was an excellent avenue to explore the topic of this thesis.

I am keenly aware that I have a desire to see TL in teachers in how they view students with disruptive behaviour and that this desire may lead me to seek confirmation of this bias in the analysis of the data. There is also concern that having some part in designing the RJE PD program evaluation may have a significant impact on which aspects of classroom practice and interactions with students I focused on. However, qualitative research acknowledges that researchers bring their own perspectives, biases, and assumptions to the process. The aim is not to eliminate the bias, but to be aware of it and cognizant of how it may influence the process. I designed this research mindful that my education and experiences influence my focus and interpretation of events.

# Chapter 1.    Introduction

Disruptive behaviours of students negatively impact classroom climate, instructional time, and student learning (Ratcliff et al., 2010), and adversely affect the achievement and social lives of students displaying the behaviours (Scott et al., 2011; Sutherland et al., 2008). Further, disruptive behaviours of students also impact teachers and have been associated with low teacher self-efficacy, job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2012) and burnout (Aloe et al., 2014; Landers et al., 2008). Taken together, these correlates create a strain on student-teacher relationships that are important for student success (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). However, student disruptive behaviour does not affect all teachers equally. Several recent findings suggest that teachers' perceptions of the reasons for student disruptive behaviour may account for variation in their response, emotionally and behaviourally, to the students eliciting the behaviour (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2019; Mikami et al., 2019; Nemer et al., 2019). Collie, Shapka, and Perry (2012) propose that teachers need support in developing understanding of students' behaviours in addition to gaining the skills necessary to reduce disruptive behaviours in the classroom. Increasingly, schools globally and in Canada are providing teacher support through professional development in restorative justice in education (RJE PD) to address this need.

Restorative justice (RJ) is a social movement that is gaining popularity worldwide, as it advocates for peaceful, constructive approaches to violations of legal and human rights (Hollweck et al., 2019).  With its roots embedded in spiritual and indigenous traditions that value respect and relationships (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2006), RJ evolved as response to the failure of the criminal justice system to meeting the needs of people and relationships involved in crime (Zehr, 1995) and places emphasis on the interconnectedness of individuals to contribute to a healthy, functioning society (Kervick et al., 2020). As applied to school communities, restorative justice in education (RJE) aims to help students build strong, trusting relationships with each other and with their teachers, which in turn, is thought to create schools that are safe, equitable, and inclusive of diversity (Hollweck et al., 2019; Kervick et al., 2020; Morrison & Riestenberg, 2019). RJE requires teachers to examine and reflect on their beliefs and values through a restorative lens about their role as teacher and their relationships with their students. The assumption is that this process of reflection fosters empathy for students and a

compassionate view of the students' disruptive behaviours. Teachers may then be more likely to form closer, more positive relationships with students who display disruptive behaviours in their classrooms ( Gregory, Clawson, Davis, &Gerewitz, 2016). While the purpose and the assumptions that underlie RJE have become more explicit in recent years, how professional development in RJE supports change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards disruptive behaviour, discipline practices and their relationships with students who engage in disruptive behaviour is not fully understood.

RJE emphasizes the importance of strong, personal relationships and places them at the centre of all interactions between people within schools and classrooms (Hollweck & Reimer, 2019). RJE involves engagement in a broad continuum of proactive to reactive strategies designed to build, maintain, and repair relationships between students, and between students and teachers (Morrison, 2007; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). However, for teachers to fully adopt a RJ ethos, only implementing RJE activities in their classrooms is not enough. Morrison and Vaandering (2012) stress that RJE is best understood as a praxis that requires critical reflection and action to transform classrooms and schools into relationship-based settings where social engagement is rooted in caring.

RJE's emphasis on relationship aligns with the ethic of care philosophy that Noddings (2005) envisions for ideal schools. Noddings suggests that the relationship between a teacher and student must be a caring relation, "a connection or encounter between two human beings – a carer and a recipient of care," where there is mutual contribution and concern (p.15). She calls on educators to move away from ideologies of control and move towards an ethic of care, which occurs in response to the needs of another (Noddings, 2013). Caring relationships are fundamental to humanity and therefore, a moral imperative exists for humans to remain in caring relationships where they strive to be the "one-caring". Ethical caring is more than the natural feeling of wanting to act on behalf of another that arises from feelings of affection or love, it is responding to the feeling of "I-must" act to the predicament of another. Noddings suggests that ethical caring is initiated when the person caring can sense the need or distress of the person cared-for and commits to help. The actions of the caring person may not be what is exactly wanted by the person cared-for, but there is intentionality that the person caring has put themselves in the shoes of the other person and acted in the best interest of the person cared-for. Noddings (2013) writes:

But the test of my caring is not wholly in how things turned out; the primary test lies in examination of what I considered, how fully I received the other, and whether the free pursuit of his projects is partly a result of the completion of my caring in him. (p.81)

By extension, a teacher's intention to create a caring relationship with students as well as their openness to reflection upon the actions they take to establish these relations represents their acceptance of this this moral imperative. The aim is to cultivate strong teacher-student relationships, regardless of whether the end result is fully optimal.

The primary goal of this dissertation is to explore changes in teachers' perceptions of disruptive behaviour and their relationships with students who exhibit this behaviour through their engagement in RJE PD. The research is guided by Noddings' philosophical stance on the ethical care. Noddings suggests that traditional curriculum, instruction and classroom management approaches in school are dominated by an ideology of control (Noddings, 2005). Discourse surrounding how classroom teachers respond to student behaviour in classrooms often focuses on behaviour management practices meant to help students control their behaviour. For example, group contingency programs that reinforce good behaviour of specific students through external rewards (Maggin et al., 2017), social skills training to help individual students follow classroom rules (Cook et al., 2008) and functional behaviour assessment based interventions that inform behaviour contingencies for students with disruptive behaviours (Gage et al., 2012), have been widely touted as effective approaches for reducing problem behaviours. However, since the disruptive behaviours of some students arise because of unmet social-emotional needs, attention needs to move away from focusing solely on the behaviour of the individual student to examining the interactions between the student and teacher within an ethic of caring.

Beck and Cassidy (2019) suggest that using an ethic of care approach to view disruptive behaviours is also a social justice approach because an ethic of care promotes student success by providing flexibility and understanding for individual differences rather than regarding students as having individual deficits that need to be fixed. Similarly, RJE shifts the focus of teachers' classroom practices away from a focus on social control and towards building, maintaining, and repairing relationships that are important for student success and well-being (Morrison, 2012). Vaandering (2011) points out that justice involves the recognition that all humans are worthy and must be

honoured because they are human, and that injustice occurs when people are objectified. Justice can be restored when relationships are repaired in ways that restore the honour and dignity of those harmed. Engagement in RJE principles and practices may help teachers reposition their attention from managing student behaviours to responding with more care and relational intent. While professional development in RJE (RJE PD) has shown promise to transform teacher perspectives about self, others, practices, and engagement (Vaandering, 2019), less is known about how this professional development transforms teacher's perceptions of their student's agency in minimizing disruptive behaviours. In addition, teachers' beliefs about the barriers they face in implementing RJE principles in classrooms have received little research attention (Parker & Bickmore, 2020). To address these concerns, the present research explores how engagement in RJE PD reportedly transforms teachers' perceptions of the agency of the students who display disruptive behaviours in the classroom, their relationships with these students, and any barriers they have faced in incorporating RJ pedagogies in their classrooms.

## 1.1. RJE Professional Development

Vaandering (2014, 2019) suggests that RJE PD has the potential to increase teachers' social-emotional competencies and create significant changes in their perceptions of self, students, relationships, and practice. She asserts that for RJE understanding and practice to be embraced by teachers, the PD must be grounded in RJE philosophy and principles. Consistent with an ethic of care (Noddings, 2005, 2013), RJE key principles involve addressing harms done by facilitating dialogue and reconciliation to promote caring, relationship-based classroom cultures where well-being and connectedness are key components of effective teaching and learning (Vaandering, 2014). Vaandering (2019) further suggests that paradigm shifts resulting in deep and broad changes in perception only occur when a current personal philosophical stance pushes up against critical self-reflection and explicit engagement with RJE core values.

RJE PD is designed with the aim of shifting teachers' classroom management and discipline practices to a more relational stance. When teachers are faced with displays of disruptive behaviour from students, their ideas about the reasons for the behaviour can affect their attitudes towards those children and their families, subsequently affecting their decisions in how to deal with the misbehaviour (Nash et al.,

2016; Poulou & Norwich, 2000b).  Engagement in RJE PD, consistent with an ethic of care philosophical approach, may help teachers consider how behaviour interventions and strategies that work for some students don't work for others. If teachers embed caring in their response to students who engage in disruptive behaviours, they may change the focus from trying to reduce the frequency of disruptive behaviour of their students solely through a repertoire of behaviour management strategies to one where they build positive relationships with their students.

An exploration of teachers' personal experiences, beliefs, and values may highlight why some teachers form close relationships with students who display disruptive behaviours more easily than others. Pianta (1999) points out that the teacher's own history of being cared for impacts how they understand the goals of teaching, their expectations of students, as well as their interpretation and response to students' emotional behaviours and needs. Like their students, teachers form internal working models of themselves as caring individuals through their own relationships in their social and professional lives. These working models of self in relation to others encompass the feelings, beliefs, and experiences that form through the teacher's own relationship history and in turn, the teacher's sense of self impacts how they interact with students in the classroom. For instance, when teachers report having lower self-efficacy and higher levels of stress, they are more likely to have entrenched views of disruptive behaviour as a fixed trait of the student and may therefore, be less willing or able to support those students (Abidin & Robinson, 2002; Center & Callaway, 1999; B. G. Cook & Cameron, 2010; Hamre et al., 2007). Lower levels of teacher self-efficacy are also connected to "teacher retreating" (Ratcliff et al., 2014), where teachers withdraw from mediating student conflict, a phenomenon that often occurs when a teacher becomes frustrated as a result of student misbehaviour. Teachers engagement in RJE PD is considered as "primarily a means for changing self" (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p.67).  As teachers engage in RJE PD, they are encouraged to deeply examine and reflect on their own attitudes, beliefs, and values to help them understand themselves and their relations with others better.

Building teacher social-emotional competencies in this way may increase the likelihood that they will have more flexibility to reframe any entrenched ideas about student's agency to self-regulate their disruptive behaviours. In principle, RJE PD serves as a catalyst for teachers to reflect deeply on their beliefs and values and to consider

how facilitating caring relationships with students might prevent disruptive behaviour in the classroom. Of interest is how these beliefs contrast with those they hold about control of disruptive classroom behaviours through punitive, behavioural intervention. Also of interest is whether teachers feel they respond to students displaying disruptive behaviour in different ways after engagement in RJE PD and how these changes have influenced student-teacher relations. These potential shifts in perspective, beliefs, actions, and relations with students can be examined through the well-established lens of transformative learning theory.

## 1.2. Transformative Learning Theory

The principles of RJE align well with those that are foundational to transformative learning theory (TLT) (Cranton & King, 2003). Transformative learning (TL) (Mezirow, 1991, 1994, 1997) was first described as the process of effecting change in an adult learner's frame of reference. Frame of reference involves cognitive, conative, and emotional domains and is composed of the two dimensions, habits of mind and point of view. Influenced by assumptions, habits of mind are the routine ways of thinking, feeling, acting that shape the beliefs, values, and attitudes expressed as points of view (Mezirow, 1997). Responding to concerns that there was too great a focus on rationality that limited other ways of knowing, later developments of TLT expanded on the seminal work of Mezirow to include a more holistic, integral approach in what has been referred to as the second wave (Gunnlaugson, 2007). In addition to describing TL as cognitive and rational, common perspectives also describe TL as imaginative and intuitive, spiritual, related to individuation, relational, and relating to social change (Cranton & Taylor, 2012).

Although predominately rational in nature, the seminal work Mezirow (1978, 1981, 1991) provides a useful model as a basis to study perspective transformation in adult learners (King, 2009). Mezirow (1991) described perspective transformation as the processes of reflection adult learners undergo as they work through examining their past experience and meaning to incorporate new ideas. Beginning with a disorienting dilemma, a profound event that causes learners to re-examine their usual perspective and view, Mezirow outlined ten phases that are involved in perspective transformation. The phases that follow can be seen in table 1.1. These phases are not necessarily followed in a linear manner and describe the thoughts, feelings, and efforts that adult

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learners experience as they attempt to reconcile the new information and understanding with their existing belief and values. Since this model of perspective transformation describes how adults integrate new information, perspectives, or practice into their world view as they learn, it provides a valuable framework with which to study processes where teachers may engage in evaluating their values, beliefs and assumptions through professional development (King, 2004).

**Table 1.1 Ten phases of persepective transformation (Mezirow, 1991, p.168-9)**

1.  a disorienting dilemma

2.  self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame

3.  a critical assessment of epistemic, socio-cultural, or psychic assumptions

4.  recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change

5.  exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions

6.  planning of a course of action

7.  acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans

8.  provisional trying of new roles

9.  building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships

10. reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective


Cranton and King (2003) assert that meaningful professional development involves consideration of educators' values, beliefs, and assumptions about teaching and learning. They suggest that the goals of professional development should lead teachers to critically examine their practices and perspectives (or habits of minds) on teaching, often through discussion with others, so that participants acquire alternative ways of understanding why and what they do. When teachers expand their perspectives, discard old habits of minds, see alternatives, and act differently in the classroom, TL about teaching takes place.

According to King (2009), TL is deeply interwoven with the adult learner's life and involves both intellectual and whole life change. However, she asserts that the choice to engage in transformation must be made fully informed, freely, and independently. Within the context of RJE PD, Vaandering (2019) asserts that this professional development can only invite teachers to engage freely with the RJE paradigm and cannot dictate their philosophical stance. This invitation begins with active participation in RJE activities so that teachers are able to engage deeply with RJE principles, interact authentically with each other, and experience the relational paradigm to which they are being invited to change. Vaandering outlines five essential elements of RJE PD that are thought to be necessary for a paradigm shift to occur: (1) understanding of the meaning of a paradigm or philosophical stance, (2) identification of personal core beliefs and values, (3) engagement with the core beliefs, values, and foundational components of RJE, (4) critical reflection of one's personal philosophical stance through the lens of RJE, and (5) facilitated dialogue with others in RJE theory-guided practice. With these suggested elements in mind, the RJE PD series at the center of this research study was explored to examine possible transformations in how teachers view the causes of disruptive behaviour and the importance of a caring, relational stance.

## 1.2.1. Shifting beliefs and attitudes.

As mentioned above, a key component of TL is the shifting of beliefs and attitudes through critical reflection. When teachers engage in RJE PD, they are encouraged to reflect on their personal beliefs and values, and then on how these perspectives resonate or differ from the beliefs and values of RJE (Vaandering, 2019). In a book written to support teacher understanding of RJE, Evans and Vaandering (2016) describe how beliefs and values influence the way teachers perceive disruptive behaviour and the agency of students who engage in disruptive behaviour. In RJE PD, teachers are asked to consider and view student behaviour through RJE core beliefs that all people are worthy and interconnected through relationship, and through RJE values: respect, dignity, and mutual concern. Evans and Vaandering suggest that viewing student behaviour through RJE beliefs and values may potentially broaden and transform the teachers' perspectives. Vaandering (2011) further invites teachers to reflect on the impact of their interactions with students who are disruptive by asking themselves three questions, "Am I honouring?", "Am I measuring?", and "What message

am I sending?". When teachers ask, "am I honouring?", they are checking for their acceptance of their students as they are and if they are encouraging their contribution in any way they can. Asking, "am I measuring?" is asking teachers to examine if they are judging or objectifying a student from a biased perspective. "What message am I sending?" asks teachers to consider how the teachers' behaviour might be perceived by the student. These three questions help teachers become aware of their usual responses to disruptive behaviour and identify if they are accepting of others for who they are and demonstrating empathy and compassion. However, when expanding their viewpoint to include their own behaviour as well as their students, teachers may feel uncomfortable. This discomfort is indicative of a "disorienting dilemma", an experience that may initiate TL (King, 2009; Mezirow, 1991).

Further, engagement with RJE PD may initiate TL when teachers search for new perspectives to make sense of any disorienting dilemmas they are experiencing. TLT provides a powerful framework with which to describe and understand the process by which adults experience significant changes in their values, beliefs, and assumptions of themselves and others. Mezirow's (1991) model of perspective transformation provides a description of the process that adult learners undergo as they work through critically reflecting on their past and current perspectives and reconcile any disorienting dilemma that emerges as they integrate new ideas with their current views. When a transformation takes place, adults learners undergo a significant change where a new understanding is applied and creates significant change in their thinking, decisions, and actions. In RJE PD, this understanding is thought to occur when teachers are given the opportunity to share their ideas and listen to others, so they are then able to co-construct their knowledge and create a deeper understanding of RJE together (Vaandering, 2014, 2019).

### 1.2.2. Shifting roles and relationships.

Another aspect of TL that is stressed in RJE PD is the shifting of roles and relationships. As teachers identify and examine the extent to which their personal beliefs and values resonate with foundational RJE principles, they may encounter a disorienting dilemma that begins the transformative process of change. They look for meaning and deeply examine three core components of RJE: creating just and equitable learning environments in which relationships can thrive, nurturing healthy relationships, and

repairing harm caused to the relationships. These three components are essential to RJE practice, each overlapping and informing the others, and provide teachers with different lenses to view student with disruptive behaviour.

RJE emphasizes building just and equitable learning environments where teachers work toward ensuring that students have their emotional needs met (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). RJE identifies the core needs that are fundamental for student well-being as: autonomy, a sense of personal control; order, a sense of trust about the environment and how it works; and relatedness, a sense of connection and belonging. Attention to meeting these needs is in alignment with an ethic of care that is necessary for building strong positive relationships with students (Noddings, 2005) by shifting the focus of the teacher's role from disseminator of knowledge to teacher as carer (Noddings, 2013). Justice and equity in RJE require that all members of the classroom community participate fully, calling on teachers to bring students who may be marginalized by their disruptive behaviours closer instead of sending them away to the office or hallway. When teachers create just and equitable learning environments through caring, they are more likely to look for the social-emotional needs of students who display the disruptive behaviour. This includes an openness to pedagogies that are grounded in the formation of positive student-teacher relationships (Nash et al., 2016).

When teachers focus on creating a just and equitable environment of caring, it sets the stage for nurturing healthy relationships. Healthy student-teacher relationships are critical to student success and well-being (Hamre et al., 2007; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta, 1999). RJE (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Vaandering, 2014, 2019) encourages teachers to consider the power dynamics in their relationships with students and asks them to reflect on their own needs (including attachment needs) that might be at play when responding to disruptive behaviour. When teachers know themselves well, they are more likely to shift their response to disruptive behaviours to give support from a relational stance. As stated earlier, RJE stresses personal transformations of the teacher and students, distinguishing it from behaviour management approaches that focus on changing the behaviour of students. RJE PD invites teachers to create space and opportunities for students to engage with them and each other to build and nurture healthy relationships. In creating just and equitable learning environments and nurturing healthy relationships, the foundation is created for viewing disruptive behaviour as a

transgression of a healthy teacher-student relationship in contrast to a transgression of external rules for managing behaviour.

### 1.2.3. Shifting responses to disruptive behaviour.

As teachers engage in RJE PD, they are encouraged to transform their perceptions of student's disruptive behaviours to support the nurturing of healthy student-teacher relationships. RJE urges teachers to move their responses to disruptive behaviours away from control and towards building stronger student-teacher relationships by repairing harm and transforming conflict (Morrison, 2015). Harm is considered to be anything that minimizes a person's dignity or worth, while conflict is an interaction that puts relationship at risk. In RJE, teachers are encouraged to change the focus from students' behaviours to address the need for repairing the relationship.

From an ethic of care perspective, traditional behaviour management interventions rarely attend to social-emotional needs and can often trigger unintended negative reactions in students that reinforce the behaviours that teachers want to change (Nash et al., 2016). RJE differs from traditional behaviour management in that it assumes that there are reasons for students' behaviours and intentionally creates ways to uncover those reasons (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). RJE asks teachers to look past the incident for the context associated with it. As noted by Morrison and Vaandering, often students' disruptive behaviours are related to factors outside the classroom and school. These factors may include adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as trauma, poverty, and family conflicts, that can significantly impact students' attendance, focus, emotional regulation, and behaviour. However the impact of ACEs can also be mitigated by a caring healthy relationship with a teacher (Hamre et al., 2007; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). RJE PD helps teachers shift the attention away from the disruptive behaviour of the student to a more relational focus based in an ethic of care. RJE encourages teachers to work towards repairing the harm caused to relationships instead of punishing the behaviour. When teachers embrace the beliefs, values, and components of RJE through professional development, they are more likely to replace discipline with practices that place emphasis on support and care.

### 1.2.4. Describing the transformation.

Transformative learning (TL) in adult learners has been shown to be facilitated through critical reflection, dialogue, situated learning, and relationships (King, 2009). However, there is limited research describing the process of how teachers transform their perspectives through professional development within the RJE context. Bailie and Adamson (2016) examined TL experiences in a restorative practices-based graduate program for teachers and found evidence to describe how restorative processes cultivated emotional and relational learning. Vaandering (2014, 2019) described how a 2-week intensive summer institute designed to implement RJE into schools encouraged transformation in educators from across one province. However, many teachers do not have the means nor the time to engage in graduate programs or prolonged summer institutes. Examining ways in which TL can occur for classroom teachers with a shortened course of professional development is of critical importance. This study informs school districts and those who provide professional development to describe how TL can occur with classroom teachers through a RJE PD after school series within one school district.

## 1.3.  Research Questions

Given the practice of RJE aims to create a relational learning space where values, attitudes, and behaviour can be reflected on, it is anticipated that teachers who engage in RJE PD will reflect on their own beliefs and values, their relationships with students, and their discipline and classroom management practices to build community understanding in preventing and responding to disruptive behaviour. RJE PD potentially provides the catalyst for TL through deep self-reflection and encourages shifts in teacher perspectives on disruptive behaviour that create change in how they interact with their students. While the concept of RJE is well-articulated (Vaandering, 2014, 2019), what is not entirely clear is how individual teachers vary in their response to RJE and RJE PD. Of specific interest is how teacher's beliefs about RJE shift over the course of the professional development, and how their prior experience in life and in teaching might also play a role in influencing these shifts.

Since RJE principles and practices have the potential to promote positive climates in classrooms through this perspective transformation of teachers, a suburban

school district was prompted to work in partnership with a local non-profit restorative justice society to create a four-part professional development series in RJE. The series was designed to encourage perspective transformation by engaging teachers in the principles and practices of RJE through experiential learning in community building circles, affective statements, and restorative questions. Participation in these activities created space for rich discussion about student behaviour at a personal level. Teachers were also provided opportunities to reflect deeply on their personal beliefs and values, examine them through the lenses of RJE, and consider how these beliefs and values might affect their discipline practices and relationships with students. The current research describes the complexity of the perspective transformation of teachers on the principles and practices of RJE and how they may potentially improve their relationships with students who display disruptive behaviours (Hurley et al., 2015).

In summary, the purpose of this study is to examine and provide a deep description of one RJE PD context for teachers and if and how participants' perceptions of disruptive behaviour and their relationships with students who exhibit disruptive behaviour changed over time. Specifically, this dissertation aims to examine how RJE PD facilitates and/or constrains transformation in teachers' perspectives of disruptive behaviours and supports them in maintaining a relational focus. This research adds to the extant literature by 1) describing the complexity of teachers' beliefs and values regarding disruptive behaviour and the students who engage in disruptive behaviours; 2) providing a rich description of how teachers may transform these perceptions as they engage in RJE, and 3) describing how engagement in RJE PD might facilitate the emergence of close student-teacher relationships. Such perspective transformations can be explored qualitatively through the lens of ethic of care theory and transformative learning theory from the field of adult education.

The primary question guiding this study is: How do teachers experience the RJE PD? Further, drawing upon ethic of care and transformative learning theory, the research explores the following sub-question: How are perspectives on student-teacher relationships transformed as teachers engage in RJE PD?

The remaining chapters of this dissertation are organized as follows: Chapter two reviews the literature regarding ethic of care theory, transformative learning theory, and restorative justice in education. Chapter three outlines the methodology and research

practices used in the inquiry. Chapter four describes the RJE PD as the context for teachers' transformative learning. Chapter five outlines the findings from the RJE PD group sessions while chapter six describes the findings from the individual teacher case studies. Chapter seven provides a discussion and summary of the findings with implications for educational practice, study limitations, and suggestions for future research.

# Chapter 2.    Ethic of Care Theory, Transformative Learning Theory, and Restorative Justice in Education

The disruptive behaviours of some students can cause great stress for teachers and lead to feelings of emotional exhaustion and burnout (Aloe et al., 2014). However, as stated in chapter one, several findings suggest that how teachers' perceive student disruptive behaviour may contribute to their emotional and behavioural responses to the student displaying the behaviour (Chang, 2013; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2019; Mikami et al., 2019; Nemer et al., 2019). Furthermore, when teachers report having lower self-efficacy and higher levels of stress, they are more likely to see the behaviour as a willful act of disrespect (Hastings & Bham, 2003; Landers et al., 2008) and less likely to provide emotional support (Center & Callaway, 1999; B. G. Cook & Cameron, 2010; Hamre et al., 2007; Ratcliff et al., 2014), which results in strain on student-teacher relationships important for student success (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Therefore, designing professional development that helps support teachers to develop a better understanding of student disruptive behaviours (Collie et al., 2012) and reflect deeply on their own corresponding thoughts, feelings, and behaviours may be of particular interest for schools and school districts interested in improving relationships between teachers and students who display disruptive behaviours.

In her ethic of care theory, Nel Noddings (2005) provides a philosophical framework that can guide the exploration of changes in teachers' perception of disruptive behaviour and of their relationships with students who exhibit this behaviour. Noddings (2013) argues that the maintenance and enhancement of caring should be the primary goal of education. She suggests that schools are dominated by an ideology of control and stresses the need to shift to a more relational stance that has caring at the center of all interactions. RJE aligns with Ethic of Care Theory by shifting the focus of teachers' classroom practices away from social control and towards building, maintaining, and repairing relationships (Morrison, 2012). Engagement in RJE PD principles and practices may help teachers move their attention from managing student behaviours through discipline and focus more on nurturing and repairing relationships.

TLT is a well-established theory of adult learning that is relevant to study the potential changes in perspective and behaviours that might be influenced by RJE PD. TLT provides a structure to describe the process in which teachers may encounter new ideas and ways of being through PD that can affect significant professional and personal changes (Cranton & King, 2003; King, 2009). This chapter reviews the theory and research relevant to the current study which includes: a) a detailed description of Ethic of Care Theory, b) the evolution of TLT and its application to study RJE PD, and c) RJE in the context of student-teacher relationships.

## 2.1. Ethic of Care Theory

With roots in feminism, Ethic of Care Theory emerged in the early 1980s as an approach to moral philosophy from thought leaders such as Carol Gilligan (1982) and Nel Noddings (2013). Nodding's seminal work led the way for other researchers to confirm and expand her theory for ethics-based practice in caring, particularly in the educational context (Owens & Ennis, 2005). Noddings' emphasis on the ethic of care in schools has endured and continues to influence educational discourse and practice (Bergman, 2004).

Noddings (2013) argues that the maintenance and enhancement of caring should be the primary goal of education and her theory of ethical care serves as the theoretical framework for this dissertation. She states, "if the school has one main goal, ...it should be to promote the growth of students as healthy, competent, moral people" (Noddings, 2005, p.10). She claims that to achieve this, students must learn how to care by first experiencing and learning how to be cared-for. Therefore, she states, teachers have the moral imperative to establish caring relations and to be what she calls the one-caring, or carer, in the student-teacher relationship.

As stated in Chapter one, ethical caring is more than the natural feeling of wanting to act because of a fondness for another, it requires feeling and reacting to an obligation, or "I-must" act, in response to the predicament of another. It begins with listening and being attentive. Noddings often quotes Simone Weil in asking her question, "What are you going through?" (Noddings, 2013, p. 15-6; 2012, p. 773-4). She suggests that caring involves engrossment in the other, a feeling of motivational displacement to act for the other, and a thoughtful response in the best interest of the other. Noddings

contends that through caring, teachers are enacting their ethical ideals and model care for their students.

## 2.1.1. Ethic of care in the classroom.

From a care ethics perspective, both teacher and student contribute to the student-teacher relationship, but the relation is unequal (Noddings, 2012, 2013). Teachers are in the position of greater power and therefore have the greater responsibility to establish a caring relation. The teacher-carer must be concerned with the expressed needs of the student as one cared-for and not only the needs of the school and the curriculum. Noddings (2012) acknowledges the potential conflict presented to caring teachers who need to resolve the question, "When should teachers put aside the assumed need to learn a specific aspect of subject matter and address the expressed need of the student for emotional support, moral direction, or shared human interest? (p.772)". She suggests that teachers should make their first priorities creating the conditions for caring relations and helping students develop the capacity to care (Noddings, 2005, 2012).

In order to care, the teacher is required to first be attentive, listen, and be receptive to the needs of the student. The objective is to understand what the student is experiencing. This understanding requires a degree of empathy in the sense that the teacher must have some awareness of the student's thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and intentions, and a degree of sympathy in the sense that the teacher is moved by the affective condition of the student. Noddings (2012, 2013) refers to this as engrossment, the act of being present and having complete desire for the well-being of the other. Engrossment involves attentive listening such that the one-caring takes pleasure or feels pain in what the other is expressing.

After attending to and receiving the expressed need, the teacher-carer undergoes a motivational displacement, a conscious intention to move towards meeting the needs and the objectives of the student needing care. When this is an academic need, teachers often find this unproblematic and provide help. However, when the student has a different need expressed through disruptive behaviour, it can cause the teacher as one-caring to feel that the student's expressed need is not legitimate. At this stage, the teacher may only try to address the disruption and may not complete the

process of caring. It is important to note that teachers are not expected to discard their own ethical ideals in the act of caring and may still correct the behaviour (Noddings, 2013). However, Noddings first asks teachers to start from a position of respect and concern for the student.

To continue in caring, the teacher as one-caring must respond to the motivational displacement. Ideally, the teacher responds positively to the need, but at the very least the response must maintain the caring relation. For instance, there may be times when teachers may not be able to satisfy the expressed need (at least not in that moment), or the behaviour is so disruptive or disrespectful to others that the teacher disapproves of how the need is expressed. In these cases, the teacher's objective may not be to meet the expressed need, but to maintain the caring relation by finding ways to respond that keep the lines of communication open.

Although the teacher has the greater obligation in the student-teacher relationship, the student is not without responsibility. To complete the caring relation, the student as cared-for needs to demonstrate that the caring has been received. Although the teacher may wish for it, students may not necessarily show gratitude, they only need to have a response that indicates receipt of the caring. Without this receipt of the care, there is no caring relation, despite how hard the teacher has tried.

Noddings points out that the ethic of care puts emphasis on relationships and is different than the everyday sense of caring that puts emphasis on the character of the teacher. In the everyday sense, teachers may work hard to help students succeed and believe they know what students need to achieve that success. However, she asserts that these are assumed needs, rather than expressed needs. Noddings cautions teachers to be clearly aware of what the student as cared-for is asking for and not act on what they think the student should want. She calls teachers who act on assumed needs virtue carers who do not engage in caring-for as described by care ethics. She further suggests that the virtue carer's efforts to care often fall flat and the students who are in most need of a caring relation suffer the most.

### 2.1.2. Teacher as one-caring.

Teachers influence how children navigate the world and everything teachers do has moral implications (Noddings, 2013). Noddings argues that teachers have the responsibility for actively cultivating the ethical ideal, but with the recognition that students will ultimately follow their own path. However, this recognition does not reduce the teachers' power or responsibility for caring. In forming the student-teacher relationship, the caring teacher directly meets the student as cared-for to build trust and model how to care. The teacher fosters the ethical ideal through modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation (Noddings, 2005).

Modeling is vital to caring. When teachers show how to care by creating caring relationships with their students, students experience being cared for. Children learn to care by learning how to be responsive to the care. Noddings suggests that the capacity to care may depend on having adequate experiences of being cared for. She asserts that the teacher needs to be more than just a role model, the teacher is called upon to respond to student need by moral obligation. However, modeling is still important and is facilitated through dialogue when teachers try to explicitly explain what they are doing and why in the act of caring.

Noddings (2005, 2013) describes dialogue as being about talking, listening, sharing, and responding to each other. It is more than just conversation. It is an open-ended common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation. Dialogue is important in the maintenance of the caring relationship by allowing the teacher and student to share information and arrive at well-informed decisions together. It infuses the student-teacher relationship with knowledge of the other that forms the foundation for the response in caring. Teachers care most effectively when they understand the needs of the student and the history of this need. Continuing dialogue builds up a substantial knowledge of the student that serves to guide caring teacher responses.

In addition to modeling care through dialogue, caring requires practice (Noddings, 2005, 2013). Noddings suggests that schools need to provide opportunities for students to care. In classrooms, teacher can enhance the ethical ideal by providing opportunities for students to learn from each other, to be receptive to each other and to relate to each other. Noddings asserts that students learn to care by participating in

caring relationships with adult models like teachers who show them how to care and explicitly talk with them about why caring is important. Then students can practice caring with others.

The final component to developing the ethical ideal in students is confirmation (Noddings, 2005, 2013). Confirmation is the act of affirming and encouraging the best in others. Teachers confirm their students when they see their better selves and encourage their development. It requires the attribution of the best possible motives in accordance with the current reality. That is, when students engage in disruptive behaviour, teachers seek to understand the motivation by considering what they know about the students and by listening carefully to them. Teachers engage in dialogue, disapproving of the behaviour, but clearly indicating to the student that they see someone who is better than the act. It is important to note, however, that confirmation can only be done if it is grounded in the trust of a caring relationship.

## 2.1.3. Students as cared-for.

While teachers have the greater power and responsibility for the caring student-teacher relationship, there is still a role for the student that contributes to caring (Noddings, 2005, 2013). While teachers must consider their own and their students' perspectives to create the conditions that build trusting relationships, for caring to be complete, teachers also require students be the recipients of the care and respond. This involves students first recognizing the attempt to care, which may be difficult if the teachers behave in unfamiliar ways or if the care comes in ways that the student has previously assessed as uncaring. Teachers are then burdened with the responsibility to build trust by listening, receiving, and responding in ways that students perceive their behaviour as caring.

Ideally all student-teacher relationships are close ones, but for some students, caring relationships with teachers can be as or more important than relationships with parents. Noddings asserts that all children need to feel safe in their relations with teachers. She argues that students need to be able to express themselves authentically, to admit error, confusion, or distaste. However, Noddings also points out that students must also accept the responsibility to communicate their needs to teachers. Students need to understand that their responses have effects on their teachers, and this should

be openly discussed. Noddings maintains that although the contributions of teachers and students are necessarily unequal, the student-teacher relationship is still characterized by reciprocity or mutual concern.

## 2.2. Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) was launched by the seminal work of Mezirow in the late 1970's (1978, 1981, 1991) and has since developed into a widely researched topic in adult education (King, 2009). Many scholars have expanded on early TLT ideas and the second wave of TLT offers broader views of TL that have been described as more integrative, holistic, and integral perspectives (Gunnlaugson, 2007, 2008). The following sections describe the TLT as it has evolved over time.

### 2.2.1. The first wave.

Mezirow (1997) argues that since part of the human condition is the need to make meaning of our experiences, the goal of adult education should be to help learners come to their own interpretation of new ideas instead of accepting their preconceived notions as truth or blindly accepting truth as it is described by others. He argues that the prior experiences of adults create stable ways in which they view and understand the world creating strong tendencies to reject ideas that do not align with their preconceptions.

When adults are presented with new information, they determine how it fits into their current schemas of understanding. If the information aligns with past patterns of experience and comprehension, they absorb the information with little disruption to their belief system. But if the information does not align, adult learners may question their values, beliefs, and assumptions to determine what is out of place. They may then look to reconcile the conflicting information against their current schema which sometimes results in a new way of understanding, or a new perspective. This is what Mezirow (1978) calls perspective transformation or transformative learning (TL). TL, he suggests, develops critical thinking and autonomy.

According to Mezirow (1997), TLT describes the process of effecting change in frames of reference, the structures of assumptions through which we understand our

experiences that determine our meaning schemas or preconceptions. A frame of reference has 2 dimensions, habits of mind and point of view. Habits of mind are broad, abstract, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting based on assumptions that constitute a set of codes to be followed. These habits of mind are articulated as a specific point of view. A point of view encompasses the beliefs, value judgements, attitudes, and feelings that shape a particular interpretation. For example, a habit of mind of ethnocentrism would describe others outside of one's own group as inferior, and the point of view would include the judgements and attitudes towards others not in that group. This might be reflected in attitudes of racism, sexism, or homophobia.

Frames of reference arise from cultural assimilation and the influence of caregivers. Of the two dimensions, habits of mind are more durable than points of view. Points of view are subject to continuous change as individuals reflect on content or the process of problem solving and try to understand why actions do not work the way they were anticipated. As individuals examine other people's points of view, they may appropriate them into their own. However, this is less easily done with habits of mind.

TLT arose from Mezirow's seminal study of factors involved in impeding or facilitating the progress of women who were returning to education or the workforce after a significant period of time away (Baumgartner, 2012; Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1978, 1991). Over time, he developed and refined a ten phase description of learning that results in personal change that he called perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow's ten phase model was earlier described in Chapter 1 (see table 1.1, p.7).

Mezirow (1978) described perspective transformation as involving a structural change in the way we see ourselves, our relationships, and the world. He suggested that when we examine our values, beliefs, and assumptions through perspective transformation, we move towards perspectives that are more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative of experience. Often behaviour change will accompany the perspective transformation. Once a perspective had been transformed, Mezirow suggested there is no turning back, the new perspectives permanently replace the old ones.

Over time, Mezirow expanded and refined his theory of TL (Baumgartner, 2012). He suggested that learning occurred in a variety of ways, people engaged in different

types of reflectivity, and dialogue was fundamental to TL. He incorporated ideas from Jürgen Habermas to include three learning domains: instrumental (technical), dialogical or communicative (practical), and self-reflective (emancipatory) learning (Baumgartner, 2012; Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1981, 1991, 1997b). Instrumental learning involves learning through deductive reasoning and hypothesis testing. Dialogical or communicative learning is learning that takes place through discussion with others and the development of meaning through consensus. Self-reflective or critical self-awareness learning occurs with reflection on the belief systems or ideologies that lead to emancipation from previous ways of knowing. Mezirow referred to these previous formed belief systems or ideologies as "meaning perspectives" (Mezirow, 1978, p. 101) and asserted that they can be transformed through these three learning processes. Mezirow argued that meaning perspectives have the tendency to be distorted and TL is the antidote for these distortions. As TL takes place, people begin to understand that knowledge and understanding is constructed through inquiry and dialogue. Mezirow (1991, 1997) suggested that critical reflections of content (the what) and process (the how) happened daily and were necessary to precipitate change, but only critical reflection of premise (the why) results in perspective transformation.

Habermas' influence was also reflected in Mezirow's emphasis on discourse and self-awareness as integral to TL (Baumgartner, 2012; Mezirow, 1981, 1991, 1997). Mezirow (1997) argued that TL requires a form of education different from the pedagogy meant for children. Meaningful learning for adults necessitates that new information not only be presented, but it must be incorporated into already well-developed frames of reference through an active cognitive and affective process. This process requires educators of adults to create experiences designed to foster critical self-reflection and experiences in discourse. Ideal conditions for discourse allow learners to assess the validity of their assumptions. This includes having sufficient knowledge to avoid self-deception and be able to freely exchange ideas. Mezirow emphasized the importance of reflectivity, or the awareness of our habitual ways of perceiving, thinking, and behaving, so that we are alert to how we understand the world around us before we transform that understanding. He explained that discourse leading to TL requires people to be open to alternate perspectives and be able to consider them objectively (Mezirow, 2003).

## 2.2.2. The second wave of TLT.

Critics suggest that Mezirow's theory lacks acknowledgement of the role of social oppression and privilege, and therefore the process of transformation cannot be as universal as he presents (Baumgartner, 2012). Taylor (1998) suggested that context is important in the TL process and point out that there is no empirical support for ideal conditions for TL. Others suggest that Mezirow's model relies too heavily on cognitive processes, does not adequately address other ways of learning and knowing, or address the importance of emotion, aesthetics, and spiritual experience in learning (Gunnlaugson, 2007). As a result of this call for an expanded understanding of different ways of knowing, a second wave of TLT emerged.

The second wave of TLT offers broader views of TL that have been described as more integrative, holistic, and integral perspectives (Gunnlaugson, 2007, 2008). As described by Gunnlaugson (2008), several authors have attempted to expand Mezirow's initial conceptualization of TLT to reach beyond perception transformation and be more comprehensive. Cranton and Roy (2003) attempted to bring together a different viewpoint on TL through the lens of individuation, the process of learning about oneself through psychological means, and authenticity, acting in congruence with our identified beliefs and values, to build a holistic and more inclusive version of TLT. Although he applauded the efforts to bring a broad range of TLTs together, Gunnlaugson (2008) argued that their framework does not address how disparate perspectives can coexist within their concepts and it falls short of integrating different ways of learning.

Dirkx (1998) included additional theoretical perspectives in TLT, and categorized them into four strands. These strands are described as consciousness-raising, critical reflection, development, and individuation. The first strand, consciousness-raising, relies heavily on the work of Freire that fosters freedom among learners by promoting critical consciousness. TL through this lens is both socially and personally emancipatory. Dirkx's second strand of critical reflection focuses on the seminal work of Mezirow on TLT and perspective transformation. The third strand is linked to adult development through the work of Daloz (1986) that orients TL to psycho-social and developmental contexts of personal growth. Finally, Dirkx described the fourth and final strand of transformation as individuation. This strand emphasizes the depth psychology work of Boyd (1994) that links TL to uncovering the unconscious aspects of self that influence

how we understand the world and bring them into our conscious awareness to be examined and evaluated. While Gunnlaugson (2008) acknowledged that Dirkx provides a helpful overview of the first wave perspectives, he argued that this summary still does not advance a comprehensive framework that encompasses the full array of TL perspectives.

Finally, Gunnlaugson noted that Taylor (1998, 2007) also suggested the need for a more comprehensive summary of TLT and mapped out a number of the key themes from leading theoretical views in a useful structure. However, Gunnlaugson (2008) argued that Taylor still falls short of creating an overarching meta-framework that expands on the first wave theories and fully integrates them with emerging second wave theories. He suggested that while the second wave contributions to TLT are helpful to bring out subtle connections and patterns that integrate and apply first-wave approaches, a subfield of TL metatheory is necessary. He argued that the metatheoretical subfield should involve "discourse that accounts for transformative learning as a multifaceted phenomena (sic) with multiple dimension and expression across various contexts" (p.129). A shared meta-discourse is necessary to expand the scope of first and second wave theories so that TLT perspectives can be integrated and better understood collectively. Gunnlaugson (2007) called for theorists to increase their reflexivity and awareness of existing categories of TL to develop a new metatheoretical vison of inquiry into higher order questions and issues. Without the evolution of a TL specific metaframework that represents psychological, spiritual, social, political, and cultural contexts, Gunnlaugson suggested that theorist will fall back to first-wave frameworks that are too limited to address broad and complex objectives. He advocated for the inclusion of generative dialogue as a method and practice to spark and support TL in groups.

Gunnlaugson (2007) described generative dialogue as a practice of conversation that draws on multiple ways of knowing rather than relying on reason. Group conversations can be facilitated to move through processes starting with conventional discussion, progressing to debate involving strong identification with one's point of view, then to reflective dialogue characterized by an openness to change one's point of view, and finally to generative dialogue where meaning and understanding is co-created. Gunnlaugson argued that the practice of generative dialogue invites and honours the multiple ways of knowing of others that might otherwise be suppressed. It cultivates

meta-awareness, the awareness of our thoughts, emotions, and ways of being, that help us uncover our unconscious assumptions, attitudes, and behaviours allowing the creative possibilities of developing new knowledge. He suggested that by looking at processes of generative dialogue, there is more space to recognize and honour areas of growth and development within TLT.

## 2.2.3. Transformative learning in professional development.

TLT is one framework to study how educators grow and develop through professional development (Cranton & King, 2003; King, 2004, 2009). Teachers develop habits of mind about teaching and learning over time from their community, the institutions they work in, their friends, family, and colleagues. These habits of mind are also shaped by their personalities, personal preferences, and experiences. Without a process for reflection on their teaching, Cranton and King (2003) suggest that educators may automatically follow rules and principles without question. They argue that professional development should focus on TL, it should lead teachers to critically examine their practice and uncover new ways of understanding what they do. They suggest that the context of teaching and learning is complex and evolving, and educators must continually reflect on their practice to stay relevant and effective. Meaningful professional development, they argue, must go beyond strategies and techniques, and involve exploring teachers' values, beliefs, and assumptions about teaching and the ways in which they view the world.

Critical self-reflection and teacher collaboration are important components of all professional development. Chapman (2000) argues that teacher professional development is the key to improving educational standards and that self-reflection and collaborative practice are crucial to improving teaching and learning. Borko, Jacob, and Koellner (2010) add that teacher professional development must move away from single workshops and involve long term inquiry that supports teachers working collaboratively to develop their skills and knowledge through critical reflection about their practice. In addition, Cranton and King (2003) suggest that professional development that helps educators better understand what they do and how they do it must foster content, process, and premise reflection. Content reflection involves examining the events or description of a problem. This might be the "what" of the lesson, interaction, or event. Process reflection looks at the strategies used or the "how" of the problem. Teachers

might reflect on ways in which their thinking might have been faulty. Premise reflection asks teachers to question the values, beliefs, and feelings they have towards the event or problem and is driven by asking "why". While all three types of reflection are valuable to help understand how teachers interpret their experiences, it is premise reflection that has the potential to lead to TL and a change in meaning perspective. Professional development activities should include strategies that encourage critical questioning that promotes premise reflection.

King (2009) describes how TLT helps explain educators' experiences of change in their frame of reference as they engage in educational technology professional development. She suggests that TL in the professional development context is informed by recognizing the diverse needs, contexts, experiences, and abilities of educators. When educators are viewed as adult learners, their professional development needs might be described as needing active learning experiences, building on prior knowledge, and cultivating a climate of respect and safety. Professional development might be viewed as risk-taking since educators may be required to step away from their expert or knowing stance and engage as learners in areas where they may not feel competent. King has developed an adult learning model to inform professional development practice in educational technology that can be applied more generally to other professional development areas.

King describes the adult learning model for professional development in technology as a journey of transformation that has four major stages: Fear and uncertainty, testing and exploring, affirming and connecting, and new perspectives. Each stage has characteristic emotions, ways of understanding, and approaches to learning technology. Educators that experience the journey of transformation proceed through the stages until they develop a new perspective of using technology in their practice which has profound effects on their perspectives and practices of education.

## 2.2.4. Transformative Learning Theory and Restorative Justice in Education

Because TL often involves interactions through discourse or generative dialogue, it can be considered a relational process (Southern, 2007). Southern suggests that transformation is made possible through the creation of learning communities based in

care that hold relationships in ways that challenge and support learners in negotiating meaning, expanding understandings, and co-creating meaning through shared responsibility. When TLT is thought of in this way, it becomes a complementary framework with which to study changes in people through restorative practices.

Abramson (2016) utilized TLT research methods to study the perspective transformation of students taking a restorative justice course in an undergraduate program. Her inquiry examined whether perspective transformation was experienced, what students felt attributed to the transformation, the impact, and endurance of the transformation. Abramson found that many of the undergraduate students experienced transformation of perspective from retributive to restorative, often involving transformation of beliefs, feelings, and relationships. These transformations led to changes in behaviour with respect to their work, volunteering, education, and personal lives. Abramson also reports that the personal transformations were sustained over time and suggests recommendations to advance RJ in mainstream education systems.

Bailie and Adamson (2016) discuss findings from 2 studies that examine the TL of educators in a graduate program based on restorative practices at the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP). Adamson's mix methods study explored the graduate students' experience of the program's classroom processes and how they influenced their thinking and behaviour. He found that participants described their learning in the program in five stages that align with the TLT framework: engaging with content, reflecting on new information, challenging existing frames of reference, experimenting with new ideas, and adjusting behaviour to incorporate new restorative processes.

Bailie and Adamson paid attention to the dynamics of power and authority between students and instructors. Through a narrative qualitative approach, these authors found that TL experiences involving how graduate students build and maintain bonds with others was characterized by intense emotions and was oriented towards personal growth in relationships. Although many graduate students entered the program to focus on improving their professional practice, they reported that their experience in the program gave them a deeper understanding of their own motivations that were rooted in personal and relational needs. Participants reported that it was the consistent

application of restorative practices in the graduate classroom that created an experience of personal growth that led to the transformation of their professional practice.

## 2.3. Restorative Justice in Education

Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) stems from the restorative justice (RJ) framework that was developed to address societal harms that occur as a result of criminal behaviour (Daloz, 1986). Differing from criminal justice, RJ has roots in indigenous and spiritual traditions and reframes judicial reactions to wrongdoing by moving the focus away from punishment of the offender to exploring the necessary requirements to repair harm and restore relationships between all who have been affected (Zehr, 1995, 1997, 2002; Zehr & Mika, 1998). Morrison (2006) first provided an international review of the role of schools in the promotion of RJ to develop a restorative society that focuses on the needs of those affected by harm. Interest in RJE as an approach to reduce problematic behaviour and increase prosocial behaviour in students has continued to grow (Gomez, Rucinski, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2021).

In RJ, crime is more than a violation of law, it is a violation of people and relationships that creates an obligation to repair all the harm done (Zehr, 1995). Crime involves injuries in four dimensions: the victim, the interpersonal relationships, the offender, and the community. This differs from a traditional view of crime that mainly focuses on the social dimensions of crime and defines the state as the victim. Through a retributive lens, crime is seen as a violation of rules and the relationship between victim and offender is irrelevant. By contrast, a restorative lens focuses on the interpersonal dimensions of crime, identifying people as victims and viewing crime as a violation of people and of relationships. Attention is shifted from the blame and guilt of the offender to the healing of all involved. Instead of being concerned with offenders getting what they deserve, RJ compels offenders to repair the harm done and ensure victims get their needs met.

Justice through a restorative lens involves searching for ways to make things right for and between people (Zehr, 1995). Instead of focusing on what punishment is most fit for the crime, RJ asks, "What can be done to make things right?' Justice is restoration, not retribution, and the focus is to repair injury and promote healing. The first goal of RJ is restitution and healing for victims, followed by reconciliation and healing of

relationships, then accountability and healing of the offender, and finally, healing of the community. While a full sense of justice may be not always be possible, Zehr suggested that even approximate or partial justice moves towards recovery and transcendence. RJ seeks to heal the emotional wounds caused by wrongdoing rather focusing on ensuring that the offender receives the appropriate punishment. It is this vision of justice reform that provided the inspiration to change the view of student discipline from social control to social engagement (Morrison & Riestenberg, 2019; Morrison, 2015).

As the efficacy of RJ practices in the criminal system was realized, educators in the 1990s began infusing restorative principles into school discipline in response to the failure of zero tolerance discipline policies (Bonell et al., 2018; Morrison & Riestenberg, 2019). While zero tolerance policies were intended to reduce violence in schools, they resulted in a disproportionate number of suspensions and expulsions of racially marginalized student (Winn, 2018). RJE was seen as a more just and equitable approach to maintaining peace in schools, reframing serious behaviour problems from violations of institutional rules of order to violations of relationships (Morrison, 2015). Morrison (2007) suggested that a universal, school-wide preventative approach could create the healthy culture and climate necessary for a restorative response to harm. Other authors also continued to identify and reflect on values, principles, and practices that define RJE.

## 2.3.1. Restorative values.

Pranis (2006) suggested that values are the foundation of RJ and can categorized as process values, values necessary for an interaction to be restorative and individual values, values that describe qualities in participants that restorative processes aim to nurture While transformation through RJ require both the process and the individuals to have restorative values, it is often the values that characterize processes that are discussed in the literature and define what it means for an interaction to be restorative.

Pranis asserted that restorative values must be embedded in philosophy and guide practice to create safe environments that enable people to engage in restorative processes. The most consistent value identified in the literature as necessary for a process to be described as restorative is respect. Restorative processes also involve

maintaining individual dignity, inclusion, responsibility, humility, mutual care, reparation, and non-domination. Restorative processes strive to help people be their best selves to promote good relationships through exhibiting behaviour consistent with restorative values. Pranis suggested that when students do not feel emotionally, physically, mentally, or spiritually safe, they fear being taken advantage of, abused or ridiculed, and cannot be vulnerable to act on these values. Safety created by promoting restorative values are paramount to supporting behaviours meant to guide the building of better relationships. Pranis argued that when practitioners engage at the level of values, they do not abandon restorative values, even when challenges to restorative practice ensue. They still find creative ways to act on those values despite the lack of support for the practices by their institution.

Elliott (2011) also suggested that RJ is activated through value-based responses to conflict. RJ values describe the ideal for how we want to be and live together. Elliott proposed that restorative processes facilitate learning by creating environments where people can reflect on the experiences of an event through the lens of RJ core values. She argued that educational institutions that hope to promote responsible citizenship must include an ethic of care through the nurturing of relationships. The value of care is consistent with and central to the values of RJ. Emphasizing the interdependence, needs, and engagement that characterize the human condition, Elliott described RJ as a set of values by which we should all strive to conduct ourselves to live in world with what she called security with care.

To help educators embrace RJ in school settings, Evans and Vaandering (2016) provided a resource explaining RJE through their book, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education: Fostering Responsibility, Healing, and Hope in Schools*. In this book, they described the core values of RJE as respect, dignity, and mutual concern, mirroring the values identified by Llewellyn and Llewellyn (2015) that are necessary for relational equality or justice from a relational standpoint. Evans and Vaandering borrowed the metaphor from  Zehr (1995) and described these values as lenses through which we view our interactions with others. They suggest that teachers examine their personal values and interactions with others alongside the values of RJE that keep the focus on people as worthy and relational.

## 2.3.2. Restorative principles.

In addition to aligning with core values, RJE is also grounded in key principles, beginning first with the belief that human beings are profoundly relational (Pranis, 2006). Since we are interconnected and interdependent, RJE assumes that we have mutual responsibility for the impact we have on each other. Unlike in criminal justice where the focus is on the violation of law, RJ involves the healing of all parties since harm to one is considered harm to all. RJ is centered around the belief that harmful behaviour is a violation of people and relationships (Morrison, 2015; Zehr, 1995; Zehr & Mika, 1998). These violations create obligations and liabilities to repair the harm that emerged from the wrongdoing. Justice in a restorative sense is about righting the wrongs, seeking healing, and restoring harmony. These principles can be summarized as Zehr's three R's of RJ, respect, responsibility, and relationships (Morrison, 2015). Zehr's three R's are reflected in RJE by providing a framework for citizenship education that is focused on how we might live together in peace.

Llewellyn and Llewellyn (2015) characterized RJE as an approach to creating spaces in a learning community for relationships to be built and nurtured, rather than a response to disciplinary issues. Also emphasizing the relational nature of humans, they suggested RJE is about developing socially just education. The focus, they argued, is on the interactions of people within the learning community and not on developing rational individual learners. They further suggested that RJE requires educators to engage with and embrace a deep, rich understanding of restorative principles and be committed to dialogical processes that create mutual understanding.  Limiting RJE solely to restorative practices places the focus on obtaining behavioural objectives and obscures the deeper connection to RJ principles that emphasize relational theory.

Evans and Vaandering (2016) identified three core goals of RJE for educators: creating just and equitable learning environments, nurturing healthy relationships, and repairing harm and transforming conflict. They suggested that these are the components that provide the basis for a comprehensive framework for practicing RJE in classrooms.

The first aim of a RJE classroom approach is to create a just and equitable learning environment. Justice in Evans and Vaandering's RJE framework broadly describes the requirement for the mutual pursuit of what each person needs for

individual and collective well-being. It includes more than addressing behaviour and applying consequences; It involves identifying inequitable relationships and finding ways to provide for the needs of everyone in those relationships. In this definition, justice is closely linked to equity or fairness. When a teacher places focus on justice and equity, space is created for understanding and addressing underlying student need that can manifest as disruptive behaviour. Creating a just and equitable learning environment requires explicitly addressing injustices in the classroom by ensuring that vulnerable students are cared for and all students are included.

Evans and Vaandering suggest ways in which justice and equity can be promoted in the classroom. They assert restorative practices are designed to facilitate equitable relationships in which all are treated with respect and dignity. They provide the example of the restorative justice circle process that allows for each person to have an equal opportunity to speak from their own point of view. In the circle, each person is visible, each voice and story have equal power and importance, and behavioural expectations are the same for students and adults alike (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015). The source of key teachings of the restorative justice circle comes from Indigenous roots that emphasize that everyone is interconnected, that the group is made of distinct parts (people) that must be in balance and whose contributions are equally valuable. The responsibility of maintaining the balance and equity of the circle is given to the circle keeper, or facilitator. The circle keeper ensures that all participants have an equal voice through the use of a talking piece. The talking piece is passed from person to person in the circle and only the person holding the talking piece may speak. The use of the talking piece allows for the holder to speak without interruption and allows listeners to give their full attention to the speaker without distractions. The talking piece provides every circle participant an equal opportunity to speak or pass. The power and control of the circle is shared as each person has the expectation to only speak when holding the talking piece.

The second goal of RJE outlined by Evans and Vaandering (2016) is to nurture the healthy relationships that are essential to creating just and equitable learning environments. Characterized by a sense of belonging, healthy relationships are at the heart of creating positive classroom cultures. They are nurtured through communicating respectfully and sharing power in ways that meet individual and collective needs. In order to do this, teachers must be able to critically reflect on the power dynamics within

their classrooms and be aware of how their use of power is impacting their relationships with students (Vaandering, 2014, 2019). The primary focus of RJE is on teacher self-awareness and self-knowledge in support of the premise that change in classroom relationships start with a change in the teacher (Elliott, 2011).

Despite efforts to create just and equitable learning environments and nurture healthy relationships, interactions between students and between students and teachers can still result in conflict and harm. Evans and Vaandering (2016) suggest that the third of RJE goal is to repair harm and transform conflict by shifting focus from the punishment of the offender to the promotion of dialogue to restore relationships. They define harm as anything that undermines someone's dignity or minimizes their worth, while conflict is an interaction that has potential to damage relationships. Disruptive behaviours in schools often cause harm and/or create conflict. However, when students engage in disruptive behaviour, RJE assumes that there are underlying reasons for the actions and creates space to uncover the context (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Vaandering, 2011). Rather than focusing on rule infractions, RJE seeks to determine who or what was harmed, what needs arise from the harm, and how the harm should be repaired and by whom. When students engage in disruptive behaviour, RJE attempts to address the needs of everyone affected to the greatest extent possible: the class, the student, and the teacher. Repairing harm and transforming conflict into restorative dialogue require teachers to create time and space to ask questions, listen to students, and engage in dialogue that helps to restore relationships (Llewellyn & Llewellyn, 2015).

## 2.3.3. Restorative practices in schools.

The early integration of RJE surfaced from the enthusiasm and success that came with the new paradigm of RJ as an alternative to traditional approaches to criminal wrongdoing (Morrison & Riestenberg, 2019). Building on Zehr's three R's of RJ, respect, responsibility, and relationships; a framework of restorative discipline practices as an alternative to punitive approaches were developed for schools (Morrison, 2015). However, over time, the RJE paradigm began to shift from responding to and repairing harm to building healthy school cultures. RJE placed the emphasis on shifting school cultures from traditional institutional hierarchies that establish social control, to relational ecologies that motivate good behaviour (Brown, 2018; Llewellyn & Morrison, 2018; Morrison & Riestenberg, 2019). Morrison and Vaandering (2012) suggested that

relational ecologies describe the connection between people in school environments and highlight the inherent relational qualities between them. They stated that "relational ecology has emerged as the normative theoretical framework for understanding and practicing restorative justice" because RJE emphasizes social engagement over social control and is understood as a means of nurturing human capacity (p.146). Brown (2015) suggested that many factors contribute to a school's relational ecology. Schools can develop a culture of well-being, belonging, and safety in an RJE framework by adopting a number of RJE proactive and reactive practices (Morrison & Riestenberg, 2019).

In addition to helping improve the climate and culture of schools, Parker and Bickmore (2020) suggest that RJE practices can also promote peacebuilding education and democratic citizenship. They point out that restorative justice circles as outlined by Boyes-Watson and Pranis (2015) provide inclusive spaces for students and teachers to talk, listen, and learn from each other. As described earlier, a talking piece is used and provides everyone a chance to speak equally which helps to build equity, relationships, and classroom community. Parker and Bickmore suggest that circle processes can be used to proactively promote peace education by teaching students how to communicate and make decisions together, engage in peace pedagogy that uses student perspectives on conflicts in subject matter as learning opportunities, and actively respond with peacemaking when conflict occurs by considering the perspectives of all stakeholders to repair the harm caused to people and relationships. Because all these goals promote peace education, Parker and Bickmore refer to circle processes as restorative peace circles.

Parker (2016) also emphasized that restorative justice circles are an ideal way for  teachers to engage students in conversations about conflicting social and political issues or conflict dialogue. Conflict dialogue occurs when teachers explicitly highlight conflicting or complex perspectives to stimulate critical thinking and self-reflection through open discussion. Parker argues that engaging in conflict dialogue creates space for inclusive and democratic learning and is necessary for peacebuilding. By contrast, avoiding discussions that involve conflicting or complex perspectives and supressing open dialogue reinforces defensive teaching practices that do not promote critical thought and may reinforce oppressive viewpoints (Llewellyn & Parker, 2018).  Llewellyn and Parker argue that this traditional form of teaching does nothing to prepare students

to be thoughtful adults who will participate in democratic process that promote peace and justice.

Winn (2018) suggests that when teachers and students engage in restorative circles, they learn how to use their personal histories as a resource to form social connections, develop common values, and build and repair community. As the talking piece is passed from person to person, participants have the opportunity to tell their story and define themselves to others in ways that may have previously been unknown. Winn suggests that restorative justice circles transform learning spaces because they provide an avenue to change the way student and teachers perceive themselves and each other in ways that promote understanding and deepen relationships. Winn further asserts that restorative justice circle processes may help to address social inequities by providing teachers and students with a mechanism to include all voices in discussion and begin to transform how we relate to each other.

Morrison (2007) described three levels of intervention in a school-wide approach to RJE: primary (universal), secondary (targeted), and tertiary (intensive). Primary practices are intended to cultivate the social-emotional competencies of the entire school population to develop relational ecologies that encourage feelings of belonging and support resolving differences in respectful and caring ways. In this manner, RJE seeks to improve the social-emotional learning (SEL) of students and adults as well as the overall school climate (Morrison & Riestenberg, 2019). Restorative practices at the primary level range from individual classroom (Pranis & Boyes-Watson, 2015) to school-wide (Brown, 2015, 2018) approaches. Secondary restorative practices come into play when wrongdoing or conflict occurs.  These practices are designed to address harm and restore harmony between small groups or individuals. The primary function of secondary practices is to repair the relationships that were formed through primary approaches. Finally, tertiary interventions are intensive processes developed to respond when serious harm has occurred. Tertiary practices often involve whole community approaches and are used when many relationships have been fractured and need to be rebuilt.

School-wide RJE approaches have begun to be more widely implemented and studied in many jurisdictions (Brown, 2015, 2017; Reimer, 2020; Vaandering, 2014). Whole school approaches to RJE have shown promise in reducing bullying and

aggression among students and improve mental health outcomes (Bonell et al., 2018). In their examination of some traditional interventions to reduce aggressive adolescent behaviour, Yeager, Dahl, and Dweck (2018) noted that only those programs that implemented RJ principles demonstrated benefits to reduce school discipline problems. Underpinning the three levels of RJE school practice is a restorative ethos that seeks to address concerns with people in a power-balanced way (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). It is this ethos that can change classroom practice, even if schoolwide RJE is not adopted.

## 2.3.4. Restorative practice and Care Theory.

Interest in RJ within the education context continues to grow and connections are being made to many well established and researched areas. For instance, a recent document released by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) outlines how restorative practice aligns with social-emotional learning in building equitable learning environments (CASEL, 2020). Elliott (2011) also suggests that RJE aligns with Care Theory by drawing parallels to both their emphases on relationships, interdependence, needs, engagement, and moral reasoning. However, as stated earlier, RJE originates from a call for alternative approaches to the criminal justice system (Zehr, 1997) and is rooted in a morality of justice, which differs from the moral imperative of an ethic of care that Noddings (2013) asserts is fundamental to the work of schools.

RJ was conceived with the aim to right the wrongs when harm has been done and promote the healing of people and relationships (Zehr, 1997). RJE evolved from these new views of justice to shift schools from a focus on rules and punishment to a focus on belonging and the repair of relationships in the hope of building healthy school cultures (Morrison, 2015). By contrast, an ethic of care compels educators to recognize the specific needs of their students, and act with commitment to the impulse of "I must do something" (Noddings, 2013). Noddings argues that teaching is not a role, it is a caring relation, and teachers cannot be relieved of their responsibility to care. She argues that the student-teacher relationship is unequal by necessity and that teachers are required to consider their students' perspectives as well as their own (Noddings, 2012). She suggests that good teachers seek to have their students pursue their own growth, "they do not want their students to be constrained by the personal or

professional needs of their teachers" (p. 107). Caring requires teachers to reflect on their own needs and ensure that they do not interfere with the growth of their students. Therefore, while healthy relationships in general are central to RJE, Care Theory specifically emphasizes the student-teacher relationship with teachers having the main responsibility of developing and maintaining a caring relationship with their students.

It is this obligation of teachers to seek and develop caring relationships with all their students that makes an ethic of care essential to this study. While RJE PD may assist teachers in understanding and possibly changing themselves for the more equitable and just treatment of students (Evans & Vaandering, 2016), it does not compel teachers to do so. Instead, RJE is described as invitational, and encourages engagement. Care Theory not only requires engagement, Care Theory also requires that teachers actively work to develop caring relationships with their students. Therefore, it is necessary for this study to explore the transformation of teacher perspectives of their students as they experience the RJE PD within the context of an ethic of care.

## 2.4. The Current Study

The aim of this dissertation is to add to this body of literature regarding the TL teachers may experience as they engage in RJE PD. Specifically, this study explores how teachers experience the RJE PD and examines their perspectives on disruptive behaviour and their relationships with the students who exhibit the disruptive behaviours. Studies exist that investigated TL in teachers enrolled in a RJE graduate program (Bailie & Adamson, 2016) and in an intensive 10 full-day session RJE PD institute delivered over two weeks of summer vacation (Vaandering, 2014, 2019). However, teachers often have busy private and professional lives and do not have the time to commit to such extensive programs. This study contributes a much-needed description of the ways a more manageable four-part afterschool series may support or hinder teachers' TL and improve their relationships with students. The research provides a rich description of teacher engagement with RJE PD, each other, and their perspectives of students with disruptive behaviours.

The methodology used in the research is outlined in chapter three and includes a description of the research situation, the research design, the participants, the secondary use of data, and analysis.

# Chapter 3.    Methodology

This chapter begins with situating the qualitative research of this thesis within the school district program evaluation and is followed by a description of the research design, the study participants, and the methods of data collection. The chapter concludes with a description of the process for data analysis.

## 3.1.  Situating the Research

The RJE professional development series that is at the centre of this research was developed by a local restorative justice society and implemented within the school district. The original program evaluation focused on the feasibility and social validity of the RJE PD series, and a wide range of measures were selected. The focus of study in this paper is a secondary analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data for a deeper understanding of the experiences of teacher participants that was not part of the initial program evaluation.

In the original program evaluation, the focus was on evaluating whether teachers felt that the RJE practices could be incorporated into classroom routines, whether additional professional development would be necessary, and overall, whether the teachers felt that the RJE educational practices had merit and would benefit their students. The complexity of teachers' experiences and TL during the RJE PD was not a primary focus of investigation in the program evaluation; however, the recorded sessions and interviews with teachers also provided a rich source of qualitative data to analyze in this regard. Therefore, as my dissertation research, I decided to re-analyze a subset of the qualitative data to explore the TL of teachers as they engaged in RJE PD.

As described in chapters one and two, TL occurs among and within people. Transformation occurs when adult learners have experiences that cause them to think critically, enhancing their self-awareness and creating a deeper level of self-understanding (Mezirow, 1991). They shift or reconstruct their internal beliefs and assumptions to adjust to new knowledge and understanding. Research indicates that transformation is most effectively facilitated when there is situated learning that promotes critical reflection through dialogue and relationships with others (King, 2009). Discussions in the RJE PD that highlight personally and socially held beliefs and

assumptions about students with disruptive behaviour create opportunities for the whole group to examine any biases or blind spots and consciously co-construct new beliefs and understandings.

As mentioned previously, the program of evaluation was conducted by the school district with the aim of establishing the feasibility and social validity of RJE PD created and delivered by a local restorative justice society. When the initial phase of the program evaluation was concluded (i.e., at the conclusion of the RJE PD, but prior to follow-up data collection 6 months later), permissions from the school district and the Simon Fraser University (SFU) Office of Research Ethics were requested to use selected measures in the database for further exploration of teachers' transformative learning. Although complimentary to the original evaluation aims, this dissertation research extends the program evaluation project with more in-depth qualitative analysis of the processes involved in teacher perception shifts over the course of the professional development series.

In response to the school district's efforts to build capacity in teachers to facilitate restorative practices in classrooms, a local restorative justice society developed a four-part RJE PD weekly afterschool series called *Proactive Circles: A Four-Part After School Series for Teachers* (Appendix A). My role as district principal was to review the RJE PD series to ensure that the program adhered to school district guidelines and objectives; oversee the scheduling, monitor the implementation, and design the program evaluation of the RJE PD. I answered questions and provided feedback when requested by the society and the final version of the professional development series was approved by the school district before it was offered to teachers (see table 3.1 Timeline of School District Program Evaluation Procedures).

In September, classroom teachers were offered participation in the series by email as one of several school district PD opportunities provided for the 2019-20 school year. The professional development was described as an afterschool series on four consecutive Tuesdays in October and November. Advertising for the series suggested that teachers would:

- Learn the principles and practices of Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) through the experiential learning of Circles, Affective Statements, and Restorative Questions, and

- Gain classroom strategies and reflect deeply on personal beliefs, values and how they may affect classroom practice.

**Table 3.1      Timeline of School District Program Evaluation Procedures**

| Time Period | Events |
|---|---|
| Spring-Summer 2019 | Development of the RJE PD by local Restorative Justice Society |
| September 2019 | School district advertises of the RJE PD series and opens online teacher registration; Teachers sign school district consent forms agreeing to allow recordings of class activities, their journals, and surveys to be used for RJE PD program evaluation. |
| October – November 2019 | RJE PD sessions are conducted at a school site on for 2 hours, one time per week for 4 weeks. All sessions were audio recorded. Teacher surveys were collected at the start of the first session. Journal entries were collected at the start of each subsequent session.<br><br>Three volunteer teachers were interviewed in their classrooms at time of their convenience. Interviews were audio recorded. |
| December 2019 | School District RJE: PD Program Evaluation-Phase 1 completed.<br><br>Permission is granted by school district for secondary use of data to study transformational learning of teachers attending the RJE PD series. Study procedures approved by SFU Research Ethics Board. |
| March 2020-present | Covid-19 prevents the ongoing collection of follow-up data in the RJE PD program evaluation. |
| May 2021 | Learning Activities Survey (LAS) was administered, focus group (all participants) and follow-up interviews (focal teachers) conducted.<br>School District RJE: PD Program Evaluation –Phase 2 completed. |
| June 2021 | Qualitative analysis of secondary data and write-up of dissertation |

At the beginning of each session of the RJE PD series, participants were informed that the session was being audio-recorded on a school district device. Multiple sources of data were collected for the evaluation of the RJE PD program throughout the duration of the series. The school district also continued to periodically collect data after the series was completed. However, due to the circumstances resulting from the Covid-

19 pandemic, schools stopped providing in-person instruction in March 2020, interrupting the program evaluation.

Full, in-person instruction resumed in September of the following school year and provided teachers the opportunity to resume RJE classroom practices learned in the professional development series. Eighteen months after the end of the RJE PD series, as part of the program evaluation, all participants were sent a follow-up survey (modified LAS) and offered an opportunity to participate in a focus group discussion conducted and recorded through Microsoft (MS) Teams. Separate follow-up interviews (Appendix B) with the three focal teachers, Christine, Kay, and Luthien were conducted so that they might describe and explain their experiences and perspectives in depth. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all follow-up interviews were conducted and recorded using the school district accounts in MS Teams. Transcripts of the focus group discussion and interviews were downloaded from MS Teams and then checked for accuracy.

Multiple sources of data collected were used by the school district for the purpose of program evaluation of the original RJE PD series. The focus was on evaluating whether teachers felt they incorporated the RJE practices into their classroom routines, whether the felt additional professional development was necessary, and overall, whether they felt that the RJE educational practices was beneficial to their students. Once evaluation of the program was completed, selected qualitative data were provided for secondary analysis for the purpose of this dissertation.

## 3.2.  Research Design

This research was designed as an embedded case study, with the RJE PD representing the case. As shown in Figure 3.1, two sub-units of analysis are transformative learning of 1) the whole group in RJE sessions and 2) three individual teachers.

```
The Case:
Restorative Justice In Education
Professional Development Series
Teacher Transformative Learning

    Unit of Analysis 1: RJE PD Whole Group
    - Teachers' shifting perspectives that emerge over
    time through engagement in RJE PD discussions and
    activities

    Unit of Analysis 2: Individual Teachers
    -Teachers' shifting perspectives that emerge
    through discussion in individual interviews
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Figure 3.1 Embedded case study with two units of analysis

This dissertation research was designed with the aim of describing the TL process of teachers who participated in a four-part RJE PD series. The RJE PD series was selected as the case of study due to many factors that suggested it would yield useful data (Yin, 2018). A case study approach is appropriate when investigating a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within the contextual conditions that are tied to its understanding. Case studies typically involve more variables of interest than data points and benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions that guide the design, data collection and analysis. When offering professional development, teachers come from a variety of different backgrounds, have different teaching experience, and teach different ages. Professional development in RJE is focused on addressing this diversity of teachers, their relationships with students, and their conceptual understandings (Vaandering, 2014). In-depth investigation is required to understand the transformation that may take place through engaging in the philosophy, principles, and practices of RJE. Borrowing from the field of adult education, TLT provides a useful framework to study changes in teacher perception of behaviour, teacher-student relationships and how educational practices can be designed to support RJE.

Yin (2018) also suggests that single-case design is appropriate when the case is critical, unusual, common, revelatory, or longitudinal. The study of this dissertation is considered both critical and longitudinal. TLT is used to describe teachers' experiences

in this RJE PD context since they are adult learners who are required to be risk-takers that can step away from their "expert" stance and engage in areas that they may be unfamiliar or may not feel competent (King, 2009). The exploration of TL for the teachers in this study may be of specific interest to others who are seeking to broaden teacher perspectives on students' disruptive behaviours or provide professional development within the context of a single school district. The case is also longitudinal in that teacher's transformation learning regarding RJE is studied over a period of 18 months.

### 3.2.1. Embedded units of analysis.

Within the RJE PD Series case, two embedded units of analysis were selected. First, transformative processes were examined at the whole group level (Figure 3.1, unit of analysis 1). King (2009) suggests that the most effective elements that stimulate and contribute to TL are critical reflection, dialogue, situated learning and relationships. Analysis at the whole group level during the RJE PD sessions places the focus on how the social interaction of the group contributes to transformation of teacher perception of disruptive behaviours through the identification of co-constructed themes.

The second focus of analysis was at the level of individual teachers (Figure 3.1, unit of analysis 2). Since RJE is primarily a means of making changes in oneself (Vaandering, 2019), in-depth analysis at the individual level provides a nuanced examination of how teachers' internal processes result in TL about RJE and teacher-student relations within the context of RJE.

## 3.3. Participants

Registration for the RJE PD was collected through a school district online registration form managed by the director of instruction responsible for professional development. Ten teachers initially registered for the four-part series: seven were intermediate classroom teachers, one was a primary classroom teacher, one was a vice-principal and primary teacher, and one was a high school specialist teacher. The participating teachers came from five different elementary schools and one high school. The primary teacher withdrew from the series and did not participate in any of the sessions. Prior to the start of the first session, participants were asked to provide a pseudonym, indicate their years of teaching experience, and describe their prior

knowledge of RJE. Prior knowledge of RJE included knowledge of: 1) some history of RJ or RJE; 2) the role of RJ or RJE in relationship building and repair 3) some specific RJE classroom practices (Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1 RJE PD Participants**

| Name* | Class | Experience (years) | Reported RJE Prior Knowledge | Sessions attended |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Christine | Primary | 5 | role in relationship building & repair | 3 |
| DJ | Intermediate | 20 | role in relationship building & repair | 3 |
| Grace | Intermediate | 2 | None | 3 |
| Kay | Intermediate | 6 | some history<br>role in relationship building & repair | 3 |
| Luthien | Intermediate | 6 | some history<br>role in relationship building & repair<br>some specific classroom practices | 4 |
| Mirabella | Intermediate | 7 | role in relationship building & repair | 4 |
| Penny | Secondary support | 15 | role in relationship building & repair | 4 |
| Pia | Intermediate | 20+ | role in relationship building & repair | 3 |
| Sally | Intermediate | 2 | none | 1 |

*Note:* Names are pseudonyms chosen by each teacher

Of the nine participants, Christine, Kay, and Luthien volunteered during the registration process to participate as focus teachers.

## 3.4. Secondary Data

All data analyzed in this research were initially collected by the school district for the purpose of evaluating the feasibility and social validity of the RJE PD series created by the local restorative justice society. Formal approval was requested and obtained from the school district and Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics for the secondary use of data collected as part of the school district evaluation study. As

previously discussed in Table 3.1, school district program evaluation data were collected prior to the start of the RJE PD series, during the series and throughout the school year, and approximately 18 months after the series was completed. Data sources selected for the current study are described below.

### 3.4.1. RJE PD program manual and materials.

Data for this research included all materials used in creating and implementing the RJE PD series. This includes: the curriculum containing learning objectives, session plans and activities, and content; materials provided to participants (*The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education* (Evans & Vaandering, 2016), educator's manual, handouts, readings); and PowerPoint presentations. A brief description of the program can be found in Appendix A.

### 3.4.2. Audio recordings of the RJE PD session.

Each session of the JRE PD series took place after school in a large classroom at one of the district school sites. At the beginning of each session, participants were reminded that the session was being audio-recorded.  Recordings were made with a school district device and then transcribed for the purpose of analysis. In addition, I was able to observe sessions one, three and four.

### 3.4.3. Audio recordings of individual interviews.

*a) Initial interviews* prior to the start of the RJE PD series were conducted with the three focal teachers. As shown in Appendix B, these interviews were guided by questions and prompts that are loosely based on the Teacher Relationship Interview (Pianta, 1999) which was initially designed to elicit teachers' perspectives on their relationship with children. Although these questions were used to start the conversation, the interviews were permitted to follow other relevant pathways as ideas and topics arose during the interview.

*b) Follow-up Interviews* were conducted approximately 18 months after the completion of the RJE PD series. The follow-up interviews took place after all participants completed the modified LAS and participated in the focus group discussions.

The individual follow-up interviews were an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the experience of the focal teachers in the implementation of RJE for the program evaluation. Teachers were asked to explore the potential benefits and/or constraints of incorporating RJE practices into classrooms and any changes of perspective in their approach to students with disruptive behaviour and in their efforts to improve student-teacher relationships. Please refer to Appendix B for a complete list of questions.

## 3.5. Trustworthiness

Since case study is part of the larger body of empirical social science research, Yin (2018) points out that the quality of case study research design is also judged in regards to tests of validity and reliability. However, Creswell (2018) points out that validity and reliability are concepts that arise from quantitative research and are viewed differently in qualitative research. Creswell suggests validation in qualitative research is an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings as best described by the researcher and participants and provides strategies to achieve what can be better described as "trustworthiness". Several of the strategies suggested by Creswell to achieve trustworthiness were used in this study and are described below.

To achieve accuracy in the audio-file transcripts, I first fully transcribed the audio-recordings from interviews and RJE PD sessions. A second transcriber then transcribed 10% of the sentences from each recording and was compared with my transcriptions for an agreement rate of 98%. Member checking also was employed. Transcripts of all audio-files from the four RJE PD series sessions were reviewed by the restorative justice society facilitator for accuracy. As well, each focal teacher reviewed the transcripts of their initial and follow-up individual interviews and were given an opportunity to provide any clarifications or corrections.

Triangulation involves the convergence of several different sources of evidence, including data, investigators, and theories, that act to describe a single phenomenon. First, multiple sources of data were used to allow for data triangulation. In addition, throughout the data collection and analysis, investigator triangulation was utilized by consulting members of the supervision committee to support critical reflection upon the emerging study themes. Lastly, early in the stages of research, ethic of care theory

(Noddings, 1995) and transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991, 1994) were identified and utilized as the theoretical frameworks appropriate to guide the study.

Creswell also suggests that qualitative researchers have extensive engagement in the field that includes learning the culture and building trust with participants. Rich and detailed descriptions of the participants and the setting allow readers to transfer information or findings to other settings. My extensive involvement and connection to the field is described in detail in the preface and a detailed description of the participants and the setting are described in chapter four.

## 3.6. Analysis

An inductive approach was used in the initial data analysis to uncover the emergence of useful concepts in the start of a general analytic strategy (Yin, 2018). The transcripts of the recordings of the sessions and interviews (RJE PD discussions and individual interviews) were read in their entirety several times to get a sense of the experiences as a whole (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) before searching for patterns, insights or concepts as suggested by Yin (2018) and documenting using memoing strategies (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Special attention was paid to emerging themes, consistency in teacher perspectives, and perspective transformations.

Within the general analytic strategy, more specific analytic techniques were also employed. Yin suggests that the techniques of pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, and cross-case synthesis help develop validity of case study research. Pattern matching involves analyzing data by comparing the patterns from the empirical data with a pattern identified by theory. Specifically, the research data were examined for patterns in perspective transformations predicted by TLT (Mezirow, 1991, 1994). The explanation building analytic technique involves making a set of claims to explain the occurrences in the case. As themes began to emerge, explanations and rival explanations were investigated. These explanations were discussed with study participants (member checking) and committee members (investigator triangulation). Similar to pattern matching, time-series analysis involved arranging the data according to time markers (beginning of the series, during the series, and 18 months after the end of the series) and comparing to trends in transformative learning. Finally, cross-case synthesis was helpful to examine the results for each individual focal teacher and then

observing the pattern of results across all three teachers. A case-based approach was used in that the search for patterns was done with respect to the holistic nature of each teacher and not broken down into component variables.

Through the process of analysis, themes were identified regarding the group sessions and the case studies. Themes related to the group sessions are reported in chapter five and describe how common ground was established through storied experience that allowed for deepening trust and connections to build among participants and create fertile soil to plant seeds of change. Themes related to the individual teachers are reported in chapter six and describe the variation in how teachers experienced the RJE PD, any perspective transformation, student-teacher relationships, and their understanding of student disruptive behaviour. However, prior to presenting the results in chapters five and six, chapter four provides a description of the RJE PD series that includes the development and implementation of the program, program content, the participating teachers, and the impact of the Covid-19 global pandemic.

# Chapter 4. The Restorative Justice in Education Professional Development Series

This chapter provides a detailed description of the RJE PD in the fall of 2019 as a context for transformative learning for nine teachers over the course of the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years. Descriptions include: the program as developed and outlined by the local restorative justice society, the teachers who participated, and the context of the Covid-19 pandemic in the months following the conclusion of the series.

## 4.1. The Development of the Program

For several years, a local restorative justice society had been facilitating weekly circles in selected classrooms within the school district. According to the society's website, the intent of their schools initiative was to provide children and youth the experience of restorative practices while teaching skills to transform conflict and repair relationships. This initiative was originally developed to be a preventative response to a high number of youths who were referred to the society's restorative response program by police after coming into conflict with the law. The long-term goal was to cultivate restorative cultures and practices in the schools within the local region.

While the RJE practice of weekly circles in classrooms provided students with a rich experience and helped to build community in the classroom, it did not focus on building capacity among teachers to implement universal RJE practices. To address this concern, the RJE PD series at the centre of this research was developed by the local restorative justice society and proposed to school district.

### 4.1.1. The school district.

The public school district where the research was conducted is located in a residential suburban community with population of approximately 45,000 people within British Columbia. It is situated within a region of relatively high socioeconomic status and relatively low rates of crime. The school district enrollment at the time of the research was approximately 7,200 students with approximately 75% of children from the local area and 25% coming from neighbouring communities. Approximately 60% of the

students reported English as their home language and approximately 9% of the students were identified with a special education category.

Within the 2019-2022 strategic plan outlined by the board of education were goals related to enhancing student resilience and supporting the mental wellness of students. One of the strategies utilized by the school board was to promote positive school climates and cultures using a variety of different means. To that end, the district formed a close partnership with the local restorative justice society to facilitate RJE practices in classrooms. Included in this partnership is the participation of school district personnel and parents on the society's RJE advisory committee.

### 4.1.2. The program as described by the local restorative justice society.

As described in chapter two, RJE is of particular interest to promote a universal preventative approach to cultivating healthy cultures and climates in schools and classrooms (B. Morrison, 2007). In addition, RJE helps teachers to reframe behaviour problems from violations of rules to violations of relationship and place attention on the responsibility to repair harm (B. Morrison, 2015). The request from the school district was to develop a series that would provide teachers with the understanding of RJE theory and increase teacher capacity to implement RJE practices within the local context. Existing trainings involving graduate programs or multi-day workshops often involved extensive commitments of time (Bailie & Adamson, 2016; D. D. Vaandering, 2014) that made it difficult for teachers to attend. A more feasible afterschool professional development format was desired. With these goals in mind, the local restorative justice society submitted to the school district a proposal to implement a four-day RJE PD series.

*Purpose and description of the RJE PD.*

As described in the proposal, the program was a four-part afterschool series and involved teachers actively participating in activities that link RJE theory and practice through hands-on experiential training. The society proposed that training would help also establish a strong foundational connection between participating teachers based on shared values and experiences. In addition, they suggested that RJE circle practices

could be used in staff meetings to support a positive staff culture. The purpose of the RJE PD as outlined by the society included:

- To give teachers an opportunity to experience and learn about RJE.

- To begin to engage in the principles and practices of RJE through Circles, Affective statements, and restorative questions.

- To connect with the belief that all people are worthy and relational.

- To encourage teacher relational reflection with the hope of improving relationships between teachers and students, and between students and students.

It was also noted that participants would be provided with a copy of The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education: Fostering Responsibility, Healing, and Hope in Schools (Evans & Vaandering, 2016) supplied by the school district.

### 4.1.3. How the program was offered to teachers.

The RJE PD was advertised as one of several professional development opportunities available to teachers for the 2019-2020 school year. It was described as a professional learning series offered after school (3:30-5:15 pm) on four consecutive Tuesdays by a local restorative justice society. The program was described as experiential and that teachers would learn the principles and practices of RJE through using restorative circles, affective statements, and restorative questions. It was suggested that teachers would gain classroom strategies and would have opportunities to reflect on their beliefs and values in how they may affect their classroom practice. Participants registered through a standard online district process.

## 4.2. Description of the RJE PD sessions.

Each session of the RJE PD series was scheduled to be 90 minutes in duration and lead by two facilitators from the local restorative justice society. Every session began with an opening circle to set the tone with a grounding exercise, check-in with each participant, and introduce who was present. A closing circle was also used at the end of each session.

### 4.2.1. The facilitators.

The RJE PD was facilitated by two representatives from the local restorative justice society. The main facilitator of the series was Joy, the school program manager who had a Master of Arts degree in Human Development (Educational Psychology) from McGill University. Her graduate research involved restorative justice in education and social emotional development as a response to victimization, discrimination, and bullying in schools, with a specific focus on LGBTQ and marginalized youth. Joy was joined by one of two co-facilitators who normally helped facilitate circles in classrooms with children. The co-facilitators assisted Joy in delivering the RJE PD and attended two sessions each.

### 4.2.2. Session one.

The first session began with an opening circle where facilitators first explained the basic elements of circle process. Participants then introduced themselves, experiencing their first RJE circle process of the series together. While still in circle, teachers were next invited to share their initial ideas about RJ before coming out of formation to learn theory in a more traditional format. In the form of a PowerPoint presentation, the lesson involved introducing the history and foundational components of RJE as they apply to the Canadian context. Using the framework provided by Evans and Vaandering (2016), RJE principles, values, and beliefs were explained along with a school wide approach as outlined by Morrison (2007).

Teachers were then invited to participate in the second experiential activity. Participants were placed in concentric circles to work with different partners to explore being in a listening stance without responding. In pairs, they took turns being the speaker and the listener in response to three different question prompts as follows:

- Describe a time when you successfully dealt with a challenging behaviour in your classroom,

- Describe your initial thought about the RJE core belief that all people are worthy and interconnected,

- Describe your initial thoughts on the RJE core values of respect, dignity, and mutual concerns as they apply to the classroom.

After three rounds of changing partners, participants were invited back into one circle to debrief the activity. They were asked about the experience of being a speaker and a listener, as well as given space to make comments and ask questions. The facilitators highlighted how the activity was designed to bring different perspectives in how we listen to students and highlight the barriers that may occur. They emphasized the idea that circles are a powerful vehicle to provide space for sharing and listening, but first requires an atmosphere of trust to be developed. The use of the talking piece was explained as a way to reinforce deep listening for circle participants.

The session was ended with a closing circle that invited participants to share what they were taking away from the first session and what they were looking forward to in the following sessions. Teachers mainly indicated that they were looking forward to gaining new skills and strategies to build community in their classroom and connect with students. After each teacher had shared, the facilitators summarized some key points including the importance of taking time to implement RJE practices slowly, conflict is contextual, and the focus is on building relationships and social-emotional skills. The homework for the next session asked participants to read chapter three, Beliefs and values in RJE, and chapter four, Creating just and equitable learning environments in Evan and Vaandering (2016). In addition, teachers were asked to write in their reflective journals after dealing with a student discipline situation that occurred during the week. They were asked to describe what happened, how they felt, what they were thinking and identify any beliefs and values that might be driving their thoughts, feelings, and actions.

## 4.2.3. Session two.

The theme of session two was creating just and equitable learning environments. The session was designed to help participants reflect on their beliefs that shape their teaching views, identify the relationship between individual needs and creating just and equitable learning environments, the explicit use of circles to address expressions of feelings, and begin to develop circle processes in the classroom. After introductions and check-ins in the opening circle, the facilitators invited teachers to share any reflections they had on the last session, the readings, and their journal activities. Several teachers openly shared and together they explored their thoughts, feelings, and actions related to the behaviour challenges they experienced over the past week. This opening portion took 30 minutes or approximately one third the length of the session.

Participants then came out of circle to engage in a presentation by the facilitator that involved a closer examination of the RJE model from Evans and Vaandering (2016), the whole school model from Morrison (2007), and the restorative practices being taught in the RJE PD series. Teachers were also introduced to Vaandering's questions ( 2014): Am I honouring?, Am I measuring?, and What message am I sending? These questions were introduced to help participants reflect on their interactions with students through an RJE lens before learning the practical aspects of conducting circles in their classrooms.

Facilitators also explored the concepts of justice and equity in RJE. They explained that justice describes the pursuit of meeting individual and collective needs to acquire well-being and that equity describes how every person is able to get what they need to experience well-being. They then explained how justice and equity intersect with the RJE practices of affective statements, restorative questions, and circles. During the presentation, teachers engaged by asking questions, sharing experiences, and participating in discussion.

The session had intended to mainly focus on an activity to investigate teachers' values. However, the sharing and discussion by the teachers was so rich and extensive, it took most of the time of the session. Therefore, the values activity instead became the closing circle activity. Participants were asked to think about the most challenging situations they are in when teaching and then asked to reflect on what value or belief they might need to feel safe. They were asked to write that down on a paper plate. They were then asked to reflect on what they might need to speak from the heart and what they might need to listen. These were also written on the paper plate. Around the circle, each teacher then shared their thoughts, laying the plate in front of them as they spoke. The homework for the following session invited teachers to read chapter five: Nurturing healthy relationships in Evan and Vaandering (2016) and in their journals, reflect through the quadrants of the "relationship matrix" (p.63) on an interaction they have with another person (see figure 4.1).

↑

| **TO** | **WITH** |
| People as objects to be managed | People as subjects to be honoured |
| *conditional acceptance* | *unconditional acceptance* |
| *<u>power</u> over | *<u>power</u> with |
| **NOT** | **FOR** |
| People as objects to be ignored | People as objects Of need |
| *neglect & rejection* | *conditional acceptance* |
| *<u>power</u> over | *<u>power</u> over |

Expectation (for being human)

low ⟵ Support (for being human) ⟶ high
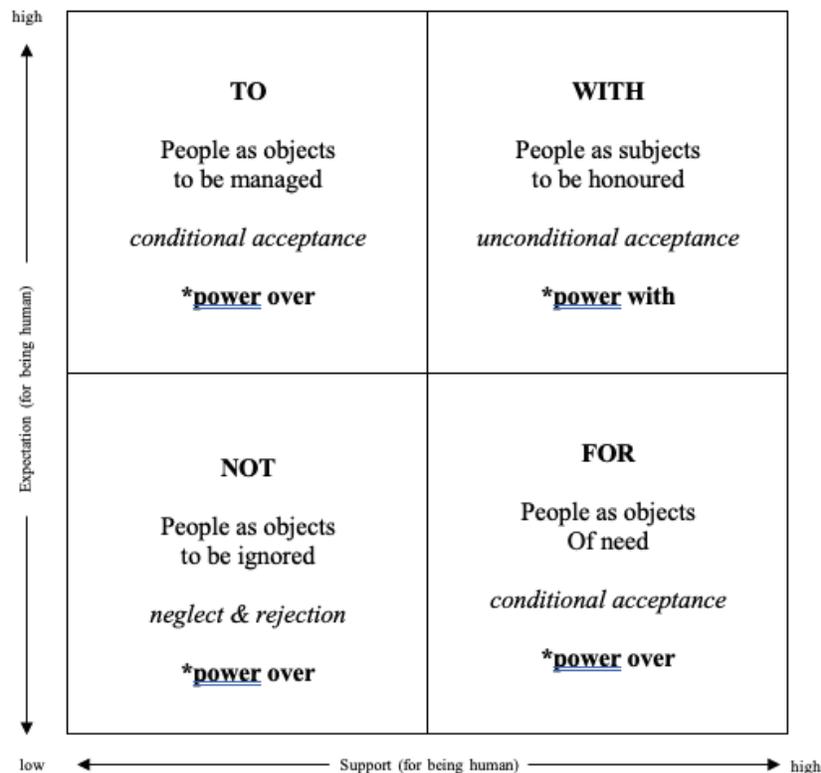
Figure 4.1 The Relationship Matrix (Window). Adapted from The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education, Fostering Responsibility, Healing, and Hope in Schools, p. 63, by K. Evans and D. Vaandering. Copyright 2016 by Katherine Evans and Dorothy Vaandering

### 4.2.4. Session three.

Session three focused on nurturing healthy relationships and had learning intentions that included: identifying the conditions for operating in the 'power with' quadrant of the relationship matrix, identifying and experiencing the requirements to feel seen and heard, learning to ask about context using restorative questions, and developing structures to facilitate circles in classrooms. In addition, restorative questions were introduced as a response to help teachers explore the context for when students engage in misbehaviours.

The opening circle began with asking all participants to say their names, pronouns, and what values they believed they needed to foster in their classrooms for students to feel safe and comfortable enough to share with others. Participants were then invited to reflect on and share any changes, shifts, or learnings that they had noticed since the start of the series. Most of the people in the circle responded with only

one teacher opting to pass. Teachers were then offered an opportunity to share any reflections from the homework that described their interactions through the relationship window framework. Penny was the first to respond, followed by Kay and Mirabella. After hearing the others, Luthien and Grace also shared experiences from the past week.

Participants then broke out of circle and further ideas supporting nurturing healthy relationships were described through a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation began with a more detailed explanation of the relationship window followed by a discussion about sharing power and respectful communication. Additional emphasis was placed on open dialogue that discourages behaviours that cause damage to individuals and relationships, and instead encourages the acknowledgement, validation, and expression of feelings. Next, a model for relationship development with students was shared that suggests teachers focus on expressing care, providing support, and challenging growth through high expectations.

The practice of using restorative questions was also introduced in the presentation. This was introduced earlier than intended because participants had requested ideas of how to deal with misbehaviours in the classroom beyond the use of circles. Restorative questions were presented as a framework to approach situations of harm from a stance of non-judgemental curiosity by exploring the actions, thoughts, and feelings of those involved with the focus on understanding how to make things right. Restorative questions and circles were also explored as a way to share power with students and encourage the responsibility to repair harm. Teachers disclosed a variety of personal classroom situations with the group as they tried to apply the principles to their lived experiences. Participants were also asked about concerns they might have about sharing power with students.

Session three was ended with a quick closing circle to demonstrate what was called a 'light and lively' exercise where each participant clapped their hands in a successive wave. Finally, a description of the homework was provided. The homework invited teachers to write in their journals and use the reflective questions to explore a situation where a student acted in a way that was harmful to others or very disruptive. The questions include: What was happening? What was I thinking and feeling at the time and has this changed? What was the hardest thing for me? Who was impacted by this and how? What did I need to do to move forward? What do I still need to do or would do

differently? Teachers were also encouraged to read chapter 6, Repairing harm and transforming conflict (Evans & Vaandering, 2016) and try one short circle activity in their classroom.

## 4.2.5. Session four.

The fourth session completed the series with a focus on repairing harm and transforming conflict. The session was designed so that participants would be able to: understand the concepts of harm and conflict and how RJE addresses them, identify the conditions necessary to address harm and conflict in classrooms, identify ways to mitigate classroom disruptions, and practice using affective statements.

In the opening circle, teachers were first invited to share any reflections about their experience with student conflict or misbehaviour from the past week. Several teachers openly shared stories of their challenges with certain student behaviours. They described the personal thoughts and feelings they were having as they struggled to stay emotionally regulated while dealing with the misbehaviours. A discussion ensued about the appropriateness of addressing an individual student's behaviour in a full class circle. Participants were then invited to share their experiences of implementing RJE practices in their classrooms. Some teachers had begun to implement circle practice and described their progress, challenges, and successes. A few others described how they had used restorative questions to probe into conflicts.

The theory portion of the last session expanded on the RJE concepts of conflict and harm, as well as the RJ obligation to repair relationships by using active and empathetic listening. Emphasis was placed on being present while listening and focusing on trying to understand the thoughts, feelings, and context when harm or conflict occurs in the classroom. Restorative questions were reviewed, and it was explained that affective statements were tools to aid in active and empathetic listening. Teachers then worked in pairs to practice using affective statements that could describe how they would feel in a variety of suggested scenarios. Afterwards, teachers were invited back into circle to explore how affective statements might work in their classrooms. A few teachers had some difficulty understanding how the affective statements would improve classroom behaviour or how to use the statements effectively. The group discussed how

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affective statements might be used by exploring different possible classroom applications.

The session and series was ended with a closing circle where teachers were invited to share one thing they would take away from the RJE PD. Participant revealed thoughts and feelings that included; courage to risk trying the new practices, gratitude for the experiences and personal feelings shared with the group, curiosity and excitement to see how it will work in their classrooms, renewed commitment to make time in the classroom for RJE practices, and emotional regulation strategies to use in the classroom.

## 4.3. Teacher Background

Participating teachers and their initial knowledge of RJE before the series are outlined in table 3.2. A brief description of each teacher and prior experience with RJE follows.

### 4.3.1. DJ.

DJ was an intermediate teacher with 20 years of experience. At the time of the RJE PD, she was teaching a class of grade 4 and 5 students full-time. With the pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic the year following, she elected to reduce her time to only one day per week in a grade 2 classroom. DJ attended three of the four sessions.

### 4.3.2. Sally.

Sally was a relatively new teacher who had only one year of teaching experience. At the time of the RJE PD series, she was in her second year of teaching a class of grade 4 and 5 students in the school where she had first been hired after completing her degree. She continued teaching at the same school in the following year. Previously to becoming a teacher, Sally had spent one year working as a Behaviour Interventionist. She was only able to attend one session of the series.

### 4.3.3. Pia.

Pia was a teacher with over 20 years at the time of the RJE PD. She had been teaching in the school district for 13 years after previously spending 7 years in a neighbouring district. She was teaching French Immersion, primarily in the intermediate grades. Pia was present at three of the four sessions.

### 4.3.4. Mirabella.

Mirabella was teaching a class of grade 4 and 5 students and had 7 years of teaching experience. She returned to post-secondary studies to become a teacher 16 years after completing her Bachelor of Science degree and raising two children. At the time of the RJE PD, she was in the second year of full-time teaching at her school. She continued teaching in the same grade level at the same school the following year. Mirabella was an active contributor in the series and attended all four sessions.

### 4.3.5. Grace.

Grace had recently become a teacher after spending several years working in the school district as an education assistant. During the RJE PD series, she was in her second year of teaching after completing her credentials and had just acquired her first full-time teaching contract. In the previous school year, she had been working as a Teacher Teaching On Call (TTOC). In the school year following the series, Grace taught a class of grade 6 and 7 students in a position that became vacant when Luthien left the school district. She attended three of the four sessions in the series and the post-series follow-up focus group meeting that occurred 18 months after the series ended.

### 4.3.6. Penny.

Penny was a teacher with 15 years of experience who started her career teaching high school English and had recently finished a masters degree in counselling. Previously in the school district, she had been an elementary teacher and teacher librarian for 10 years but had taken a new role during the school year of the RJE PD. At that time, Penny's load was split with half her time spent in secondary school and the other half in a district role supporting student who were unable to attend school due to

extreme illness. At the secondary school, Penny was a teacher providing support in a program designed to meet the needs of students who had difficulties in school primarily for social-emotional reasons. The school year following the series, Penny switched this portion of her load to be become an elementary counsellor three days per week. Penny attended all four of the sessions in the series and was one of two teachers who attended the focus group meeting 18 months after the RJE PD.

## 4.4. Focal Teachers

During the registration process, three participants indicated they would like to volunteer to be focal teachers. Christine, Kay, and Luthien are colleagues from one suburban elementary school that identified SEL as the focus for the school's goal within the Framework for Enhancing Student Learning (Government of British Columbia, n.d.). At the time of the study, the school had an approximate enrolment of 260 students and enrolled 12 divisions from kindergarten to grade 7. The majority of the students (67%) resided in the community, while the remaining students (33%) traveled to school from 4 neighbouring communities. The student population was described as having over one third of students being serviced as English Language Learners (ELL), 9% of students having Ministry Designations with social/emotional, physical/health and/or learning needs, 5% of students considered District International Students, and 10% of students self-reporting as being of First Nations descent.

### 4.4.1. Christine.

Christine was one of three participants who volunteered to be a focal teacher. At the time of the RJE PD, Christine was teaching a grade 2 class and was in the first year of being appointed vice-principal. Her time was divided with 4 days of the week spent teaching in the classroom and 1 day of the week completing administrative duties. Unlike most administrators in the district who were well established in their careers, Christine only had 5 years of teaching experience, 3 of which were at her current elementary school. Also, unlike her administrative colleagues, Christine had not yet completed a masters degree at the time of the study. Her education and training included a Bachelor of Education (Elementary) degree plus one additional year of Post Baccalaureate studies in Information Technology in Education. However, she was extremely well

regarded for her leadership and innovative approaches to learning that included the use of technology and inquiry. Christine attended three of the four sessions in the series. In addition, she was interviewed at the beginning of the series and 18 months afterwards in a follow-up interview.

### 4.4.2. Kay.

Kay also volunteered to be a focal teacher and taught at the same elementary school as Christine. At the time of the RJE PD, Kay was teaching a class of grade 4 and 5 students. Although she had been teaching for 6 years, this was her first year as a full-time general education classroom teacher. Previously, Kay had worked as a TTOC for 2 years and then as a Special Education and ELL teacher for 4 years in two different school districts. At the start of the series, Kay described how she had always wanted to have her own classroom but until recently, there were few general classroom positions available in the area. Previously, she had job-shared a primary class in her first year of teaching and had been a non-enrolling teacher ever since. She explained that after getting her teaching credentials she took more courses to become a specialist teacher so that she could find employment. She stated that she was grateful for the training and the experience but "really wanted to be in the classroom". Her education and training include a Bachelor of Education (Elementary) degree and courses within a Diploma in Education in ELL and Special Education.

Despite realizing her dream of teaching in a classroom, Kay described having her own intermediate class full-time as "a massive transition". She stated that she knew it was going to be hard but felt ready for the challenge. She attributed her sense of being overwhelmed to having to adjust to the pace of the classroom and the novelty of routines and procedures that she had not encountered as a non-enrolling teacher. She stated that she was planning on being a classroom teacher for the long term but was glad that she could also fall back on being a non-enrolling teacher when "I'm burnt out, and inevitably I will be".

Kay attended three of the four sessions in the series. In addition, she was interviewed at the beginning of the series and 18 months afterwards in a follow-up interview. Throughout the course of the RJE PD, Kay expressed her appreciation to the group for the sharing of experiences and struggles from other teachers.

### 4.4.3. Luthien.

Luthien was the third volunteer focal teacher and taught in the same elementary school with Christine and Kay during the school year of the RJE PD series. At that time, Luthien was in the third year of teaching classes of grade 6 and 7 students at that school. She was in her seventh year of teaching and had previously taught in several different schools including two independent schools and two schools in rural First Nations communities. Luthien had a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in sociology and a minor in psychology, did her fifth year Bachelor of Education degree in a cohort focused on elementary self-regulated learning, and completed coursework within a Post Baccalaureate diploma in Special Education.

Luthien was an active participant in the RJE PD series and attend all four of the sessions. In addition, she was interviewed at the beginning of the series and 18 months afterwards in a follow-up interview.

At the end of the school year of the RJE PD series, Luthien and her husband decided to take advantage of online learning and the working from home that was occurring because of the Covid-19 pandemic to explore relocating their family to another community. They moved out of the region, prompting Luthien to resign and take an online position teaching a grade 3 class for another school district. This was her current assignment during the follow-up interview.

## 4.5. Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

The RJE PD series took place in the Fall of the 2019-20 school year. One day into spring break on March 17, 2020, the Government of British Columbia announced that K-12 learning was suspended indefinitely as a result of rising cases of Covid-19. Teachers returned to work on March 30th and began planning remote options for student learning. As teachers navigated online learning, some opted for opportunities for synchronous learning, while others provided lessons to be completed without direct instruction. On May 7th, the Ministry of Education released the details of a five-stage plan for the return to in-person instruction for students. The return to school plan began in the month of June which saw the partial return of students to class on a voluntary basis. By the end of the school year, it was still uncertain how schools would operate in the Fall.

On July 29[th], an updated K-12 return to school plan was released with health and safety guidelines that put elementary students in learning cohorts to limit the number of interactions and reduce the chance of transmission. Covid-19 health and safety guidelines for schools also involved monitoring for signs of illness, strict hand-hygiene and cleaning protocols, and limited contact within classrooms. Students returned to full in-person instruction in September after a slight delay so that teachers could become familiar with new health and safety protocols. Concerns about transmission of Covid-19 prompted many teachers to place students in separate desks and avoid activities that required close contact. As the pandemic progressed, additional measures such as a mask mandate were introduced later in the school year.

Because of the additional stress brought on by the pandemic, the school district began the year with a full day of training focused on trauma-informed practice and teachers placed more emphasis on SEL. Most participants of the RJE PD series continued in similar in-person roles except for Luthien who left the school district and taught online and DJ who reduced her teaching from full-time to one day per week. The constantly changing health and safety concerns and resulting protocols created by the global pandemic continued to have an influence on teaching practice throughout the 2020-21 school year. Teachers in the school district taught in-person classes amidst local and global social tensions as well as uncertainty created by ongoing exposure notices and unclear vaccination strategies. The follow-up interviews and group session were conducted in May and June in midst of this unusual school year.

# Chapter 5.    Results: Group Sessions

In Restorative Justice in Education Professional Development (RJE PD), teachers are invited to engage in circle discussions that involve open communication about their learning within a safe and non-judgmental atmosphere. The primary aim of these circles is the development of trusting relationships among participants. In the first section of this chapter, I describe how a safe space was created in circle by teachers sharing experiences that identified their values and common ground. This is followed by a description of how the teachers deepened their trust by sharing stories that involved more personal thoughts and feelings related to challenges they faced when dealing with students' disruptive behaviour. Finally, in the last section I describe how the personal sharing of stories provided the impetus for some teachers to begin to transform their perspectives while in other teachers, the experience affirmed their previous beliefs.

## 5.1.  Creating Safe Spaces Through RJE Circles

Restorative justice circles were a significant feature of the RJE PD. The classroom where the sessions occurred was arranged with tables and chairs in a U-shaped configuration so teachers could take notes and face the facilitators and each other when learning theory. Additional chairs were also placed in the empty space so that teachers and facilitators could sit in a circle without anything in front of them. Every session began with an opening circle to set the tone with a grounding exercise, introduce and check-in with each participant, and invite reflections from the previous week. Teachers were then invited to sit behind the desks to learn in a more traditional format. A closing circle was used at the end of each session to give participants an opportunity to reflect upon and share their learning. When in circle, RJE protocol requires participants and facilitators to remain silent, unless holding the talking piece, and receive what is shared with openness and acceptance.

Early in the RJE PD series, when teachers were tentative about exposing feelings of frustration or doubts about their teaching, circle discussions and learning activities focused on relatively safe topics such as whether RJE strategies could improve instruction or classroom management and how RJE might sustain a positive climate and culture. Sharing ideas about the value of instructional strategies is a common activity

among teachers and presents minimal risk of judgement about teaching ability. For instance, during the closing circle of the first session, teachers were asked to express what they were taking away from their experience with the RJE PD that day. When the talking piece came to Luthien, she wondered if the concentric circle approach would be an effective strategy for making connections among her students:

> There's the two-circle approach, and I'm wondering if I'm brave enough to try it pretty soon. We already do circles, so to go beyond the 'what did you do on the weekend' and some fun stuff, I think I'd approach it as an easy sort of ice breaker first. And I'm hoping that these strategies will work out well with my prepubescents and actually make it interesting.

The word "brave" as used by Luthien describes her uncertainty about whether the two-circle strategy is an effective practice to promote students' sharing of ideas in an enjoyable way (i.e., "an ice-breaker'). Although she has used circle activities with her class, she wonders how student will respond if she uses an adapted, two circle strategy in an attempt to improve upon the practice and "actually make it interesting." Teachers often encounter such uncertainties in their professional lives and collectively, these uncertainties translate to a common ground for discussion. It set the stage for teachers attending the RJE PD to come to know and trust one another as colleagues who are facing similar challenges in their classrooms.

Discussions among teachers about their shared value of creating a positive climate and culture in their classrooms also created common ground in the early stages of the RJE PD. In the closing circle of the first session, DJ expressed her desire to build community in her classroom:

> I think my takeaway is a reminder that…this process is going to take time, and I have tried to start building community in my classroom, and I'm looking forward to seeing where it goes because I have the same questions. I have the same questions every year. How can I how can I help this little person move forward and be part of the community and [also have] everyone connecting with each other? So, I look forward to finding some new tools to maybe make that happen within the school year.

Pia echoed DJ's intention to create a positive, nurturing classroom for students and commented on the sense of trust that she was experiencing:

What I'm taking away is an atmosphere of trust and I really look forward to being able to share that with my class as well to develop a positive atmosphere and not just solve problems …"

As these comments highlight, nurturing a sense of classroom community through the promotion of positive climate and culture was a common objective among participants. At the start of the RJE PD, teachers focused on these common values and shared classroom experiences as they began to create connections with each other.

On occasion, teachers tentatively described personal feelings of discomfort or uncertainty, but they did this within the context of classroom climate and culture, which was the common ground among the group. For instance, when reflecting on her engagement in a circle discussion before the end of the first session, Pia shared her discomfort with the physical emptiness in the center of the circle:

This is just a quick comment: I know when I have sat with students in circle like this with nothing in the middle, we're all very keenly aware of the emptiness in the centre. It's very different, and I feel it too, even if you have a bonfire in the middle or a table in the middle or something - it would be very different. So, I know some of my students feel very uncomfortable in this situation.

Pia quickly transferred her own awareness and discomfort ("I know when I…") to her students ("we're all very keenly aware"; "I know some of my students feel uncomfortable") since the wellness of students is a value shared among teachers. This allowed her to express personal feelings that may differ from the other participants without risk of judgement. In the early part of the RJE series, teachers were tentative and kept to topics of discussion related to teaching that avoided expressions of emotional tension. However, as elaborated in the next section, as they found increasingly more common ground and came to know each other better, they began to share stories of challenges they faced in the classroom, suggesting they were building a foundation of trust.

## 5.2. Deepening trust and connections through storied experience

As the RJE PD progressed, teachers shifted away from the safe conversations about strategies, common values and positive climate and began to share personal stories about how they were impacted by student's disruptive behaviour. They became

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more comfortable with each other, revealing experiences of struggle in the classroom and describing the tensions that were created when students acted in ways that did not align with their beliefs and values about expected classroom behaviour. Their stories slowly began to expose insecurities and doubts about their efficacy as teachers. It appeared that they trusted that the others would validate their concerns and help them find ways to stop the disruption of the positive climate and culture they were hoping to develop through RJE.

This shift was started and best highlighted by several comments made by Mirabella towards the end of the theory portion of session one as she tried to understand how the RJE concepts might apply to her classroom practice. She began by describing a student who she felt was disrupting the classroom climate:

> I was really interested as to how students get at some of the issues they are having with other students in the class...There's that one student, I know he's being unkind to most of his classmates behind the scenes. And I …want, without him feeling … picked on, I'm just hoping that people can start to share how it's making them feel.

Mirabella appeared to be hoping that RJE practices would help her find a way to allow other students to confront the unkind behaviour, but she felt uncomfortable in singling the student out. She continued to explain that parents of the other students were also beginning to complain that their children were having difficulty "staying away" from the student who was being unkind:

> You know, I had 4 of the parents come to me and say that their son is trying really hard to just stay away... There's this sort of big, almost a hidden undercurrent that doesn't feel good. Undercurrent in the classroom where this [the unkind behaviour] is happening, and it is kind of spreading. And I want to be able to address it, but I can't address it the way it comes to me at recess and lunch with eight emotional people, and we're supposed to eventually get to teaching math or something. It's really hard, this undercurrent of things that are going on.

Mirabella expressed her uncertainty of how to address the negative climate that was developing and revealed that it was "really hard" for her. She hinted at feeling overwhelmed when she commented on wanting to be able to address the negative undercurrent but had several emotional students to care for and still needed to get through curriculum. Mirabella also suggested that students in the class were becoming aware of the concern:

> And the students come to me saying, 'someone is targeting all the new students this is what's happening,' and I want to bring that out right into the open in the right way. In the right way, to find the right way to help with those issues that are really very prevalent ...

Her comments about wanting to find "the right way" suggests that she was concerned that she may get it wrong and was unsure of how to handle the situation. She ended by asking the facilitator if the student's behaviour might be corrected by using RJE circles and if the process might allow other students to voice how he is affecting them:

> But it's a really prevalent thing where the kids need lots of people to talk to and lots of people to help them sort it out. And so, this little group circle format, proactive circle sounds like it could be, I don't know, is it?

Mirabella's comments highlight the frustration and concerns that teachers can have when faced with challenging student behaviour. She also described the tension in her desire to stop the behaviour by doing things "the right way." By expressing her feelings of frustration and asking for help to solve the problem, Mirabella went deeper than the safe topics of strategies and common values in order to seek support and validation. Her story began to establish the climate for other teachers to also share more personal stories of challenges they had in the classroom. For example, during the closing circle of session one, Kay, another teacher, described how she was already being impacted by participating in circle discussions:

> I think I'm taking away an appreciation for everyone's stories that were shared today. I'm glad to hear that other people are going through the same things and some of the same stuff [struggles with challenging behaviour and self-regulation] And I think, I hope in the future that we are able to sort though it some.

Kay expressed relief that other teachers were also feeling overwhelmed when dealing with challenging behaviour in the classroom. Realizing that her experiences were shared by others appeared to give her hope that there may be ways to find relief for the pressure she was feeling and to negotiate change together.

As the RJE PD series progressed, it became clear that there was a range in the amount of verbal participation by participants. For instance, Christine was the least likely to engage in discussion compared to other teachers and rarely volunteered personal stories or opinions. Mirabella was the most vocal of the teachers in the group and her stories appeared to prompt other teachers to impart more personal stories about feeling overwhelmed by the struggles they were having with classroom management and

problematic student behaviour. Together, the stories served to bring the teachers closer together when they realized their experiences and reactions were also shared by others. Revealing personal thoughts and feelings through story acted as a catalyst and prompted deeper sharing. For example, in the opening circle of the second session, teachers were asked to reflect on the past week. Mirabella received the talking piece and began by telling the story of how she realized she "was having a great day" when a student was absent. She revealed her thoughts about expected classroom behaviour and speculated that the inclusion of this student in classroom activities negatively impacted the behaviour of other students in the class and her teaching:

> I thought about, what was so good about this day? I felt like, wow, I'm getting the hang of this teaching thing, this is great, and all my students were fantastic, I mean look at what we accomplished today! And I was like, oh darn it, we accomplished this because, just one student causes so much disruption. Um, someone I like as well, but just causes so much disruption that I realized just how much it puts me on edge. So that was kind of a feeling... I realized that this 10-year-old has me on edge and suspicious.

Mirabella's description that this student "put her on edge" and her belief that his behaviour impeded the class accomplishment appeared to encourage other teachers to share similar feelings and views with the group. In circle, they began to slowly reveal their frustrations with disruptive behaviour.

After Mirabella, the talking piece was passed to Pia who expressed how she struggled to stay calm when a student's behaviour aggravated her:

> I'm on personal quest to try and learn to step back and take a breath before reacting. But I am finding that very difficult with one particular student who is lovely, very nice, extremely needy, never has a quiet moment, never. And whenever I speak, I hear this little voice parroting and making comments in the background constantly. And he has the knack of doing it to the others too which means he's getting them aggravated. And before I pounce on him, I have to step back and see that he's a nice kid but I'm not sure how to teach him to stop some of these behaviours. So that's where I was the last couple of days.

Pia's story was followed by Grace and Sally who also told similar stories of frustration and reactivity towards students when they each held the talking piece:

> Grace: I... found myself getting frustrated and being reactive rather than proactive with her... and I guess I sort of was blaming her for not being on track. And because I was so overwhelmed by all the other students

I was trying to help, my feelings during this time were exasperated and 'I don't have time for this acting out behaviour' when all these other people have these legitimate needs and questions. But of course, she has them too, she just asks for her needs to be met more times… It made me think that I need to do a better plan for that one particular student.

Sally: I'm just connecting on some of the things that you guys are saying. Mine is more general. More so if I am a little reactive to a situation, I think the feeling that I'm feel a lot of the time afterwards is guilty. Like I feel guilt for the way I handled the situation at times… A few times today where I think I'm going to handle thing better, so I didn't quite. I wasn't fully aware of what space some of my students were in when they were doing some of the things they were doing ... And then afterwards I was, "Oh my gosh, I was being so mean because I didn't know". What, you know, why they were doing this, I didn't even give them enough space to explain to me, like what the background information for that was. So yeah, I think guilt sometimes is something that I feel a lot. I think a lot of teacher guilt.

Both Grace and Sally appeared to be encouraged by the disclosures of Mirabella and Pia. Sally links her comments to the others by saying she is "just connecting on some of the things you guys are saying" and openly speaks to the feelings of guilt to which the others have alluded.

After Mirabella's story that described how she "was having a great day" when a student was absent, teachers began to speak more freely about their personal reactions to student behaviour when their responses were not judged as inappropriate or unprofessional in circle. As the talking piece was passed, trust was developing and each teacher who spoke shared a little more deeply about what they were thinking and feeling. Together, all these stories had a profound effect on Kay, as was indicated by her comments to Sally:

I really appreciate you sharing, and I feel that way too. I'm new to the classroom this year, I did ELL and Special Ed for years and then from there into the intermediate classroom. I met with the amount of children in small groups before, and now when things happen and I get frustrated, I react. It's nice to hear that I'm not alone.

When the talking piece was finally passed to Kay, her statement "it's nice to hear that I'm not alone" suggests she felt relieved to learn that other teachers also become frustrated with and react to student behaviour.

After teachers shared their stories of challenges that they faced in their classrooms in the past week, circle was closed, and teachers returned to sit at tables to learn in a more traditional format. Joy, the facilitator, explained that the focus of the second session was addressing the RJE pillar of creating just and equitable learning environments. She suggested that sitting in circle provided a mechanism through which teachers could work with their students to address the harms resulting from behaviour:

> When we are sitting in circle, the power to address those inequities and this justice piece is really that everyone is equal. And so, when you're a teacher sitting in circle, this is important that you are part of the circle yourself. And that students see you as well in that new perspective - I'm equal to you and I'm with you – and the amount of you sharing in circle will also project the image of "I am taking this seriously; I want to share with you" and again will help the students do the same as well.

Joy emphasized that when students engaged in misbehaviour, RJE required teachers to shift the perspective of justice from seeking the appropriate consequence or punishment for an offender to repairing the harm created to relationships. She asked teachers to expand their focus from the person who committed the harm to the larger question of what is necessary for everyone to heal. She suggested that, by using the talking piece, circles provided a space for each person to speak in their own terms and their own time to be heard and valued.

During this portion of the session, teachers began to question how to implement the practice of circles in their classrooms. They began to give suggestions of what has worked in their classrooms previously and continued to disclose stories of classroom challenges, perhaps emboldened by the personal sharing that occurred in the opening circle. Hearing the classroom stories of others seemed to have the effect of normalizing the kinds of interactions described and evoked in participants a sense that the others would be understanding and empathic in response to their own classroom challenges. These frank discussions appeared to encourage Luthien to divulge a story where she confessed to reacting in an unprofessional manner out of frustration. Luthien prefaced her story about an incident from the previous school year by saying it was an example of "things not to do", but she also hoped that her story would resonate with the others when she said, "you'll know what I'm talking about":

> I was going to share a really extreme experience I had - which is probably like things not to do. But it worked really well for me, and you'll know what I'm talking about. I had the same student that I mentioned

[earlier in the session] that was derailing the circle, and I mean some high school vocabulary was coming out, it was like sexualized themes coming out in circle, words that were not okay. This is grade 6/7 - crazy stuff was being said and I had to address it. So extreme measures had to be taken…I really felt like he was swaying the whole entire class, this was last year.

At this point in her story, Luthien set the stage for explaining why she reacted by doing "things not to do". She described how she felt like she was losing control:

The whole entire class sort of got away from me, like the whole class was being affected by that negative energy, that high school vocabulary, little bullying was starting to happen. And I just felt that the kids were buying into that. That toxic negative energy… And it so happened that he forgot his shoes or something, he was playing basketball [afterschool] and had to go home and get his shoes. And the bell had rung for the end of the day. But I had all the kids there and I said, just give me one second, just hold on. So, he went to get his shoes at home, whatever, and I kept the kids and actually addressed, without his presence, I addressed him, by name, and I said, 'I need your help'. I said, 'I'm feeling like this is what is happening in our classroom, you know his behaviour is happening and if you're saying nothing or laughing at whatever, you're validating that behaviour and we can't get any learning done, you know this is how it makes me feel, blah blah blah…'

Luthien described how she "actually addressed, without his presence" the behaviour of an individual student to the class. She described this action as "things not to do" but justified it because "extreme measures had to be taken". However, she then explained how she attempted to mitigate her actions by speaking with the student the next day:

Anyways, I of course talked to him the very next day in the morning and 'this is what happened after you left'. And I said, 'this is how serious your behaviour is' - and we had a great relationship, we were able to open... really - we were able to have open conversations even though when he had an audience, he would say all sorts of things. So, this is sort of things what not to do, because I basically talked about a student without his presence. But I let him know and he was aware sort of like, the level of how his behaviour got to.

Luthien described this unprofessional action as "what not to do" but shared the experience with the group anyway. She described having a "great relationship" with the student, yet she spoke about him "swaying the whole entire class" and challenging her control of the classroom. She described the tension created between her desire to have a good relationship with the student and her need to have control of the class. When she divulged her breach of acceptable teaching practice to maintain control, she appeared to hope the others would respond with validation and understanding.

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Grace immediately engaged with Luthien's struggle in the classroom and provided support:

Grace: Yes, I was your TTOC last year - so I know what you were talking about!

Luthien: You survived!

Grace: I even came back for more - so I remember being there at the beginning of the year and I know the student that you're talking about and that sense of that person being in control was definitely - it was so there. And so, there were a few issues that we dealt with while I was there, and I was there for a couple of days.

Luthien: You might be thinking of a different student because I had a couple.

Grace: Yeah, you did for sure. The second one's language, I'm thinking of one particular person who would never seem to be away. And then later on in the year, it seemed like there was a different energy. And so –

Luthien: There definitely was, by the end of the year he was, I was happy, I had seen him act, and all this stuff, I mean, he has not become a different person, but I must have been somewhat effective in the classroom setting. (Laughs)

Grace: No, no, not at all. I'm validating you. (Laughs)

Luthien: Right? So, I'm not crazy!?

Grace: I saw it all, yup, yup.

This exchange between Grace and Luthien highlights how teachers can form alliances through the sharing of difficult experiences with challenging behaviour, even when the teacher's behaviour is problematic. Despite Luthien beginning her story with "what not to do", Grace responded by indicating that she understood the reason for Luthien's unprofessional behaviour and then supported and reinforced it by describing the conditions that appeared to justify the "extreme measures". They both described the class as something to "survive" and the need to take control back from the student. The endorsement of Luthien's behaviour by Grace appeared to prevent any correction or criticism of Luthien's behaviour by the facilitators or other participants. These exchanges illustrate how bonds can form between teachers, but also be problematic when they involve justifying behaviour that is harmful to children. This was a missed opportunity for

the facilitators to illustrate how RJE might have been used to address and repair the harm caused by Luthien.

However, the support and understanding provided by other teachers, even when the teacher's behaviour was open to criticism, served to deepen the atmosphere of trust and acceptance. This provided an environment that allowed Kay to be vulnerable and explore with the group her own thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that she found problematic. In the closing circle, the facilitators asked participants three questions: In those most challenging situations in your classroom, what do you need to feel better? What do you need to speak from the heart? What do you need to listen? When the talking piece was passed to Kay, she answered:

> If I could drop something in my classroom that would make me feel a little bit better? Of all the important things that are there in the classroom, it would be a kind group and time to calm down. And for myself to speak from the heart, I need to self-regulate because I think that's something, when I am calm and have time and space, that's something I am good at. But when I'm really feeling frustrated with myself with the way I am reacting to things, because I am up into the yellow zone, and I'm reacting from there right now a lot, and it's not a nice place to be. So, I need to self-reg. And then to listen, I wish, in order to listen to my students, I wish I had more time to even listen. Because I don't and I feel a lot of guilt around that. And then to find ways to build that into my day I just wish I had more time to spend with students as individuals.

The gift of personal stories that teachers shared and were listened to without judgement provided Kay with space to explore and express the feelings of frustration and guilt she was carrying. She admitted it was "not a nice place to be". The safe space of circle provided fertile ground for Kay to plant seeds of change that might develop and grow later.

## 5.3.  Planting the seeds of change

Throughout the series, teachers were invited to reflect on their practice through the values and principles of RJE. For instance, during the opening circle of session three, teachers were invited to reflect upon their learning and experiences from the past two sessions and share any changes they have noticed in themselves. After Grace, DJ, and Penny spoke about how they were impacted by both sessions, Kay responded to this invitation by describing her reflective process:

I'm just reflecting on a lot of the choices that I'm making and the messages that I'm sending, and I think because sometimes I react, …and I have guilt. And I think there's like a mismatch in my sort of values - seeing, respecting the kids as individuals, and honouring who they are. But then, getting frustrated and kind of reacting in a way that sends the message that they're a nuisance or that they're causing me frustration which isn't the message I want to send. But it's really interesting to frame our interactions with kids in this lens and I'm curious about ways I can shift the way I respond to things.

These comments highlight a disorienting dilemma that arose as Kay began to realize that her response or reactions to student behaviour were not aligned with the messages she wanted to send to students. She shared a deeper self-reflection that her behaviours associated with getting frustrated and reacting were not consistent with her values and beliefs that respect and honour students as individuals. She described the feelings of guilt that came with the self-examination and was beginning to critically assess her current assumptions and exploring options for change. Kay was demonstrating signs that she was engaging in transformative learning.

By contrast, Luthien did not express any tension between her practice and the RJE principles. Instead, she suggested that the readings were reinforcing past learning that occurred when she took part in circle activities in her undergraduate courses:

I really like the book that we're reading. It's sort of going back to all my years of education, my first encounter of circles, sort of leading classes as 'teacher as a facilitator' as opposed to anything else, was way back in my undergrad in my sociology classes. I had this really powerful instructor who just reminded you of all that, then encountering Freire's work, encountering Vygotsky's work on education later, and kind of having that come full circle. It's cool, so very cool. It's exciting to see the connection.

While Luthien was enjoying the reading and appeared to connect with RJE principles, she did not appear to be experiencing the conditions for a disorienting dilemma. The experiences she was having by participating in sessions and engaging in the reading seemed to merely reinforce beliefs that were formed through previous learning.

As illustrated by Luthien's comments, the PD series encouraged teachers to reflect on their practice through the RJE lens by inviting them to read chapters from Evans and Vaandering (2016) and write in their journal after each session. Although they did not appear to be a catalyst for Luthien, the between session activities provided opportunities for reflection that could expose tensions between current practices and

RJE principles. For example, in the homework to be done for session three, teachers were asked to take note of interactions they had with others during the week and reflect in the journals on one interaction through the quadrants of the relationship matrix (Figure 4.1). In the opening circle, teachers were invited to share their journal reflections. Mirabella began by making fun of her own "ridiculous" thoughts:

> I'm in that "to" box, right? I'm in that "to" box for sure. I have high expectation and I like to support people for being human but sometimes it's really hard to do… they were two students that I was surprised that they did not do [their homework] - they took me definitely by surprise. I was feeling very disappointed because I carefully chosen peer editing partners for everyone and they have nothing to work with for this activity… And I wanted to send them to the office to finish it. Like what a ridiculous idea! It is a ridiculous thinking. I always think it, but I really try not to, "go to the office to finish your work" (laughs at herself, others laugh too). Right? That's not support! That's some kind of shaming, right?

The other teachers laughed because they could relate to having thoughts of overreaction like wanting to send students to the office for not having their homework done. They laughed again when Mirabella admitted afterwards that she "was demonstrating flexibility that I often demonstrate but do not feel" when she used restorative questions and asked students "what happened?" despite being tempted to punish them for not doing their homework. The group seemed to recognize that these 'ridiculous' thoughts do not align with RJE principles and found it humorous that they had them.

Like Mirabella, Kay also reflected on an interaction through the quadrants of the relationship matrix:

> So, I was just thinking about a student who is often disruptive during lessons. And it's hard to get all of my student settled and ready to attend. So, once I get there and then she chooses to kind of throw that off, it's frustrating. But then looking at it through the quadrants, what I'm asking, I'm setting a high expectation for this particular child without providing support. And I think it's hard for her to sit in a chair and it's hard for her to attend. I think there are some things going on that are being explored with her family and doctor right now. So, I can't expect her to sit and listen and do. I have these high expectations and she can't do it and I'm not giving her supports all the time. I do sometimes. So, it's kind of interesting to look at it that way. And then again just the message I am sending when I get frustrated and then I get mad at her and I need to find another way, I think.

In her comments, Kay moved beyond expressing that she felt frustrated and angry when her student was disruptive and began to shift her perspective. Again, she reflected on her emotional reactions to the disruptive behaviour and realized that they did not align with the RJE principles that she hoped to embody. She demonstrated that she was beginning to shift her perception of the student's behaviour from a choice the student was making to a reaction to Kay's unrealistic expectations. Kay then voiced that she needed to find a different way of relating to the student which suggests transformative learning.

Unlike Kay who reflected on her own practice, Luthien's reflection through the relationship matrix involved examining the power structures within the school:

> I just find it interesting how, in terms of the school system structurally, we're always pulled, whether we like it or not, towards the "to". Even with something so simple as the expectation of having kids stand respectfully as we have O Canada play every Monday morning, which I personally detest and find not as important as maybe some other educators. It's just that it is so what we are expected to do. But at the same time, there is that space to be – we do have a lot of autonomy in the classroom. So, there's that space to question that, and dissect that, and deal with that in the classroom. But we are often 'told' too.

Instead of reflecting on her own practice, Luthien was contemplating how the power structures within the school impacted her teaching practice. It did not appear that she was shifting perspective but merely observing how the hierarchy of decision-making at an administrative level was playing out in her classroom.

Another example that suggests Luthien was not shifting her perspective came later in the session when she expressed a concern about sharing power with students:

> I have a smaller fear that I have kind of experienced, and not just in circles, but in general about sharing power with students. Sometimes, at least at the age level that I teach, grade 6-7, my kids are just kind of generally prone to complaining because their agency is at that point where they can be opinionated and want to share. So, when you come in and very explicitly invite them to share that power, you're also opening the door to a lot of complaining because sometimes they can mistakenly feel like that's the only way they can contribute. It's just on a logistical level, that can be really annoying…. It's like, "Oh I have a voice; therefore, I'm going to complain about what we're doing in PE", or whatever it is, they like to share their thoughts and feelings and just sometimes it's in that complaining box instead of meaningful box.

In these comments, Luthien appears to be hesitant to allow students to have more power in the class because she finds their complaining annoying. She makes it clear that the meaningful box does not give voice to students to complain about the activities she chooses for them in class.

Whereas Luthien appeared reluctant to change her educational practice in ways to share responsibility for creating a positive classroom climate with her students, Kay seemed much more open to a process of ongoing change, even after the professional development series concluded. At the last session of the RJE PD series, Kay explained:

> I think my biggest take away is that I need to find the time to make these conversations. I really liked what you just said about the diffusion of responsibility when you're talking to a whole class. I think that's what's happening in my classroom now. And a barrier for doing some of these things is just finding the time in the day to have these one-on-one conversations. But I think I need to make that a priority to move forward. And I also appreciate everything I learn from you, Joy, and everyone else who joined us, and I am so grateful for hearing everybody else's stories. I'm sort of having a window into other people's classrooms. And see I'm new in the classroom this year. So, seeing that everyone's kind of going through similar things, I think that's really powerful, and I really appreciate everyone sharing.

These closing remarks highlight the isolation that teachers can experience when they work alone and are unaware of similar challenges occurring in the classroom of others. Kay expresses her appreciation for the stories of struggle that help normalize her experiences. She indicates her intention to continue to reflect on her practice and values and resolve tensions that arise between them. There is an indication that transformative learning has begun.

In contrast, Luthien's closing remarks highlight her recommitment to RJE principles and practices that she described as aligning well with coursework she had taken as part of her undergraduate degree in sociology:

> A lot of take-aways. I think mostly I'm excited and kind of curious to explore further. It's been cool to see my various influences throughout education coming together in this restorative justice sort of language. I'm just excited to explore it further. I think I am sort of blessed with a really safe and great class to try different things and be a bit more brave than I was able to be in previous years. So, it will be cool to see how far they will go as well in some of the social emotional skills that are learned through this process. And it's really exciting because regardless of the class, I've never had anybody hate circles. I think they just love that

time, and it is a special time. Maybe especially with a challenging class but then you're limited with the things you can do in certain ways. I'm just curious and excited.

Luthien expressed enthusiasm for continuing with restorative practices and described feeling curious and excited to see how much further she can teach her students social emotional skills through RJE. However, she did not elaborate on what she meant by "explore further" beyond trying "different things".

## 5.4.  Summary

The circle discussions in the RJE PD series provided the safe space for teachers to share their stories of struggle with student disruptive behaviour. As they had their stories listened to without judgement and gained support, they began to reveal more personal thoughts and feelings. The sharing of stories helped teachers build connections with each other and validated their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. This provided fertile ground for Kay to begin to experience disorienting dilemmas and begin planting seeds of change that could result in transformative learning over time. The sharing of stories also appeared to affirm Luthien's previous commitment to RJE principles and practices.  In the following chapter, descriptions of interviews with Kay, Luthien, and Christine are explored to investigate the differences in how they experienced the RJE PD, their perceptions of their relationships with students who display disruptive behaviour, and any changes they may have noticed in themselves after participating in the RJE PD.

# Chapter 6.     Results: Case Studies

This chapter describes findings from individual interviews with three teachers, Kay, Christine, and Luthien, that focused on their experience of the RJE PD series, how they perceived their relationship with students who displayed disruptive behaviour, and the changes they did or did not notice in themselves eighteen months after the series had ended.  At the time of the RJE PD, Kay, Christine and Luthien taught at same elementary school. Christine also was a vice-principal at the school.

## 6.1.  Kay

When Kay was interviewed at the beginning of the RJE PD series, she was teaching a general education class of grade 4 and 5 students. Although she had been teaching for 6 years, this was her first year as a full-time general education classroom teacher. Previously, Kay had worked with students as a Teacher Teaching on Call and then as a Special Education and English Language Learning teacher. Kay commented that in her first year of teaching, she job-shared a primary class and had wanted a full-time classroom position, but until recently there were few positions available. Her education included a Bachelor of Education (Elementary) degree and a Post-graduate Diploma in Education with courses in English Language Learning and Special Education.

Kay was initially interviewed after school in her classroom the day following the second RJE PD session. Eighteen months after the last RJE PD session, Kay participated in a follow-up interview through MS Teams.  The second interview was delayed due to the onset of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and provincial health orders requiring schools in British Columbia to close to in-person instruction. Kay taught her class from March until May through Google Classroom and held virtual meetings with her students, half of the class at a time. Schools were open to partial in-person instruction in June 2020.

When schools opened to full, in-person instruction in September 2020, the pandemic remained a major health concern; therefore, school staff and students were required to adhere to strict health and safety protocols that included social distancing as

well as staggered entry, dismissal, recess, and lunch. At the time of the follow-up interview, Kay was teaching another class of grade 4 and 5 students.

## 6.1.1. A fragmented sense of belonging.

During the initial interview, discussion focused on the disruptive behaviour of a particular student and its impact on both Kay and the other students in her class. Kay described how she thought that having closer relationships with her students would result in them placing greater value on her reactions to them, which in turn could lead to more positive behaviour and work effort. She stated, "I think you have to have that connection for [students] to feel the power of positive reinforcement". However, she was having difficulty achieving these aims.

Kay explained that her challenging student "has maybe ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) or something" and exhibited "a lot of attention seeking behaviour". She was uncertain how to address this student's learning needs:

> I don't know that I can meet her needs right now, I don't know what her needs are because I really think that there are some significant attention issues. She needs to move all the time. After I say, "How are you today?", [she will respond] "Not good, I have so much energy" and I know it's not going to be a good day. Like there's something going on.

Kay stated she wanted "to get her on the right track and give her the support she needs so she can be successful as she moves through the school system" and framed the behaviour as a bid for connection:

> She is connection-seeking. I don't know why she has that need, but that need is there. And she's doing anything she can to connect with an adult.

Although Kay thought some of the student's disruptive behaviours were "out of [the student's] control because I think something is physically going on there," she would also describe the student as "manipulative" and "taking advantage":

> Kay: I check in with her a lot. If I 'm doing a lesson and I can see she's going to derail the lesson, I'll ask her to go get some water and come back. And she's expressed that to me, that she needs breaks. But then because she's, it's hard with her because she's a little bit manipulative, you don't know if she genuinely needs a break or if she's taking advantage that she is able to access breaks. I find that hard.

M: What would be her intent of trying to take advantage? Why would she be doing that?

Kay: I think to avoid work. She can't sit and do her work. She physically can't. So, she's always trying to find ways to get out of doing it. And now she realizes she can get out of doing it. So, there's like two things going on. There's the genuine need she has and then her taking advantage of the accommodations that are being made for her. I mean, she's nine, so of course she's going to do that. (Laughs)

Kay appeared to be having difficulty demonstrating care to her student despite recognizing the student's need for adult connection.

Kay described the tone of her class as "high energy," and the disruptive behaviour of this student often frustrated her as she tried to keep her students settled. She spoke about feeling emotionally dysregulated and angry:

I think my reacting, getting mad, is not working. I know that. And she, the other day, I was upset about something and then she kind of shut down a bit. She doesn't usually do that though. But that happened the other day.

However, her feelings appeared conflicted, as she also expressed remorse after becoming emotionally upset with the student:

Kay: She'll stop for a second and then will start again. I just, it's just frustrating. And then there's guilt because then I like, sass, and I'm like, 'she's just a nine-year-old girl'.

M: And what does that do to you when she does that?

Kay: So, then you remind yourself she's just a little kid, and then you beat yourself up. It's like a cycle. [Laughs]

Kay appeared to recognize that her emotional response of getting angry was not helping to reduce the student's challenging behaviour but was frustrated by the continued disruptions. She demonstrated a shift to more positive feelings when she focused on making a connection with the student outside of class time:

M: Was there ever a time when she was upset and came to you?

Kay: Yeah, she has started doing that. And she often does, there's a lot going on. I think she spends a lot of time at the school, so like at any moment after school she'll pop back into the class to come chat. I said this at yesterday's circle: If I'm going to be able to listen and give a child that time to listen to them and

> speak from the heart, I think those were the things they were asking at the circle [the day before], I need time... So, when she does pop back into the room, I actually do appreciate it because it gives us time just her and I, like to chat or reflect on something that's happened and in a way that's productive and not stressful for me.

Kay's comment that she valued her afterschool conversations with her student aligned with the RJE principle that nurturing healthy relationships is a critical element for creating equitable learning environments as discussed in the PD session Kay had attended previously. However, she was relying on the student to initiate these connections and did not appear to see ways in which Kay herself could create opportunities for deeper connections. Additionally, Kay's comments focus on how the afterschool interactions impacted Kay and not how they might benefit the student.

Kay's apparent lack of agency and focus on her own feelings might be because she felt overwhelmed. While she saw a benefit to forming healthy relationships, she appeared worried that when she focused her attention on forming a connection or managing the disruptive behaviour of this one student, the remaining students in the class did not receive the attention she felt they need:

> Because when I'm trying to give her that time and I have 29 kids that are going bonkers, then I'm elevated. So, I wonder if I can build that into our day. But then there's 5 other kids who need that from me too, so I don't know.

Further, although Kay expressed a desire to have a closer relationship with the student, she was having difficulty doing so:

> I know how important connection is and I see her behaviour as: she's seeking out a connection, desperately seeking out a connection. And so I try, if I have time at the beginning of the day to connect, and, "what are you going to do to have a successful day". At the end of the day, I try and debrief and set a goal for the next day when I'm calm so I can deal with her the way I wish I could. But in a class of 30, it's hard.

When speaking about her concerns about meeting the academic and social emotional needs of her student and providing individual attention to the rest of the class, Kay described the stress she was feeling, "I think I take it all home right now, I'm very overwhelmed". She appeared to be struggling to sustain a connection with her student and seemed worried that she was not providing enough attention to the other students in her class.

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## 6.1.2. An emerging, holistic sense of belonging.

In the follow-up interview, Kay spoke about having connections with the students she was currently teaching, which was different than the fragmented bonds that she described having with her previous year students in her original interview. Kay recounted how engagement in daily RJE circle practices with her current class provided a way to increase connections with and among her students during the pandemic:

> …and we actually start every day in circle this year. I did it once a week last year and I had started experimenting with it without knowing what I was doing before I started the series. I had just seen other classes do circle, so it was really interesting to go and learn the theory behind it and things like that. And it was really powerful. And [last year] in my class it was just the once a week, and I felt that this year, coming into this year with what the kids have gone through and are going through and the adults and everything, I would try just starting every day in circle just to really ground the kids at the start of the year. And we've done it every day, all year, which wasn't really my plan. But it's just they like it. And I think it's really helped this class really, really connect this year. So, yeah, it's awesome.

Kay also linked engagement in daily RJE circle practices to enhancing social-emotional wellness and a sense of community and belonging among students:

> And so, curriculum is important. But what came first for me this year is social emotional wellness. So, I think it [the pandemic] gave me an opportunity to kind of take the pressure of the curriculum off of myself and focus on building community, having the kids just be happy and connected at school. I think nothing is more important this year. And because this, the class I have, it's a different group than last year, it's a lot more, like they're not calm, but the energy is just more manageable. So, we've been able to get to the curriculum because they are such a connected class and they're able to take risks and get through the day smoothly and take care of each other. So, it's been it's been a really neat opportunity actually, this year.

As Kay focused on building a strong sense of community among students in the class as they navigated the global pandemic, she prioritized providing attention to students to build this sense of belonging over curriculum goals. She explained that RJE practices provided social spaces for the teachers and children to build relationships as they attended to and came to know each other:

> M: What differences, if any, have you noticed in your relations with others in the school, say staff or students?

> Kay: Staff? Not so much with staff, but with the students. But what I really like about it [daily circle practice] is that you have the

> kids that get a lot of your airtime because either they have more needs than other kids or they seek it out. And then there's always those kids that are kind of at the end of the day, you kind of like, 'Oh, did I even talk to them today?' And that's always that's a tough part about teaching. And so, I really love that I start every single day, well, the kids start every single day, being heard. They all have a chance to share how they're feeling and whatever other topics we're talking about, and you're looking right at them and starting your every day with that connection, just with me, with each student, and the students with each other, which I think helps with that problem of missing kids throughout the day.

Kay appeared to feel emotionally connected to her students because she was giving each student daily attention using circle practice. Whereas in the initial interview, she reported she felt overwhelmed by having too many students and guilty because she wasn't paying enough individual attention to everyone, Kay suggested this concern had now abated since she and her students engaged in RJE practices such as circles.

In addition to feeling like she was giving each student sufficient attention, engagement in RJE practices appeared to provide Kay with a means to develop a supportive and trusting environment that could handle challenging situations. When asked to reflect on a challenging situation she faced in the past month and to describe her thoughts and feelings, Kay described how circles provided a mechanism for difficult discussions:

> This has been a week. There's lot there's been lots going on. As a class, having, having the conversations about the children that were lost in the Kamloops residential school was a lot. And so, I'm so grateful we had a way for us to talk that I think the kids felt safe.

The use of circles appeared to give Kay the confidence that she had created enough emotional safety for students to discuss their personal thoughts and feelings related to sensitive issues such as the discovery of remains on the grounds of the residential school.

In addition to the practice of daily circles, Kay also spoke about her use of RJE restorative questions (e.g., "What happened", "What was going through your mind when…", etc.). She described how using the questions helped her better understand the context surrounding a student's aggressive behaviour:

I have a student who's really struggling with the transition to Canada…And there's so many layers and he's struggling. And it's hard to figure kids out when there's that kind of language barrier as well. He had a physical altercation two days ago and then tried to leave the school. He was very upset. So, with him, he has enough language that we can, once he was calm, we could talk it through and using those like questions like, he harmed another, physically harmed another child. But kind of asking him "what?", I love that question, "What happened?" Like "what's going on? Help me understand what is going on", instead of just coming down with punishments or consequences. Because I don't think that would help him, especially given what we talked about in that course.

Using restorative questions appeared to help Kay look deeper into the reasons for why the student had physically harmed another student rather than seek punishment. She was concerned about his emotional well-being and wanted to support him, despite his physically aggressive behaviour. She further elaborated that she had empathy for the student and explained that it could be traumatic moving to a new country:

I well, I just felt really sad. I felt sad that a child could be feeling such big emotions. And, you know, he's I think sometimes moving to a new country can be a trauma for kids, you know, being taken away from a parent. His dad's still there and his family, and that support network and coming here and not knowing the language. It's just, some kids are amazing and resilient and are OK and some kids just aren't. And he's expressing that with his behaviour. And it's it makes me sad for him.

While she later emphasized that the physical altercation "wasn't right and it's not okay", she expressed empathy and concern for him and was focused on repairing the harm to the other student and the relationship between them. She examined the context for the behaviour and sought to support him through what she thought was a difficult circumstance. Kay described how using RJE practices gave her the tools to address the student's social-emotional need for belonging, even when he engaged in aggressive behaviour.

At the start of the RJE PD series, Kay expressed feeling overwhelmed by the change from being a specialist teacher working with small groups to teaching a general classroom of 30 students. She seemed to feel that she did not have enough time to give her students the individual attention needed to meet their social-emotional needs. She described feeling like she was missing students and guilty when she became frustrated with one student's disruptive behaviour. However, after participating in the RJE PD series and applying RJE principles and strategies daily during the pandemic, Kay did not

express the same concerns. She reported that engagement in RJE practices provided a social space for her to attend to her students and for students to connect emotionally with her and each other, to trust one another when discussing sensitive topics, as well as repair harm and transform conflict.

## 6.2. Christine

At the beginning of the study, Christine was a newly appointed vice-principal who also taught a Grade 2 class. Her time was divided between 4 days teaching in the classroom and 1 day completing administrative duties. Christine had 5 years of teaching experience, 3 of which were at her current elementary school. She was in the process of completing a Master of Education (Education Technology). Christine had a strong interest in supporting innovation and use of technology in classrooms throughout the school district.

Christine attended three of the four RJE PD sessions; however, she was less likely to engage in discussion compared to her peers.  In contrast, during the initial and follow-up interviews, she highly engaged and reflected deeply on the topics discussed. Christine's initial interview took place after school on Monday, November 4th, 2019, in her vice-principal office. Two of the RJE PD sessions had already taken place and Christine had attended both sessions.

Eighteen months after the last RJE PD session, a follow-up interview was conducted with Christine after school on June 1, 2021, through MS Teams. Christine was nearing the end of her second year as vice-principal and was finishing her master's degree. Her first year as vice-principal had been complicated by the closing of schools to in-person instruction and required her to teach her grade 2 class online while navigating the added administrative duties to manage the pandemic. When school began in September 2020, Christine and other administrators continued to implement a variety of health and safety guidelines and protocols that shifted as more was discovered about the virus. Christine had been teaching class of grade 4 and 5 students which was a change from the grade 2 class the year before.

## 6.2.1. Belonging through patience and understanding.

Much like Kay, in the initial interview, Christine also described frustrations that she initially felt as she tried to form a strong relationship with a student who she identified as in high need of her attention:

> She kind of stood out from day one and had a lot of nervousness around being with the group [of new students], and wouldn't go into the classroom, and would sit out and wouldn't talk to anybody, would kind of shut down.

Christine's initial focus was on the student's non-compliance with teacher direction. She found that even when classroom routines were well established, the student did not follow the class and she became frustrated:

> And I'd say sometimes frustration, for sure. We're trying all do one thing and it's hard because she's kind of always following behind. Trying to catch her up and point her in the right direction with the rest of the group.

When Christine's efforts to have the student join the rest of the class were met with resistance, she appeared to be frustrated because she wanted compliance without a power struggle:

> Christine: It's definitely challenging. I have to go in with a certain plan about how I'm going to engage her and bring her into the group before we get started. But I also have to know to pick my battles, which battles to pick with her and when.
>
> M: Can you tell me about some of those battles?
>
> Christine: I think sometimes if we're in whole group and she's not sitting with us. She'll be at her desk finishing up her drawing or writing something. She actually is attending because she'll provide ideas. So sometimes I just let her do that because she's still paying attention, she's just not with the group. And so, I don't want to get into that power struggle with her everyday trying to get her to join the group.

Whereas Kay tended to emotionally react to her student's disruptive behaviour, Christine explained that she wanted to avoid confronting the student who was passively ignoring her requests:

> I just, well I have had students in the past where, it's just not a good place to be because you'll always lose. And I don't want to, the kids are still so little. And I don't want to single her out for things that she's

doing. The kids do notice that sometimes she is not doing what everyone else is doing… Sometimes I have asked her to move into a different space and she just doesn't really listen. It was kind of more at the beginning. I've been pushing a little bit more to see how much I can get away with her. We kind of have built a relationship and I can ask her to do more. But at the beginning, the whole class is a part of this weird power dynamic and recognizing who has the control over the situation, and that's just not something I really want to put myself in.

However, engaging in the RJE PD series encouraged to her shift her focus from mediating challenging behaviour while avoiding power struggles to building a stronger relationship with the student:

> And then as she transitioned to my class, it kind of took a while to kind of figure each other out. And as we started the conversations about restorative circles [in the RJE PD series], I've kind of tried to develop a closer relationship with her. And now we seem to be at a better place. She trusts me and I trust her, and I give her the space that she needs but I can also ask her to do things when I need her to and she will follow through.

Christine described how she noticed early on that the student was socially isolated and used a caring approach to encourage her to engage with others:

> For the first few weeks she was very hesitant to come to school [at the beginning of the year] and mom would drop off and she would be holding onto mom and didn't want to come in. And now it makes me very happy that she comes right in, and she doesn't even say bye to mom anymore. She is just happy to be with the group, happy to be in the class, happy to be doing things. And she talks to me about the different things that she loves about school. She writes I love school on white boards and on pieces of paper. So that's makes me super happy that we kind of transformed that perception of school for her.

It appeared to be important to that the student feel happy at school. She predicted that participating in the RJE PD would affirm the importance of forming strong, positive student-teacher relationships:

> I think it, just even being part of the conversations about restorative justice and circles, and it just reminded me, brought me back to my number one job is to build relationships. And that a lot of the frustrations that I'm having around certain behaviours can be, which I have always thought this, its' just a good reminder, especially with the new [vice principal] position, I find I get easily frustrated because I have lots going on, but at the end of the day it's those relationships will really improve the behaviour and the things that are going on within the class.

At the start of the study, similar to Kay, Christine was dealing with the stress of working in a new role. However, Christine appeared to become aware that her frustration was related more to the increased busyness of the new position and less to the behaviours of the child. She also appeared to believe that improving relationships with students and among students would improve student behaviour and the climate in her classroom. She suggested that the RJE PD might help:

> I think it's just that talking about these circles or restorative justice is just bringing me back to the importance of those relationships within the classroom and what I'm really hoping is that through, which will probably be tomorrow, some of those conversation pieces that I can have with a small group on some of the behaviour that is happening outside, or even as whole class, talking about building community and understanding between each other.

Christine described how the RJE PD sessions were helping her refocus her attention on the importance of building relationships with and among students. She reported that she cared about the student and wanted her to feel happy and part of the class community. Christine appeared to want a closer emotional connection with her student to build the trust that would be foundational to change the student's non-compliant behaviour. Engaging in the RJE PD had provided her with an opportunity to begin to reflect on reasons that were contributing to her frustrations and reminded her that "her number one job is to build relationships". Christine's hope was that engaging in RJE would help give her tools to improve the climate and culture in her classroom and strengthen student-teacher relationships.

## 6.2.2. Stepping back and creating spaces for belonging.

Eighteen months after the last RJE PD session, Christine continued to emphasize the importance of a warm, inclusive classroom and school culture. In her follow-up interview, much of the discussion consisted of affirmations of ideas she had previously expressed, but these affirmations were considered through the lens of RJE. She spoke about using weekly circles on Monday mornings to start the week:

> So, we do circle on Monday mornings, share what sort of happened over the weekend.

Christine then suggested that she was using restorative justice when incidents came up on the playground:

And so even over the last few days, things have come up on the playground and we sort of have a whole class conversation about feelings and how it can make people feel. And talking about some, talking about the issues without talking about the specific people has been really beneficial. So it has popped up in sort of organic ways in the classroom.

In these two examples, Christine's understanding of RJE appears to be about providing space for students to share their experiences with each other and discussing how feelings are affected by events and others. She alludes to RJ popping up organically in regard to possible conflict on the playground but did not appear to use a RJ circle or RJ questions in the "whole class conversation". Because of the stress of the pandemic, she emphasized the importance of creating safe spaces for students to form emotional connections, first virtually when students were learning remotely and then in circles when school came back for in-person learning in September:

I felt the need and I don't really know what the right word is, but to want to create that space, that safe space for kids on whatever platform we were using. And so, I provided a lot of opportunities where they could just show up and talk and chat about whatever it was…Then when we came back, I guess it also increased my focus and wanting to provide that space for kids, especially now that we're together. So, it was difficult when we were apart online. Now we're all back together and what an important thing to remind ourselves of the power of our community and our group.

Christine suggested that the RJE PD series had reaffirmed her belief that social emotional learning "is the foundation of all learning and that nothing can really happen without a solid foundation of feeling a sense a belonging and feeling connected". While she stated, "I've always felt that way", she noted that "there's a huge difference between when they feel like they're connected, a huge difference from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. Being connected and having a sense of belonging, it's made a huge difference."

Christine also spoke about how the combination of being an administrator and engaging in RJE PD may have helped broaden her understanding of students within their family, school, community contexts, rather than in isolation:

I think, something that I've noticed, and it's hard to know if it was part of this professional development or also my experience as an administrator, is just seeing the students for who they are and all the different things that are going on and make up that student's life. Being in the administrative role has opened my eyes to all the things that are

going on for a lot of our students. And when conflict arises or behaviour is difficult to manage or things are happening, there's so many other things at play. And to kind of remind myself to take a minute and to think about how I could use some of those practices to help resolve a conflict or to gather a small group together that are having issues on the playground and just talk some of those things through…

Christine further articulated the need to suspend her bias that children's behaviour was solely a response to the current school context and avoid making assumptions about the student's motives. She suggested she was aware that student behaviours she observed were not the whole story and had shifted the way she interacted with them:

…and it's just trying to see the students for themselves as who they are as opposed to their behaviour. Like their behaviour doesn't define them, and that maybe it was an unfortunate choice that they made but it's not who they are. They aren't stupid, they aren't whatever. But it was an unfortunate choice. And I try and take that into any conversations that I have with kids or any time I see things that are going on the playground, like not to make assumptions based on what I'm seeing. I don't know the whole context. So, it definitely has changed the way that I interact with students.

Similarly, Christine also discussed the importance of considering her colleagues lives beyond the school context when she interacted with them to solve problems in her role as a school administrator:

I'd say similarly to working with students, always there's so many other things going on for staff and for families in our school, and so [I'm] really taking that step back. I think it's kind of always been part of who I am, and I don't, I try not to react and take a minute to think about the best way to solve a problem. And again, I think that experience in this role [as vice principal] and also conversations from our restorative justice professional development is just reminding yourself of the context of what's going on and who's involved.

She further elaborated that stepping back helps to create space and listen so that she can engage with others:

I think I try and take on a lot of things within the school and I think reminding myself to take a step back and to let other people in, and to have conversations that might be tricky, but sort of having the grounding of some of those [restorative] questions, those sorts of probing questions to keep in the back of my head to help sort of facilitate those conversations.

Christine suggested that the combination of the vice principal role and the RJE PD had given her an awareness to pause and take a step back to examine the context of

situations with both staff and students. She spoke about her shift from having didactic interactions to creating space to engage others in conversation to solve problems collectively. However, there were other instances during her follow-up interview that suggested that further growth in RJE understanding is needed for greater engagement.

## 6.2.3. Continuing to grow in relational understanding.

Although Christine appeared to have some awareness of RJE principles and spoke of how they had possibly contributed to changes in her perspectives, there was also evidence that indicated she did not have a complete understanding of RJE requirements for social engagement. For instance, Christine initially described how she was using restorative practices to change her approach to problem solving:

> Because when I first started teaching, I noticed now reflecting back, I did a lot of the problem solving for them, which is not the greatest. And so, figuring out some of that [restorative] language, the probing language that was shared with us, some of those guiding [restorative] questions and things to help prompt conversation has been really helpful to come back to help students have those conversations. So, it's not me leading it, but them talking about the issue and just me being there as a mediator and helping them communicate.

Christine described how she moved from solving problems for students to facilitating with restorative questions to help students solve their own problems and repair harm from their behaviours. Although she appeared aware of the benefits of restorative questions and reported using these questions to engage students about challenging behaviour, she also provided examples where she maintained a more didactic approach in her interactions:

> And so, at the end of the day, as we came in, we all sat on our desks, and I just sort of explained what I had just heard [about a bullying incident]. It was very big. I didn't use names or anything, but based on the details that I shared, the kids could figure out what was going on and who I was talking about. And so, we shared the issue that was going on, how it could possibly make that person feel, and what different choices we could make next time, and how we could make it better moving forward… I didn't want to point fingers or have anybody say, take responsibility for it. But the conversation really pointed out the fact that it's made somebody upset, and that if you think that there is something that you need to do to make it better with that person who's upset, then here are some things that you could possibly do before the end of the day to repair that connection. Because we want to make sure that that person leaves on a more positive note and make sure that this

doesn't happen again. So that's one little thing that happened at the end of the day yesterday.

Christine had earlier expressed that using restorative questions had been helpful to engage in difficult conversations, but she did not use them to engage her students in repairing harm in this situation. Instead, she was more directive and appeared to explain what they needed to do to make things right. When she was asked what was going through her mind she stated:

> I was trying to think of the most appropriate way to deal with it. If it was if it was a whole group issue, if it was a small group, if it's something that we go into more detail with, is it something where I want to know who it was that started it? It was just kind of making those decisions about what would be the best way to solve the problem.

In describing this situation, Christine appeared to fall back into a more familiar didactic approach and focused on who was at fault rather than how to engage the students. While she seemed aware of the importance of student's acknowledging the harm their behaviour might have cause, there is little evidence that she also engaged in restorative dialogue with students that lead to repair of these harms.

Christine also suggested that the restorative questions were helpful to engage with teachers in difficult conversations, but again appeared to be more didactic in her approach:

> I think with other teachers, it's changed just in the fact that providing a space, working to provide a space to have some challenging conversations about things that are going on within the school, things that are happening on the playground, things that are especially around our school goal with social-emotional learning, sort of how are we supporting those students? What are we doing that's effective and really sort of going deeper into and having some hard conversations around philosophical things that people might not necessarily agree on or aren't doing in their classroom. And so, kind of using the [restorative] questions and the perspective that were shared with us in some of those [RJE PD] conversations.

While Christine suggested she was using the restorative questions in her role as a school administrator to engage teachers in philosophical conversations, she appeared to be using the restorative practices to influence changes in practices that were desired by administration. She mentioned that she is providing space to have challenging conversations but appeared to be guiding the direction of the conversation.

In summary, at the start of the RJE PD series, Christine appeared to be focused on the obtaining compliance from a student with disruptive behaviour; however, she also seemed to recognize the importance of building nurturing relationships with and among students. In her follow-up interview eighteen months later, Christine stressed the need to step back and engage in dialogue about harms rather than dictate solutions to harms. She also described a shift from focusing solely on the problem at hand to considering the broader context of the complex lives of students and staff that might give rise to the problem. She reported shifting from using a didactic, intervention approach to providing students and staff space to listen and have conversations about problems that arise but she also provided evidence that she did not have a full understanding of the relational stance required by RJE.

## 6.3. Luthien

At the start of the study, Luthien was teaching a class of grade 6 and 7 students in the same school as Kay and Christine. She was in her seventh year of teaching and had previously taught in several different schools including two independent schools and two schools in rural First Nations communities. Luthien had a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in sociology and a minor in psychology, did her fifth year Bachelor of Education degree in a cohort focused on elementary self-regulated learning, and completed coursework within a Post Baccalaureate diploma in Special Education.

Luthien was an active participant in the RJE PD series and attended all four of the sessions. Her initial interview was on November 4th, 2019, after school in her classroom. The first two sessions of the RJE PD series had already taken place and the third session was occurring the day after the interview. At the end of the school year of the RJE PD series, Luthien and her family left the school district and relocated to another city. She took a position with a new school district as an online teacher and taught a grade 3 class virtually. The parents of these students had elected to have their children learn at home instead of in-person because of concerns related to the pandemic. Classes were provided in mostly an online asynchronous format with some synchronous whole class instruction. Her follow-up interview took place over Zoom on May 28th, 2021, at a time that she did not have students scheduled.

## 6.3.1. A naïve understanding of belonging and RJE.

At the start of the study, Luthien expressed concern for one of her student's negative dispositions:

> So, I chose her because at the beginning of the year, she kind of started [our] class with a mindset of, she would say this often, 'I don't like this class. I don't like to be here. I miss my class from last year' and all this stuff. She was kind of the only one who had that... But then after school, she was pleasant, and we chatted. But she was always very negative in her disposition. Her view of anything. And more so than just kind of a teenage, I don't know, emotional unbalance or something. She just seemed very oppositional, but just in her speech, but then it did spill into her actions a tiny bit. She just needed more reminders to put something away and get the whatever out, and things like that. So, I just chatted with her a couple of times. I just said, 'You know, I'd really like you to think about what you're projecting to the world because it just sounds really negative. And I would like just a bit more of the positivity that I know you have if you want to share that. Otherwise, it just kind of makes it difficult to interact.' And we had a couple of conversations around that.

Notably, Luthien described the student as "oppositional", "very negative in her disposition", and having a mindset where she often complained about her class. Luthien expressed confusion by the behaviour:

> Ah, [she's] confusing. I think that experience of having her present herself in one way at certain times, like in a really negative way, "I hate this, I don't like this". But then also in a different situation, maybe a 1-on-1 situation, be very kind and sweet. And I've seen both sides of her.

Luthien recounted times when the student rejected her attempts to uncover the reasons for the confusing behaviour:

> If I chatted with her about, you know say, 'hey, do you notice that your language is really negative today? Like you were saying this and this and this'. She would just give me a face, make a face at me and say, 'you're depressing me'... I was confused because I'm trying to get at the core of what's happening. I'm trying to start a dialogue, but the dialogue would just be cut off.

Although Luthien suggested that she was trying to engage the student in dialogue, she instead used an instructive approach that pointed out the student's disposition. She appeared to have a superficial understanding of engagement. Further, when the student responded to her negatively, Luthien appeared to take it personally:

When she said everything was depressing, I'd be thinking, 'Oh My God, what am I doing, am I causing her to feel sad?' That's like the last thing I want. And it was also so confusing because had so many kids feel comfortable and that's always my goal. I have never had a student say your class is depressing or that this is depressing or whatever. So, I was thinking, what am I doing wrong? I'm trying to create a caring environment and she's telling me that she's feeling the exact opposite... clearly it came from somewhere, it came from my classroom.

The student's apparent unhappiness seemed to contrast with Luthien's expectation that her classroom is a space where students feel comfortable and recognize they are part of a caring community. She appeared to be confused that this student was not experiencing the comfort and care she was trying to develop and by the rejection to Luthien's attempts at connection.

Although Luthien did not appear to fully engage with the student in meaningful dialogue, she suggested that the student's demeanor eventually changed because of Luthien's focus on building a closer relationship:

I think that in all teaching the relationship is central. So, I think that the reason she improved was because she was feeling uncomfortable and instead of [using] punitive practices... when kids are [mis]behaving, like the more extreme the behaviour, the closer you need to bring them.

Luthien's statements appear aligned with RJE goal of nurturing healthy relationships in a trusting and accepting environment. She suggested that the student's behaviour was a form of communication:

Because they're communicating something. So, and I'm still not 100% sure what she was communicating aside from 'I'm uncomfortable' or whatever or 'I need help', but by pulling her closer and meeting with her mom and, in a very non-judgmental way, I can build supports around her, so she feels more successful.

While Luthien suggested she was withholding judgement when speaking with the student's mother, her next comments revealed that she may have a naïve understanding of acceptance and non-judgement:

And I made it very clear [to her mother] that I want her happy, I don't want her just present. This is her 7th year, and this is her final year of elementary school, I want it to be positive memories. So, I think putting that relationship first and recognizing that all players, parents and students and teachers, and other support players are invaluable in supporting a kid and making them more comfortable.

Notably, Luthien seemed to expect that children in her class are happy and positive and she appears to judge discomfort or unhappiness as negativity. She appeared to be unaware that these expectations are in contrast with the RJE that respects others by accepting them for who they are instead of trying to change them to meet our own needs. She seemed to have a naïve understanding of RJE.

## 6.3.2. Reaffirming (naïve) beliefs about belonging.

At the time of the follow-up interview, Luthien was teaching in a virtual platform. She stated that she was continuing to apply previously held RJE principles and practices that were developed before engaging in the RJE PD:

> It's kind of interesting because in terms of restorative justice circles, you can kind of apply it online because we're doing zoom calls and every zoom call is kind of like a circle… So, in a way, I think back to [the RJE PD], but of course it's different because it's not in person. I can't do a lot of the exercises or things that I was trying out with my class last year. But I think it's kind of hard to say because I was drawn to it, because I already had certain inclinations.

By describing Zoom calls as a type of circle, Luthien demonstrated that she appeared to continue to have a superficial understanding of RJE. She further spoke about how she was trying to apply RJE theory to her online classes:

> I try and I try [to use RJE], and to be honest, I feel really happy and proud of myself, of where I am now with my classroom community, because even though it's all virtual, it's all on Zoom. And we do like, Minecraft sessions together and things like that… I feel like I have a really nice class community where kids can speak out, where will also do small groups, small group calls as well.

Unlike the classes of her colleagues, she found that attendance in her online class was good, and she attributed it to her students wanting to have social and emotional connections with each other:

> They want to communicate. They want to contribute. They I don't think they're showing up for just, say, blabbing at them because it's boring. But they want to connect with one another. So, I always try and keep that top of mind.

Luthien appeared to reaffirm her view that it was important to create a sense of belonging in a caring, nurturing environment, whether this environment is face-to-face or

online. She mistakenly suggested that having spaces for students to interact and play games and interact with each other constituted a form of RJE implementation. While she described a form of social interaction that contributed to developing her online community, she did not describe the relational qualities of respect, dignity or mutual concern that would be characteristic of RJE.

Luthien further described how the RJE PD reaffirmed the importance of understanding students within their family, school, and community contexts:

> And I already had an idea or a philosophy that each child is a microcosm of many, many different things. And you have to remember the relationships. You have to see the kid in context. And of course, it's hard because sometimes you don't see, most of the time you don't see the context unless they tell you. And it's always partial information. But I do think that it was very reaffirming in that way.

Luthien suggested that she had been already drawn to RJE because of previously formed beliefs that included the belief that student behaviour should be seen in context of their lives and the importance of forming relationships. She stated that participating in the RJE PD series was reaffirming of those beliefs and had not contributed to any changes in her views:

> I'm not sure if there were necessarily changes, but I think it was a good reminder to ask yourself, especially if there is a challenging interaction, or something like that, or a day, just to ask yourself, 'what did I do or what could I do or how I was that day? And then what about the kids?' And so, I think it was a reminder more than anything… So, I think we need we need reminders to keep up with our practice. Otherwise, it's going to just fall by the wayside.

Luthien explained that she had earlier developed her RJE views because a sociology professor in her undergraduate classes had used RJE practices and it had a profound influence on her ideas of how teaching should be done. She suggested she began teaching with these ideas of creating community and honouring students because of this experience and was drawn to the RJE PD because she already had similar beliefs and practices. Therefore, Luthien did not appear to view the RJE PD as a potential catalyst for change, but an affirmation of principles that she already had established. She did not appear to shift to a deeper understanding of RJE after experiencing the PD and continued to have a naïve understanding.

At the start of the study and eighteen months later in the final interview, Luthien appeared to hold beliefs that students in her classroom should be happy, comfortable, and connected with her and each other. She also appeared to have naïve understandings of RJE that did not shift or deepen after the RJE PD. Luthien suggested the lack of change was attributed to her early experiences with RJE in her undergraduate program that shaped her beliefs about teaching. Instead of being a catalyst of change, the RJE PD appeared to serve as reinforcement for previous beliefs about needing to reflect upon the context beneath disruptive behaviour and the importance of forming relationships with students.

## 6.4. Social Validity and Feasibility of RJE PD

The RJE PD appeared to be a positive experience for Kay, Christine, and Luthien. Christine suggested it provided an opportunity to hear about challenges other teachers were experiencing and helped her feel less isolated:

> It was nice to just hear what's going on in other schools and situations that are coming up and being able to talk through it with some district staff members was nice. I think as a classroom teacher, sometimes you feel like things are happening in isolation in your classroom and you're doing the best that you can. But it's nice to hear that similar things are happening in other places and how they are managing and dealing with it.

Kay suggested it was "really powerful proD when you can connect with colleagues" and hear other teacher's stories. She expressed appreciation for the practice of circles suggesting that it was what made the series "powerful":

> I think one thing is that we were in a circle, and they created a safe space for us to share. Just having that that format for sharing, which actually thinking about it would be such a great thing to do with a staff or like in staff meetings, be in a circle in staff meetings. But yeah, I liked that. And just any proD where you have that chance to hear from your colleagues and what's happening in their classrooms is nice.

Luthien's appeared interested in learning how to implement the strategies with her students:

> I think that I walked away thinking that it was really cool. I really enjoyed it. I really liked the hands-on stuff. It would take me a while to process some of it and think through some of the ideas and some of the exercises, especially some of the experiential stuff that I wanted to try,

because you can't necessarily just throw everything at the kids. So, it would take me a while, but I definitely wanted more. I definitely was keen to, if there was more training, I would have done it.

All three teachers expressed interest in additional RJE sessions. Similar to Luthien, Kay suggested another session that focused on deeper implementation of restorative practices. Christine suggested "those touchbacks every now and again connecting back with those staff [who participated]" to discuss their use of RJE in their classrooms and reconnect on a regular basis.

## 6.5. Summary

The findings revealed that the three teachers experienced the RJE PD differently and demonstrated differing levels of transformation from the start of the RJE PD series to the follow-up interviews that took place 18 months later. All teachers spoke about the importance of forming relationships with students and exploring the context beneath displays of disruptive behaviour but their understanding of engagement within the RJE context varied. In addition, all three teachers expressed that they would have liked to have some sort of additional RJE PD experiences after the series.

The follow-up interview with Kay indicated that she may have had the greatest level of transformation among the three teachers. Unlike in the initial interview where she appeared concerned about missing students, she suggested that daily practice of RJE strategies provided her an opportunity to connect with and give attention to each of her students shifting the fragmented development of a sense of belonging in her class to a more cohesive and sustained sense of belonging. Christine stated that using RJE practices, particularly restorative questions, had impacted her relations with students by reinforcing the importance of cultivating belonging through patience and understanding. However, there was limited evidence of transformation since many of her perspectives were given from the point of view of her role as vice principal and focused on using RJE strategies to solving problems and have difficult conversations to change the behaviour of others. Luthien demonstrated very little transformation and appeared to continue to have similar naïve understandings of RJE that she reported developing during her undergraduate program.

# Chapter 7.    Discussion

This chapter summarizes the study findings in relation to the research questions and discusses their application to RJE research and professional development (RJE PD) for teachers.  The primary aim of the chapter is to highlight the experiences of teachers who participated in a four-part RJE PD series and discuss how teachers' perceptions of their relationships with students who engage in disruptive behaviour changed over time. The research questions that guided the study are addressed, and the implications of study findings for RJE PD practice are discussed. The chapter concludes with the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research.

## 7.1.  How do teachers experience RJE PD?

A sense of connection and belonging was a theme that emerged in the teachers' discussions as they experienced RJ circles in the RJE PD. Engagement in circles was foundational to constructing common ground where teachers shared stories and created bonds. Initially, teachers kept their focus looking outwards at topics that pertained to establishing and maintaining a positive classroom climate and culture and they were tentative about exposing feelings of frustration or expressing doubt about their teaching practices. However, as the RJE PD progressed and teachers engaged in more RJ circles, they began to reflect inwards and openly share their personal thoughts and feelings as they related to RJE principles. This personal sharing served as catalysts for deeper stories to emerge. The complex narratives revealed that teachers often struggled with problematic student behaviour that caused them to feel overwhelmed. They shared stories about difficulties they had with classroom management, their frustrations with disruptive behaviour, and their subsequent feelings of regret and guilt. The sharing of these personal stories helped teachers develop stronger connections with each other.

As the RJE PD progressed and teachers developed stronger connections by openly sharing in RJ circles, they deepened the way in which they related to each other, which Llewellyn and Morrison (2018) describe as the deepening the relational ecology. Silverman and Mee (2018) suggest that sharing in RJ circles promotes connection among teachers by providing safe spaces for teachers to not only voice their own thoughts, but also hear the struggles of others that reassures them they are not alone in

their feelings. This was observed in an RJE circle during the second session when Mirabella openly shared a story about her frustration with a student that appeared to serve as a catalyst for other teachers to be open about their own frustrations and missteps in their teaching. It was in this RJ circle where Kay stated that, "it's nice to hear that I'm not alone" and where she was observed reflecting on her approach to classroom management. RJ circles helped shift teachers' feelings of isolation to feelings of connection and belonging and allowed them to begin critically examining their practice within the RJE paradigm. In her mixed-methods study of two schools that used restorative practices, Brown (2017) similarly found that it is through building of relational trust that RJE can nurture a listening culture that supports teachers as they work through the challenge of examining and changing the culture in their classrooms. As suggested by Llewellyn (2012), the relational focus of RJE creates a nurturing environment in which teachers can engage in critical reflexive dialogue that plant the seeds of change. Winn (2018) also suggests that the relational nature of RJ circles creates the possibility of a "restorying process" where teachers can "begin to form boundary-crossing social connections and circles become transformative learning spaces" (p. 44). Through the social connections made in circle, teachers can define and redefine themselves and their perspectives in ways that are new to others or themselves. The idea of restorying aligns with Mezirow's theory of transformative learning (1991) that posits when teachers can engage with others in open communication to critically examine their own assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes that have been acquired through socialization, they are more likely to transform their perspectives. In addition, through focus group interviews that occurred 6-9 months after a 2-week RJE PD, Vaandering (2014, 2019) found that when participants experienced such a paradigm shift, the transformation was unlikely to be reversed. Results from the current study followed a similar pattern where the building of relational trust in the RJE PD provided Kay with an opportunity to examine her own beliefs, attitudes and practices and transform her perspectives toward students with disruptive behaviour. Similar to findings by Vaandering (2014, 2019), eighteen months after the RJE PD, Kay's transformation appeared to be sustained.

In addition to providing opportunities for self-reflection that may transform perspectives, the connections developed through the RJE PD also provided opportunities for teachers to explore any feelings of guilt and shame. For instance, both Kay and Christine commented that the stories shared in circle provided an opportunity

for them to glimpse into the classroom of other teachers and helped to normalize their experiences with the challenging behaviour of students. They appeared relieved that other teachers also had feelings of anger and frustration, which may indicate that they were holding some feelings of shame. Hargreaves (1998) suggests that when teachers believe that they have fallen short of their own or other's moral standards, they often experience shame. Many teachers in the study appear to have the belief that a good teacher does not show negative emotions. They may have felt a degree of shame for becoming frustrated, shame that they were initially reluctant to share. This reluctance is consistent with Koenen, Spilt, and Kelchtermans' (2022) finding that teachers they interviewed often struggled with a tension that arose between their understanding of self as teacher and the realities of the classroom experience. These authors suggested that teachers may not always feel capable of living up to their views of good teaching and can feel forced to hide personal thoughts and feelings that might be interpreted as negative. Instead of voicing the tension they struggle with, they often express false positive attitudes towards students and their relationships with students. However, when some teachers began to share their stories and express feelings guilt and shame in RJ circles, others were able to connect with those stories and began to explore their own struggles.

When feelings of shame are internalized and hidden, teachers often become disconnected from themselves and others. However, when teachers can express shame in safe spaces such are provided by RJ circles, they are able to reconnect and strengthen their sense of belonging. Gregory, Clawson, Davis, and Gerewitz (2016) suggest that admitting wrongdoing and addressing harm through RJE helps to resolve shame. Hargreaves (1998) also suggests that healthy teachers require ways to acknowledge shame they feel about their past actions. Hargreaves asserts that, without this acknowledgement, teachers may not change their actions and instead rationalize them or project blame onto others. During RJE PD, the use of RJ circles invites educators to slow down, be present, listen to one another, set aside hierarchies, and speak from the heart (Pranis & Boyes-Watson, 2015). This pause in regular busyness provides teachers with opportunities to be vulnerable with each other and express any feelings of frustration, guilt, or shame they may hold. In this study, RJ circles allowed teachers to examine how they view good teaching and provided space necessary to explicitly explore the internal and external conflicts that resulted from trying to achieve

them. Christie (1977) suggests that spaces where teachers can engage with their conflicts and hear similar voices and stories of others provide opportunities for norm-clarification, the building of a collective understanding of how to socially be together. The RJE PD helped teachers probe into their internal and external conflicts, express feelings of shame, and allowed them to reconnect with themselves and others to strengthen their sense of belonging.

## 7.2. How are perspectives on student-teacher relationships transformed as teachers engage in RJE PD?

Three broad themes emerged from the findings that address how teachers' perspectives on student-teacher relationships transformed as they engage in RJE PD. These themes involve a shifting focus from the student to the teacher, a growth in relational understanding of students who create disruptions, and naïve understandings of RJE held by some teachers.

### 7.2.1. Shifting focus from student to teacher.

A theme addressing how teachers' perspectives on their student-teacher relationships transformed as they engaged in RJE PD involved teachers shifting their focus from the behaviour of their students to focusing on their own behaviour and perspectives. For example, in the initial interview, Kay expressed feeling overwhelmed by the high number of students with needs in her classroom. She appeared to believe that she was unable to provide sufficient individual attention to each of her students and became frustrated when one student continually engaged in disruptive behaviour. Kay attributed her inability to meet her students' attention needs to circumstance that were outside of her control, including a high number of students, a lack of resources in the public system, and what she believed was undiagnosed ADHD in her student. However, as she engaged in the RJE PD, Kay's began to alter her focus on external factors and began to pay attention to her own behaviours, beliefs, and attitudes. She described how, after she read about the relationship window in Evans and Vaandering (2016) and reflected in her journal for the RJE PD homework, she began to realize that her student was not being willfully disobedient when she engaged in disruptive behaviour. Rather, Kay realized that she had set unrealistic expectations for the student and that she was

not giving the student enough support. Following Mezirow (1991)'s conception of a disorienting dilemma, Kay's description of this revelation was a profound event that caused her to re-examine her beliefs about expected student behaviour. The RJE PD appears to have provided Kay with a way to self-reflect on her practice and perspectives and seek new ways of engaging with her students.

Kay's initial belief that she was unable to provide enough attention to the student with ADHD because of the overwhelming factors outside of her control (e.g. too many students, the student had ADHD, not enough resources) is consistent with Koenen et al.'s (2022) finding that, when teachers attributed their inability to form close student-teacher relationships to stable causes (e.g. symptoms of ADHD or other diagnosis), they are less likely to report that they had agency to make positive changes to their connection with these students. However, Vaandering (2014) suggests that RJE serves as a mirror that reflects the teacher's pedagogical practice and stance. Morrison (2007) writes, "children are our mirror, our reflection", we know how well we are doing when we look at the well-being of our children (p.191). When students are engaging in problematic behaviour, RJE PD invites teachers to look deeply into the mirror and examine their philosophical stance, their practices, and consider how they might make changes. RJE PD provides an opportunity for teachers to engage in deep self-reflection that may reveal how they are contributing to the problem and spark insights leading to transformation.

In her 6-9 month follow-up interviews of teachers who participated in a 2-week RJE PD, Vaandering (2019) found that when teachers were able to look in the mirror and examine their personal philosophical stance by reflecting on their own core beliefs and values within the RJE paradigm, they begin to feel the tension created when their practices are in conflict with RJE perspectives. A similar tension was expressed by Kay when she identified the mismatch between her values and her actions in one of the sessions. This aligns with the transformative learning process that requires reflection involving critical examination of one's beliefs through interacting with others in open communication to expose conflicts of thought (Mezirow, 1991). Kay appeared to continue the transformative learning process in the eighteen months that followed. She no longer expressed feeling overwhelmed nor mentioned the high number of students or needs in her class. Kay appeared more confident in her ability to handle challenging behaviour, including a serious physical altercation by one student against another. Kay

suggested that the RJE practices provided her with a way to connect deeply with each of her students and with a framework to deal with challenging situations. Through RJE PD that offered teachers reflective space on restorative frameworks and connections with self and peers, connections with students were facilitated.

## 7.2.2. Growth in relational understanding of students who create disruptions.

A related theme that emerged from the findings involved an increased awareness by teachers that there is often a deeper, unknown context related to the disruptive behaviour of students beyond the circumstances presented in the school context. In the three follow-up interviews, all teachers emphasized their need to look beyond misbehaviour and patiently consider any possible underlying personal contexts of students. They also suggested that it was important to understand that disruptive behaviour was often influenced by difficult and traumatic circumstances and that students engaging in disruptive behaviour especially require their care and empathy.

This finding aligns with previous research indicating that when teachers are able to look beyond misbehaviour to seek a greater understanding and have empathy for the student's situation, they are more likely to respond in ways intended to help the student (Barr, 2011; Poulou & Norwich, 2000). Moreover, through the examination of closeness and conflict patterns of 5-minute speech samples given by classroom teachers, McGrath and Van Bergen (2019) found that teachers who are more social-emotionally competent and express empathy are also more likely to seek closer student-teacher relationships. Additionally, Wink, LaRusso, and Smith (2021) describe cognitive empathy as the ability to understand the perspective and emotional experiences when others are distressed and differentiate it from affective empathy which describes the emotional response to the emotional experiences others. After assessing teacher empathy of elementary school teachers (N=178) through online surveys in the Northeastern United States, they found that teachers who express greater cognitive empathy are more likely to have a positive approach to supporting students with problematic behaviour. These teachers are more likely to believe that the students are not wilfully misbehaving and view the behaviour as a lack of skills that need teaching. The authors also suggest that teachers may feel more competent in handling student behaviour when they take this alternate perspective of disruptive behaviour. Engaging in RJE PD may promote cognitive empathy abilities in

teachers which in turn may help improve their willingness and feelings of competence to support and improve their relationships with students with behaviour challenges. In addition, Wink et al. (2021) suggest that increased cognitive empathy in teachers may also lead to better attunement and deeper connections with these students.

### 7.2.3. Naïve understandings of the purpose of RJE.

The findings in this study suggest that when teachers view restorative practices as a method to improve student disruptive behaviour, they may miss opportunities to deepen their connections with students. For instance, in the initial interview, Christine suggested that engaging in RJE PD reminded her that her focus should be on improving relationships with students and that would result in improvements in behaviour and the classroom climate. However, in the follow-up interview, she stated that learning about RJE had shifted her engagement with students to solve problems with them instead of solving the problems for them, but she did not engage students in restorative practices when an instance of bullying took place with her class. Instead, Christine described how she spoke to the class using restorative language to outline the problem and then suggested to them how to repair the harm. Instead of engaging the students in restorative practices to repair the relationships, she used the restorative language to help manage the situation. In addition, Christine also described how she used restorative questions to have difficult conversations with teachers to steer them towards improving their connections with and support for students. Christine's use of RJE practices did not appear to deepen her connections with others. Rather, they appeared to be a means to an end: to improve student behaviour and to help teachers engage in self-reflection to influence their practices so they were more in line with administrative goals.

RJE holds promise to lead to more equitable student outcomes by reducing exclusionary practices and improving student-teacher relationships (Gomez et al., 2021; Gregory et al., 2016). However, in a comparative case study that focused on the use of restorative practices in two schools, Reimer (2019) concluded that it is not RJE implementation that is the key element to improving teacher engagement with students, but the relational intent for using the restorative practices. Reimer suggests that RJE will be used to advance whatever the relational objectives of the school were prior to implementation. She found that in schools with a compliance focus, teachers appeared to view restorative practices as a kinder, less punitive way to control student behaviour,

while in schools with a focus on building relationships and nurturing healthy communities, teachers appeared to view restorative practices as an effective way to increase student engagement and empowerment. The findings of the current study follow a similar pattern.

Although the series was titled "Building Classroom Community Through Proactive Circles", it became clear from the teachers' comments and discussions early in the series that their main hope was to improve classroom management and instruction. This hope was also observed at the start of the study when Christine stated her intent for using RJE practices was to improve student behaviour through nurturing stronger relationships and, a year following the RJE PD, there was no evidence that she had increased her engagement with students. In her initial interview, Luthien expressed hoping restorative practices would provide ways for her to make her classes more enjoyable for her students and, eighteen months after the end of the RJE PD, she also did not appear to demonstrate any deeper understanding of the relational context that RJE requires. Christine and Luthien appeared to hold naïve understandings of RJE, and no evidence emerged to indicate they had strengthened their connection with students by the end of the study. By contrast, Kay reported a significant increase in her engagement with students. Kay's explicit intent for using RJE was to create strong connections with and among her students due to the circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic that included three months of lockdown restrictions in the previous year. As a result of using daily circles, Kay reported greater engagement and a strong connection with each of her students.

The hope that RJE might address the disruptive behaviours of their students and improve the classroom climate is not surprising since there is evidence to indicate that strengthening student-teacher relationships often results in improved student behaviour (Bringewatt et al., 2020; Wilkinson & Bartoli, 2021). However, Koenen, Spilt and Kelchtermans ( 2022) argue that teachers may judge their teaching performance based on the positive return of their investment in student-teacher relationships. If they do not receive the return of increased closeness and student compliance, they may give up on RJE. McCluskey (2013) argues that when RJE is structured as an approach to behaviour management, teachers will tend to default to what they know and may look to enforce rules or seek compliance rather than focus on improving relationship and connection. Although restorative practices are often associated with a way to address

negative behaviours, the core of the RJE approach has the focus on promoting and maintaining positive relationships and is not disciplinary or behavioural, but relational (Llewellyn & Llewellyn, 2015).

The challenge when designing and implementing RJE PD is to address teacher intent for their use of restorative practices in their classroom through a deep examination of their personal paradigm or philosophical stance as related to their role as teacher and their relationship with students. Vaandering (2019) suggests that RJE PD can impact personal philosophical stance if it asks teachers to explore their ways of being and knowing. Her study found that one indication of an impact to personal philosophical stance was when teachers were able to reflect critically on their practice and were no longer satisfied with the status quo. Although she asserts that RJE PD cannot dictate what the philosophical stance should be, she suggests that a shift to a more relational stance is likely to take place when the RJE PD first provides space, time, and active opportunities to understand what it means to have a paradigm or philosophical stance. Vaandering stated that it cannot be assumed that teachers are aware that they view the world through a particular frame of reference. She then further suggests that RJE PD must provide space, time, and active opportunities for teachers to deeply examine their personal core beliefs and values that shape their decisions and actions. Vaandering states that while individual reflection is critical for this process, it is further developed through the sharing of their ideas and listening to others. Instead of asking teachers to examine their personal core beliefs and values, the outcomes stated for the first session of the RJE PD in this study focused on introducing participants to the history, principles, and values of RJE (see Appendix A) As a result, teachers may not have fully understood when their philosophical stance did not align with RJE beliefs and values and mistakenly believed that they had adopted a restorative ethos as was demonstrated by Christine and Luthien. When clear guidance in the process of exploring a teacher's own beliefs and values is not explicitly provided, transformation may occur by chance rather than design.

## 7.3. Implications for Educational Practice

Positive student-teacher relationships are important for student success, especially for those who display disruptive behaviour (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Studies suggest that teachers' perceptions of the reasons for

disruptive behaviour affect how they respond emotionally and behaviourally to the student (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2019; Mikami et al., 2019; Nemer et al., 2019). Teachers with higher social emotional competence have more self-awareness of their emotions, are more socially aware, and recognize the emotions of others, and are able to regulate their emotions and behaviours in ways that promote a positive climate in the classroom and stronger student-teacher relationships (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Additionally, when teachers have empathy for behaviourally challenged students, they are more likely to support them and form deeper connections with them (Wink et al., 2021). The findings of this study suggest that RJE PD may help teachers further develop their social-emotional competencies and have more empathy for students by providing a vehicle for self-reflection through the lens of RJE.

Morrison (2007) points out that the behaviour of children serves as a mirror. RJE PD invites teachers to look deeply into the mirror to see what they might be doing that contributes to any conflict and injustice (Vaandering, 2014). When RJE PD is presented as an option for professional development, it is recommended that the emphasis be on encouraging teachers to self-reflect on their practice and philosophical stance with the hope of improving student engagement and empowerment. Since Reimer (2019) suggests that RJE are often used to further existing relational goals, it is recommended that RJE PD not be described with a focus on improving student behaviour. Instead, teachers could be advised that RJE PD may help them find ways to cultivate equitable and nurturing learning environments and gain a better understanding of how to improve relationships with and among students.

When developing RJE PD, organizer should consider that teachers may harbour feelings of shame if they believe they are falling short of their views of good teaching (Hargreaves, 1998). They may seek to rationalize their actions, project blame on to others (Hargreaves, 1998), or be reluctant to share their true thoughts and feelings about experiences of conflict with students (Koenen et al., 2022). While engaging in RJ circles may provide a safe space to express stories of classroom challenges and frustration that allow teachers to feel that they are not alone in their experiences (Silverman & Mee, 2018), it is also possible that through open sharing teachers can become engulfed in a negative narrative about students in ways that are counter to the RJ emphasis on human dignity, compassion, and relationships (Braithwaite, 2002). This negative narrative was illustrated when Luthien described her "what not to do" actions of

discussing a student's behaviour with the class and was reinforced by Grace who helped justify Luthien's behaviour. In such situations, it is likely that teachers may be seeking to supress feelings of shame (Hargreaves, 1998). To mitigate the risk of falling into a negative spiral of student blame, it is recommended that facilitators explicitly state that RJE PD is a space where teachers are encouraged to explore and question the usual social norms in schools and redefine them in ways that collectively resolve conflict (Christie, 1977). This begins by clearly establish RJE community agreements (Pranis & Boyes-Watson, 2015) that reinforce RJE values of respect, dignity, and mutual concern (Evans & Vaandering, 2016) before discussions within and outside of circle take place. After clearly identifying what it means to speak with respect for the dignity and concern of others, it is necessary for facilitators to have the ability to listen for language that assigns blame or is counter to RJE values, gently point out how the discussion is inconsistent with the established community agreements and help guide participants back to restorative practice. Facilitators should infuse the core values and beliefs into the talking circle and all RJE PD activities while continually encouraging participants to reflect on how their stories and practices fit within the RJE framework (Vaandering, 2019).

Vaandering (2019) additionally recommends that RJE PD be designed with five components for transformative learning. She suggests that RJE PD have: (1) explicit space, time, and active opportunities for participants to understand the meaning of a philosophical stance; (2) active examination of participants' personal core beliefs and values that shape their decisions and actions; (3) full engagement with the foundational elements of RJE that shift away from dominant social thought; (4) explicit exploration of participants' philosophical stance, the connections between their unconscious and conscious thoughts, and how they may relate to new possible ways of being; and (5) active participation in theory-guided, facilitated dialogue that encourages reflexivity that deepens understanding of self and may lead to greater empowerment and autonomy. Although the RJE PD in the current study involved engagement with RJE foundational elements and guided dialogue, it did not explicitly emphasize identification and examination of a teacher's philosophical stance. The first two components as outlined by Vaandering are necessary to help teachers become aware of their philosophical stance and when it may be inconsistent with the principles and values of RJE. Including these components in RJE PD may have prevented the naïve understandings of RJE observed

in Christine and Luthien who spoke about RJE but did not appear to demonstrate it in their practices. When an emphasis on understanding one's personal philosophical stance is included in the RJE PD, teachers may also be better able to recognize when their discussions are falling into negative student narratives and may be more easily steered back towards talk that is more representative of restorative values. RJE PD design should follow Vaandering's recommendation and include all five components for optimal conditions for transformative learning.

Gregory and Evans (2020) also suggest that schools and districts adopt a principle-based, comprehensive, and equity-oriented approach to RJE implementation. Restorative practices should be described as aligning with the RJE principles of respect, dignity, and mutual concern for all members of the learning community and the RJE commitment to justice and equity. A comprehensive approach involves examining all aspects of education including staff behaviours, school and district policies and procedures, decision- making processes, in addition to student behaviours. Gregory and Evans suggest that a focus on equity means paying attention to opportunity gaps, hierarchies, and disproportionate disciplinary and exclusionary practices as it relates to characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, ability, social economic status, language, culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Gregory and Evans recommend that schools implement RJE with context sensitive, strategic, and long-term plans, perhaps as described by Morrison (2007), McCluskey (2013), and Brown (2018). However, there is no single or stepwise model for successful implementation of RJE. RJE implementation is complex, requires ongoing commitment and effort, and takes a great deal of time (Brown, 2018; Gregory & Evans, 2020; Winn, 2018). Gregory and Evans suggest that any implementation and study of RJE requires a minimum of three to five years.

## 7.4. Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, it is lacking in student perspective. The study examined the experiences of teachers who participated in the RJE PD but there was no exploration of how their participation impacted the experiences of students. The perspective of teachers is often different than their students (Den Brok, Bergen, & Brekelmans, 2006) and teachers tend to view the learning environment in a more favourable light than their students (Fraser & O'Brien, 1985). In addition, as

suggested by Gregory and Evans (2020), student perspectives are also needed to have a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the RJE PD.

Next, teachers who voluntarily selected to participate in the RJE PD and the study were predisposed to RJE ideas and therefore may not be representative of the average classroom teacher. Teachers who might be required to participate (e.g. in a whole school or district approach) may not engage in ways observed in this study. Consideration would need to be taken as to how to approach and involve teachers who have no interest in RJE PD.

Another limitation involves social desirability bias. Teachers may have answered interview questions in ways that presented themselves in the best possible light due to the influence of my district administration role in the school district. This limitation could be mitigated by the involvement of co-researcher who was not involved in the school district. Alternately the study could have been done in a different school district.

Lastly, the study was limited as a result of the interruption and resulting complications of the study due to onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. This study examined the perspectives of teachers over two school years that included a 3-month school closure, variable health and safety restrictions, and changes to school structures and routines. The disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have highlighted the impact on the social emotional well-being of young people (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2020) and may have influenced teachers perceptions of the RJE PD. A longer study of three to five years (Gregory & Evans, 2020) without the influence of the complication of a global pandemic may capture a more representative experience for teachers.

## 7.5.  Directions for Further Research

Findings from this study suggest additional opportunities for future research. First, a valuable contribution to the extant literature would include an examination of students' perception of changes in their relationship with teachers who engage in RJE PD. While there have been a limited number of studies that include the examination of students' experience of school wide restorative practices (Brown, 2018; Reimer, 2020), a study of student perceptions in how their relationships with their teachers change would

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provide a more direct understanding on the impact of RJE PD on specific student-teacher relationships.

Second, additional research that investigates transformations in teacher perception and classroom practice that takes place over several school years would provide a detailed picture of how RJE PD might affect teachers' perceptions and practices (Gregory & Evans, 2020). Gregory and Evan (2020) recommend that research that examines changes that arise from RJE implementation use mixed method designs and take place over a minimum of three to five years due to the complexities of RJE implementation. They suggest that research not simply focus on outcomes, but on how RJE implementation and practices might foster social-emotional growth in staff and students.

## 7.6.  Concluding Thoughts

Shortly after he wrote *Beyond Monet: The Artful Science of Instructional Integration* (Bennett, 2001), I heard Dr. Barrie Bennett describe the job of the general classroom teacher as more challenging and complex than the role of a brain surgeon. He suggested that every day, classroom teachers are required to plan for several different events in succession, to perform multiple tasks throughout the day, manage several young people at once, and carry this all out by themselves. Brain surgeons, he argued, plan exclusively to do one specific surgery, the surgery is carried out under controlled conditions, there is a team of professionals assisting, and there is only one patient. With dramatic flair he added, and the one patient is knocked unconscious. While I found his comparison humorous, it stuck with me for decades for another reason, it painted a very relatable picture. The work of teachers is indeed very challenging and complex, and as the teachers in this study described, at times it can feel like they are struggling it all alone until they hear the stories of others.

I began this research with the hope of better understanding the beliefs and attitudes that teachers hold towards their students who exhibit disruptive behaviour. I wanted students who were expressing themselves through their behaviour to be cared for and understood by their teachers with the hope that their school journey might shift for the better (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). This study has allowed me to hear the voices of teachers and better understand that if we want our students to be cared for, we also

need to care for our teachers and provide spaces for them to connect with themselves and each other, to express their doubts, their guilt, and feelings of shame. Restorative justice in education may provide these spaces. My hope is that educators and researchers will continue to explore multiple ways to nurture relational, interconnected school communities.

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# Appendix A. Program Description

## Day 1: Introduction to Restorative Justice in Education

**Learning outcomes:**

- Comprehend the history and foundational components of restorative justice (RJ). This will include sharing about how RJ has evolved and currently exists in the Canadian landscape;

- Understand the history of RJE and how it originated from RJ (i.e., how it has evolved and how it is currently applied in Canada, as well as locally);

- Identify a core belief of RJE that people are worthy and relational;

- Understand that RJE is rooted in the values of respect, dignity, and mutual concern;

- Define RJE in terms of facilitating learning communities that reflect the core values and supports the inherent dignity and worth of all;

- Identify the relationship between RJE and well-being of self (e.g., mental health, sense of belonging and addiction issues), others, and the community; and

- Actively participate in Circle and reflect on own experience.

**Agenda**

1. Welcome

2. Circle focus: Introduction to Restorative Justice in Education

3. The lenses we use to see the world through – RJE values and beliefs

4. Learning by Doing - Activity 1: Listening Stances and Concentric Circles

5. Debrief

6. Take away

7. Homework:

- Using reflective journaling: In the next week, notice your thoughts, feelings, and actions (behavior and words) when dealing with student discipline. Describe what happened (What did the student(s) do? What did you do?), how you felt (what emotions went through you?), and what you were thinking (about the student(s), about yourself). Reflect on this situation and try to identify the beliefs and values that are driving these thoughts, actions, and emotions.

- Please also read chapters 3 and 4 of the *Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education* (Evans & Vaandering, 2016) in preparation for the next session.

- If you are willing to share your reflective writing, please bring a copy of your journal writing to the next session and write down your pseudonym on it.

## Day 2: Creating Just and Equitable Learning Environments

**Learning outcomes:**

- Reflect on own beliefs that shape their view of their classrooms using the 3 questions: Am I honoring, Am I measuring, and What message am I sending?;

- Identify the relationship between individual needs and just and equitable outcomes;

- Explicitly address expressions of feeling through the Circle process;

- Begin developing Circle processes for their classrooms;

- •Identify tips & tricks to engage all students and how to build buy-in from students; and

- Reflect on learning from the homework and the first session.

**Agenda:**

1. Welcome

2. Opening: Check-in and homework sharing from Day 1

3. Circle focus: Essential Elements of Circles

4. Learning by Doing: Values

5. Debrief

6. Take away

7. Homework:

- Using reflective journaling: please notice your interactions and your interactions with others. Describe an interaction that reflects one of the 4 quadrants from the relationship window (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p.63).

- In addition, please read chapter 5 (Evans & Vaandering, 2016) and specifically reflect on personal situations from each of the 4 quadrants of the relationship matrix (page 63).

## Day 3: Nurturing Healthy Relationships

**Learning outcomes:**

- Identify the conditions that are required for "power with" (unconditional acceptance);

- Experience and identify what is required to feel seen and heard (be honored);

- Develop the structures for facilitating Circle in their classroom: creating the space, setting the intentions, talking piece, opening questions;

- Learning to listen and learning to ask; communications skills to nurture healthy relationships between students and between students and teachers; and

- Reflect on learning from the homework and the first two sessions.

**Agenda:**

1. Opening Round

2. Circle focus

3. Debrief

4. Learning by Doing: Concentric Circles

5. Debrief

6. Energizer: 'Big Wind Blows'

7. Closing

8. Take away

9. Homework

- Using reflective journaling, please write down an example of when a student was acting in a way that was harmful to others or very disruptive. Describe the situation and then answer the following questions:

  What was happening?
  What were you thinking and feeling at the time? Has this changed?
  What was the hardest thing for you?
  Who was impacted by this and how?
  What did you need to do to move forward? What do you still need to do or would do differently?

- Please also read **chapter 6** (Evans & Vaandering, 2016) and try one short Circle activity in their classroom and reflect on the experience. Reflections can be brought in and discussed for the last session.

## Day 4: Transforming Conflict through RJE

**Learning outcomes:**

- Define and understand the concepts of harm and conflict;

- Understand how RJE addresses harm and conflict;

- Identify the conditions necessary for harm and conflict to be addressed through RJE (including conflict between students, as well as dialogue with parents that promote restorative values);

- Identify ways to mitigate disruptions;

- Practice using affective statements;

- Facilitate Circle processes that involve a disruptive component; and

- Reflect on learning from the homework and the first three sessions.

**Agenda:**

1. Welcome
2. Opening
3. Circle focus
4. Activity
5. Group Brainstorm activity
6. Affective Statements Activity
7. Take aways
7. Closing

# Appendix B.  Interview Questions

## Initial Interview Questions Based on the Teacher Relationship Interview (Pianta, 1999), October 2019

- Please choose three words that describe the relationship between you and <name>? For each word could you describe a specific experience or event, that clarifies that word?

- Can you tell me about a specific moment when it really 'clicked' between you and <name>?

- Now tell me about a specific time when you and <name> really weren't "clicking".

- What kind of experiences with other people do you feel have been particularly challenging for him/her?

- Every teacher has at least occasional doubts about whether they are meeting a child's needs. What brings this up for you with <name>? How do you handle these doubts? Do you ever think about <name> when you are at home? What do you think about?

- What gives you the most satisfaction being <name>'s teacher? Why?

## Follow-up Interview Questions, June 2021

- It has been approximately 18 months since the end of the RJE PD series. Could you please reflect on and describe any parts of the RJE PD experience and framework that are still meaningful and resonate with you? Are there any parts that you find difficult or challenging to practice?  Did the pandemic offer more opportunity to integrate what you learnt during the RJE PD or hinder the opportunity to integrate what you learnt?

- What differences, if any, have you noticed in your understanding of yourself as a teacher? of yourself in other contexts?

- What differences, if any, have you noticed in your relations with others in the school?  students, in general?  students, who you find challenging?  students, who disruptive learning in the classroom? parents?  other teachers?  school administrators?  the curriculum?

- Think about a time in the classroom from the past week or month that you found particularly challenging. Could you describe the situation and some of the thoughts that went through your mind?