

# Restorative Justice and Critical Mentorship as models for social and emotional self-efficacy

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## Context

This project is centered on ways to maintain effective classroom management and overall self-regulation among students from a "high-need" school. The main goal of this project is to utilize pedagogical and disciplinary practices that are not based on punitive or authoritarian models—which tend to be prevalent among teachers and staff in my school. When this project began, many of my students had either been suspended, expelled or even arrested for engaging in violent or drug-related activities; destroying or stealing school property; and even bringing weapons to school.

## Methods

Over a period of 6 weeks, students were introduced to concepts like Restorative Justice, Critical Mentorship, Non-Violent Communication, Community Agreements, Empathy, Impulsivity-Management, and Emotional Literacy as means to resolve conflict and acquire self-efficacy. Data was collected in the form of field notes, student journals, and teacher reflections. The main concepts of Restorative Justice and Critical Mentorship were introduced in the form of weekly lessons and group activities, culminating in a group reflection and student survey.

## Results

Overall, after only 6-weeks of Restorative Justice and Critical Mentorship activities, some students did display significant changes in behavior as well as their general understanding of common social interactions. The results were gathered via pre-and post-surveys (detailing ways to deal with conflict) as well as student journals, teacher field notes, and academic grades. This project will continue to be conducted throughout the remainder of the year but data will not be collected in a diligent manner. Changes were made to the original action plan since some students were resistant at first.

## Conclusions

Several studies have demonstrated that Restorative Justice conferencing can be a highly effective process for responding to negative and inappropriate behavior in schools in a healing manner. My hope was to introduce in my classroom an alternative that would help students achieve behavioral self-regulation without resorting to excessively punitive practices. While the 6 weeks of intervention proved significantly helpful, the skills learned in our workshops are not enough to help students shift behaviors that have been longstanding. Many students were indeed able to utilize some of the tools learned during our project. Yet it is evident that the aggressive and risky behaviors continue to be part of their every-day interactions with other people.

## Future Questions

While some of the findings shed important insight on how students reacted to the project, a few questions did arise. 1) How can the ideas discussed during circle activities and expressed in student journals, be applied to other aspects of a student's life? 2) How can this project be adjusted to serve students who may be resistant at the beginning?

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