Highlighting Successes: Student-Led Restorative Practices for Type 1 Behaviors

The following case study took place at an elementary school, serving 450 students from ECE through 5th grade. Student demographics are as follows:

- 69.4% of students are students of color
- 66.5% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch
- 35.5% of students are English Language Learners
- 15.6% of students require special education services

This particular school is a traditional, public school.

What happened?

Throughout the 2017 school year, teachers were sending any overwhelming amount of students out of class for Type 1 behaviors. These students were being funneled into a volunteer-run space in the school meant to facilitate restorative conversations when relationships had been harmed. On multiple occasions, the volunteers were put in the uncomfortable situation of facilitating conversations around behaviors that should have been addressed on the classroom level according to the DPS discipline policy (e.g., one student grabbing another’s pencil).

At the beginning of second semester, school culture leaders noted that 80% of all referrals were for Type 1 behaviors.

Who was affected?

Students were impacted by this challenge in implementation by missing valuable class time, often thirty minutes or more, to address behaviors that would have been more efficiently addressed through quick restorative dialogue. Their relationships with their teachers were also harmed by being sent out of the classroom.

The volunteers and interns in the peace room were affected by being forced to allocate time to circles with very low levels of harm, often at the expense of high level conflicts. As volunteers, they often felt powerless in addressing this concern directly with the teachers. By taking on circles for these low-level behaviors, the volunteers and interns were indirectly discouraging staff buy-in and ownership of restorative practices.

Teachers were also being impacted by this challenge as, due to a lack of training and tools for addressing low level behaviors in the classroom, they were “outsourcing” their relationships with their students to the volunteers and interns in the peace room.

How did the school community take responsibility?

Volunteers were facilitating a restorative circle when a student noted, “This is just like the Peace Feet Ms. Jones uses!” The volunteers reached out to this particular teacher to better understand the Peace Feet process. Peace Feet was a structure Ms. Jones was using so that students could facilitate their own restorative conversations for low level behaviors in the classroom.
A graduate school intern assisting volunteers in the peace room took the lead in rolling this initiative out to all staff.

**How did the school community make things right?**

The graduate school intern leading the charge made a Peace Feet poster, big enough to be laid on the floor for students to use a map for restorative conversations. Students or teachers can stand across from one another and move across the poster using this process. A typical Peace Feet conversation takes less than 5 minutes, versus the 30 minutes a formal restorative circle can take.

Each classroom was introduced to the concept and given a poster. Students from the classroom would demonstrate a conversation for their peers using a recent incident in the classroom.

In the peace room, Peace Feet was used when, through pre-conferencing, it was determined that the situation did not warrant a formal circle.

Even paraprofessionals were trained and given a laminated poster that could be brought outside at recess.

Recently, fourth and fifth grade students have been trained to lead these conversations, if they require a facilitator, as well as more formal restorative circles.

The greatest impact has been that the Peace Feet process is moving to normalize conflict within the school for both students and teachers. By normalizing conflict, the school can begin to address it in a restorative way, ensuring that conflict is treated as a learning opportunity for all involved.

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*Benchmark 2: Foundational structures to support RP implementation are in place.*

*Benchmark 5: Restorative language and culture are established.*