# Mentoring First-Year Teachers' Implementation of Restorative Practices

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## Abstract

An analysis of data collected through series of semiscripted interviews with 16 first-year teachers reveals the types of classroom management systems implemented by early-career teachers at the start of the school year. The findings of this study indicate that the first-year teachers adopted a hybrid approach to classroom management. Eleven of 16 participants implemented aspects of the classroom management system advocated by their teacher education program. However, 14 of the first-year teachers also used classroom management systems that were negatively critiqued by the teacher preparation program. The ways in which the first-year teachers implemented Restorative Practices is explored along with an unanticipated outcome of this study: the benefits of continued contact with first-year teachers by their teacher preparation program. Through the interview process, the interviewer, one of their former professors, mentored and encouraged the first-year teachers, and the potential benefits of this type of extended relationship to both the teacher education program and the first-year teachers are discussed.

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## Introduction

First-year teacher Molly perhaps captured the challenge of effective classroom management best. She said, "Some days I felt as though I was making an incredible impact on the lives of these children, and other days felt as though I couldn't do anything right." No doubt Molly's feelings resonate with most beginning teachers all too well. Indeed, the wide-ranging struggles of first-year teachers have been well documented in recent education research (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Snydor, 2014; Wetzel, Hoffman, Roach, & Russell, 2018), but few challenges of first-year teachers are more daunting than that of classroom management. As Korthagen (2010) noted, most beginning teachers struggle for control in the classroom and experience emotions such as frustration, anger, and bewilderment. Their experience might best be described as survival mode rather than induction. Indeed, difficulties with classroom management contribute to beginning teachers' dissatisfaction with the profession, resulting in up to 50% of beginning teachers leaving the field by some estimates (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). As Melnick and Meister (2003) stated, one of the most looming concerns of beginning teachers is "dealing with aberrant behavior" (p. 42).

It stands to reason, then, that teacher preparation programs are poised to play a crucial role in alleviating much of this first-year teaching angst by better preparing beginning teachers for the realities of managing their own classrooms. Yet, a perennial difficulty in preparing beginning teachers is that of transference from the teacher education program to actual practice (Britzman & Pitt, 1996). As beginning teachers attempt to act upon their beliefs, informed most likely by the progressive pedagogies and dispositions espoused by their teacher preparation programs, the problem of enactment arises, with many teachers reverting to more traditional pedagogies once they arrive in their own classrooms (Zimmerman, 2017). Indeed, documentation of the challenge of carving out progressive pedagogies in more traditional school structures stretches back as far as Lortie's (1975/2002) apprenticeship of observation research first conducted in 1975. Unfortunately, there is often a clear disconnect between what first-year teachers intend to do in the classroom and what they actually do. Many beginning teachers report that they feel poorly prepared (Dugas, 2016), especially for classroom management, and thus choose classroom management strategies in "an ad hoc manner, desperately searching for something that works" (p. 20), without much consideration of any theoretical or philosophical underpinnings that may have been advanced during their teacher preparation programs.

One possible way to address this ongoing dilemma is through establishing a reciprocal relationship between first-year teachers and their teacher preparation program. This type of relationship would allow for first-year teachers to reach back and teach their former education professors about their lived challenges in the classroom so that those professors are better equipped to prepare future educators.

But moreover, that continued contact with the first-year teachers allows for the education professors to reiterate and reemphasize the dispositions and pedagogies that were taught through the program and thus encourage those teachers to implement more progressive pedagogies.

This study reports the findings of just such a reciprocal process between first-year teachers and their teacher preparation program. I (the author of this study and former student teaching seminar instructor of the participants) conducted 45- to 90-minute interviews with 16 graduates from a teacher preparation program at a small liberal arts university in the Midwest. While my initial intention was to elicit information about whether or how these first-year teachers implemented the classroom management approach advocated by our teacher preparation program—and I was indeed able to explore that—an additional benefit from this study was the establishment of a continued mentoring relationship through which I was able to help the nascent teachers reevaluate their choices of classroom management systems and, in so doing, allow for more content from the teacher preparation program to be enacted.

O'Neill and Stephenson (2012) contended that research into the effect of specific coursework on classroom management strategies for preservice teachers would be highly beneficial in helping teacher education programs align their coursework with the real challenges of the classroom. However, this study moves such research into the classrooms of those teachers who are experiencing the realities of classroom management devoid of the support of cooperating teachers, professors, or supervisors; thus this study examines the "in the trenches" experiences of first-year teachers and allows those experiences to inform a teacher preparation program. Simultaneously, this study makes a case in favor of teacher preparation programs continuing their mentorship of their graduates once they become first-year teachers. Through this process, this study answers Melnick and Meister's (2003) call for teacher preparation programs to "assess candidates' preconceived beliefs about themselves and teaching and, where necessary, provide instruction and experiences that shape those beliefs and attitudes to be consistent with the reality of teaching" (p. 53).

The impetus for this study was a noted disconnect between what the teacher education program taught and what occurred in the student teaching classrooms of the participants. During their student teaching practicum, the field sites of all participants in this study implemented the same school-wide behavior management system called Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS). Through PBIS, common, baseline expectations are established and applied universally throughout the school and classrooms, often through a series of reward systems for compliant behavior and increasing interventions for noncompliant behavior (Bornstein, 2015). PBIS is framed as a proactive approach and includes such features as problem-solving methods, evidence-based practices, and progress monitoring (Bruhn, Gorsh, Hannan, & Hirsch, 2014). PBIS has also been promoted as a program to combat bullying (King, Kennedy, & Dainty, 2017) and to teach social skills (Bruhn et al., 2014). The overarching goal of PBIS is to improve the "effectiveness, efficiency,

and equity of schools and other agencies" and to improve social, emotional, and academic outcomes for all students (King et al., 2017).

While PBIS does not mandate particular classroom rules or protocols, the PBIS system does have specific features that must be adhered to in order to maintain fidelity. For instance, the communication of clear expectations is required, as is the collection of data to assess the effectiveness of the program. Three to five positive classroom or school-wide expectations are to be posted, defined, and taught, and behavior-specific praise is used to communicate approval of student compliance (e.g., Thank you for lining up so quietly; Positive Behavior Interventions and Support, 2016). When noncompliant behavior occurs, teachers have a range of responses that reflect an approach aligned with *applied behavior analysis* (Robacker, Rivera, & Warren, 2016). For instance, if a child misbehaves, a token system, such as a marble jar, may be used: The noncompliant student would lose a marble from their marble jar and then be instructed as to how they can avoid losing more marbles. The accumulation of a certain number of marbles may yield a positive reward, which in theory motivates the student to align their behavior with the expectations. Preventative measures are likewise employed, such as the "bubble in the mouth" technique, in which students are told to hold a (fictional) bubble in their mouths that is "physically incompatible with talking."

The implementation of PBIS in each of the schools of the student teachers was strikingly similar. Each field site school had a set of three or four schoolwide rules, each of which was phrased the same way (e.g., "Be responsible," "Be respectful," "Be safe"). Each school likewise had a motto along the lines of "It's a great day to be a [school mascot]." A ticket system was used in each school as well, with students receiving small paper tickets for compliant behavior. Students could then turn in their accumulated tickets to enter a raffle for a particular prize (e.g., a pizza party, lunch with the principal).

Another classroom management approach used at many of the student teachers' school sites was similar to PBIS: Class Dojo. ClassDojo is a "contingency management strategy" (Robacker et al., 2016, p. 40) in which students are rewarded with a token when they exhibit a targeted behavior, and students can likewise have tokens taken away when they do not exhibit a targeted behavior. ClassDojo, however, is a computer-based system that uses an electronic application to implement this tokenized system. Because ClassDojo uses an electronic platform, teachers have the option of sharing a live version of each student's progress with families (ClassDojo, n.d.). Other similar systems were used in the student teachers' school sites, including clip charts, visible charts that recorded students' compliance with classroom expectations; clipboards to record infractions of classroom rules; and Check-In, Check-Out (CICO), an individualized set of goals that are assessed twice each school day for the CICO student. Systems like ClassDojo, clip charts, and clipboards fall into the category of classroom ecologies and are best implemented consistently and in a unified way throughout the school (Marr, Audette, White, Ellis, & Algozzine, 2002).

Each of these systems has a number of things in common. First, each relies on the teacher or school leadership establishing a clear set of expectations for students. For the system to work effectively, these expectations are established prior the beginning of the school year so that implementation can begin on the first day of classes. Second, each uses a behaviorist approach by rewarding positive behaviors in the hope of increasing those behaviors and by punishing negative behaviors in the hope of diminishing those behaviors. While teacher praise plays a role in these systems and can manifest in a variety of ways to increase desired student behaviors (Blaze, Olmi, Mercer, Dufrene, & Tingstom, 2014), these systems (i.e., PBIS, ClassDojo, clip charts, CICO) rely more heavily on tokens and rewards. However, these types of incentive and public behavior management systems have come under some scrutiny. For one, PBIS has been criticized as medicalizing student behavior (Bornstein, 2015), with misbehavior implicitly viewed as a disability requiring doses of remediation. As Bornstein notes, when comparing student behavior to a school-defined norm, misbehavior is constructed as an abnormality in need of remedying. Bornstein stated,

> A search ensues in which data-driven processes are focused on identifying disabilities as deficits, constructing categorized interventions to eliminate . . . them, and thereby define a successful school . . . as those who are proficient in this endeavor. (p. 249)

Additionally, because PBIS is a top-down approach to behavior management, with school administrators and teachers determining the social and behavioral norms of the school, the cultures and needs of the student body are not always represented (Wilson, 2015). Administrators and teachers are disproportionately white middle-class individuals (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020) who may not be fully aware of how their own conceptions of student needs are framed through the lens of their lived experiences. They are thus more likely to design behavioral norms that are misaligned with their students' needs.

Furthermore, while it remains unclear as to whether these types of extrinsic motivation systems increase or decrease students' intrinsic motivation, students' prosocial behavior is more commonly associated with intrinsically motivated factors like helping and caring about others (Bear, Slaughter, Mantz, & Farley-Ripple, 2017). Using class time to focus on building a relationship with students rather than on creating a culture of compliance is another argument against incentive and public behavior management systems (Kwok, 2017; Minkel, 2017). A more relational classroom management system has even been connected to higher instructional quality (Kwok, 2019). In fact, the use of external sanctioning systems and behavioral compliance goals like those espoused by programs like PBIS often interferes with relationship building (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012) and can create an "us versus them" mentality in a school (Kline, 2016). Perhaps the most persuasive argument against public and incentive behavior management systems is articulated by Hatt

(2012). Drawing on a one-year ethnographic study of a kindergarten classroom, Hatt found that students conflated behavioral compliance with smartness. They defined being smart as "not having to move one's card (on the clip chart). Smartness came to be associated with following the rules, becoming docile bodies, and behaving in ways expected by teachers" (p. 455). Thus public and incentive behavior management programs appear to have many flaws.

## Study Context

In response to these and other critiques of behavior management systems like PBIS, ClassDojo, and clip charts, the teacher preparation program in this study advocated an approach that is more empathy based (Martin, 2015)—Restorative Practices. Restorative Practices grew out of the restorative justice movement; both restorative justice and Restorative Practices focus on repairing harm caused by one's actions and, in so doing, emphasize accountability and making amends (International Institute for Restorative Practices, n.d.). Both approaches likewise emphasize restoring relationships by engaging all involved parties in conversation (Kehoe, Bourke-Taylor, & Broderick, 2017). The use of Restorative Practices represents a shift away from punitive practices "which isolate individuals following wrongdoing" and toward relational practices "which bring individuals together following wrongdoing" (Morrison, Blood, & Thorsborne, 2005, p. 338). Additionally, Restorative Practices represents a shift away from a control mind-set and toward a collaborative mind-set (Buckmaster, 2016).

Restorative Practices is an approach particularly well suited to school environments in that it builds social capital and engages students in "participatory learning and decision making" (International Institute for Restorative Practices, n.d.). Building relationships and creating a sense of community are bedrocks of the Restorative Practices framework (Costello, Watchel, & Watchel, 2009). More specifically, Restorative Practices seeks to resolve conflicts directly with those involved and, as a result, allows students to "think for themselves about their actions and to reflect on how they affect other people" (Costello et al., 2009, p. 19). Key features of Restorative Practices include the use of the following (Costello et al., 2009):

◆ *affective statements*. Statements in which the person wronged uses an I statement to express how the other person's actions have affected them (e.g., I felt angry when you knocked my book off my desk).

◆ *affective questions.* A series of structured questions to elicit specific information from both the person wronged and the wrongdoer (e.g., What happened? What were you thinking when this happened? What can you do to fix this? How do you think you can demonstrate that you're sorry?).

◆ *informal conferences.* Brief, impromptu meetings in which affective statements and affective questions are used to resolve an issue that has occurred involving two or more people with a goal of restoring the relationship.

◆ *circles.* Meetings of an entire class to set goals, build classroom community, and address concerns, in which all participants have the opportunity to speak and be heard.

◆ *formal conferences.* Meetings with wrongdoers and all involved parties, including families of students, to resolve an issue; conducted by a trained facilitator.

◆ *application of the social discipline window.* Practices that emphasize the need to enact discipline with students rather than doing discipline to students; includes the process of having students design the classroom rules, protocols, and procedures.

While adhering to these features allows educators to enact Restorative Practices with fidelity, Restorative Practices can also be applied informally through the use of only affective statements and affective questions. Even the informal use of Restorative Practices can create a "restorative milieu" that fosters empathy and responsibility for one's own actions (International Institute for Restorative Practices, n.d.). Whether applied exactly and completely according to the framework or informally using only affective statements and affective questions, the use of Restorative Practices has the potential not only to teach students to hold themselves accountable for their own actions (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016) but also to help teachers manage student behavior more calmly and reasonably (Kehoe et al., 2017). In fact, students reported having better relationships with teachers who implemented Restorative Practices consistently (Gregory et al., 2014). When Restorative Practices is implemented schoolwide, the results can be dramatic, but it may take a significant investment of time to change the culture of the school. According to Ingraham et al. (2016), the implementation of Restorative Practices in a culturally and linguistically diverse urban school over a three-year period yielded "significant reductions in the number of behavioral referrals to the office" (p. 370) and a decrease in parental concern about their child eventually graduating from high school. In essence, the theoretical principle underpinning Restorative Practices is social engagement, for "when students are valued as human beings to be honored rather than objects to be controlled" (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012, p. 145), a shift from social control to social engagement can occur.

As noted by Kervick, Moore, Ballysingh, Garnett, and Smith (2019), Restorative Practices as a framework in schools is only now becoming more prevalent and thus there is "limited research on its effectiveness" (p. 591). However, given the fact that Restorative Practices is "both preventative and responsive" (p. 598), it stands to reason that one possible critique of Restorative Practices is that it is time consuming to implement. Additionally, Restorative Practices is predicated on the assumption that an entire school or district would adopt the framework, especially if it is to be implemented with fidelity. However, this type of comprehensive adoption and related buy-in from faculty, staff, and administration is difficult to achieve, as it represents a global dispositional shift. Finally, as O'Reilly (2017) noted, aspects of Restorative Practices that are somewhat scripted, such as those used in restorative

conferences, could reduce the implementation of Restorative Practices to a type of "skill building exercise" (p. 172) rather than a robust shift in perspective.

Because the student teachers in this study were completing their student teaching practica under the direct supervision of a more experienced classroom teacher in an established school environment, there was already a classroom or behavioral management system in place in each of their classrooms. These classroom management systems, as previously discussed, involved primarily incentive and/or public systems in which the class expectations were determined by the teacher and students were then taught these expectations and held accountable for adhering to them. These classroom management systems typically relied on a behaviorist approach in which positive behaviors were rewarded and negative behaviors were punished. These systems were strikingly different from the Restorative Practices approach, which advocates for student-designed classroom expectations and teaching children to use their autonomy to resolve their own conflicts. Because the student teachers were not able to supplant the existing classroom management system at their field sites, they were able to enact only particular aspects of Restorative Practices during their student teaching practica, like the occasional use of affective statements and affective questions.

This disparity between what the student teachers experienced at their field sites and what the teacher preparation program advocated gave rise to this study. I was interested in the degree to which the participants enacted Restorative Practices once they were able to establish their own classroom management systems as first-year teachers. This study was designed to answer the question, To what degree did first-year teachers implement the classroom management system advocated by their teacher preparation program, in this case, Restorative Practices? An unanticipated but beneficial outcome of this study involved the reestablishment of a mentoring relationship between the first-year teachers and me.

## Methods

### *Participants*

This institutional review board–approved 2-year study drew on data that were gathered through semiscripted interviews with first-year teachers of Grades 1–8, all of whom were elementary education majors, female, and between the ages of 21 and 25 years. All graduates from this particular teacher preparation program were invited to participate in this research, resulting in 24 eligible elementary teacher candidates. However, data were gathered from only 16 of the eligible participants. Those graduates who were not teaching full-time in their own classrooms the fall following their graduation were eliminated from the participant pool because they did not have the experience of making autonomous decisions about classroom management. This eliminated two candidates from the pool. One teacher's aide was included as a participant because she designed her own behavior management

system for the students with whom she was working. Additionally, the participant pool used only those full-time teachers who were teaching in the United States, which eliminated another participant. In light of these parameters, and because some participants did not respond to my postgraduation request to interview them, the pool of potential participants was pared down from 24 to 16: eight from each year of this two-year study. This participant set was not intended to be representative of all first-year teachers but rather served as a convenience sample. It should be noted that I taught all participants during their student teaching seminar class and supervised the student teaching practica of five participants and as such had an already-established relationship with each of them.

After graduation, all potential participants were contacted via email and invited to participate in a semiscripted interview about their classroom management systems (see the appendix for the interview protocol). I scheduled a visit to each respondent's classroom during the first few months of the school year or, as necessitated by distance, arranged a video call or phone call. It was important that I visited the classrooms for the first-year teachers to understand the community context of the schools and to see any physical manifestations of the chosen classroom management systems. For instance, I was able to see the arrangement of the physical space, posters of classroom rules, and token systems like a marble jar. At times, I was also able to meet briefly the colleagues and administrators of the first-year teachers for casual conversation. Driving around the area of the schools also gave me insights into the local community. My experience of the school context helped me understand better the decisions of the first-year teachers regarding classroom management. Each interview was audio recorded for future transcription.

### Data Analysis

Once the interviews were transcribed verbatim, I read through the transcripts while listening to the audio recording of each interview. During this initial reading of the data, I noted broad emerging themes. These broad themes served as my initial set of codes (Charmaz, 2006). Each transcription was then transferred to a spreadsheet for a process of line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2006). During this process, more themes emerged, which resulted in a more nuanced and detailed set of codes. Each statement in the data was parsed so that each cell in the spreadsheet contained reference to only one topic or category so that the data could be more precisely coded. Once all lines of data were coded for all interviews, they were sorted so that sets of data about a given topic were grouped together. This allowed me to see and analyze more trends in the subsets of data. While there were 13 original broad codes for the entire data set, this particular study focused on the data set around the use of Restorative Practices as a classroom management system. Using this subset of data, further coding was conducted to analyze the implementation of specific characteristics of the Restorative Practices framework, with each of the

six characteristics noted earlier receiving its own code. Two additional codes were added to the original set of codes to reflect the ways in which the first-year teachers used more general applications of Restorative Practices principles that were not directly related to the original six characteristics.

The semiscripted interviews that I conducted are best described as responsive interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This responsive interviewing approach is characterized by the creation of a relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee with a goal of generating a depth of understanding rather than a breadth of understanding (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Because responsive interviewing allows for a relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee—a relationship that preexisted, in this case—the interviewer must be aware of their own biases and ensure that those biases do not influence the interviewees' responses. This was a challenge in this research, as all interviewees already knew my own biases regarding classroom management systems and the benefits and drawbacks of each. Therefore I took pains to assure each participant that I was not there to judge them in any way but rather to learn from them about the challenges of establishing an effective classroom management system during the first year of teaching. In each of the interviews, I made it clear that my intention was to improve my own practice of preparing future teachers and communicated that I was there to learn from them. My intention was to engage in conceptual-empirical inquiry to document the "daily dilemmas and contradictions of practice" that first-year teachers experience (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 95) and, at the same time, also to engage in a "reciprocal, recursive, and symbiotic relationship" (pp. 94–95) in which I was able to mentor and support the first-year teachers. The interviews thus took on more of a robust mentoring, give-and-take quality as participants shared their successes and failures and I offered encouragement, empathy, and sometimes suggestions.

This research also emerged not from theory or practice but rather from a confluence of both theory and practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) as I attempted to determine how theories of classroom management are realized in the actual practices of a full-time teacher. During this research, my inquiry stance was geared toward understanding something, not proving something (Samaras, 2011). However, there is no doubt that my own subjectivities played a role in this research, as I very much wanted the participants to embrace a disposition toward classroom management that mirrored my own. To prevent my bias from coloring my conclusions, I started this study with the data rather than with predetermined theories in mind and allowed the data to shape and inform my conclusions (Charmaz, 2006). I also shared a draft of my findings with the participants for a participant check, and I shared my preliminary findings with colleagues to ensure that my data analysis was accurate. The sequence of questions for the interviews was likewise important in that I did not ask questions about Restorative Practices until after all participants had had an opportunity to talk about their chosen classroom management systems. Only after sharing what they were enacting in their classrooms did I broach the subject of

Restorative Practices, and even then, I did not ask about the specific characteristics of Restorative Practices because I did not want to taint their responses. My goal was to ascertain which remnants of Restorative Practices lingered and which fell away during the time between the student teaching seminar and the first year of teaching.

## Results

As previously noted, the guiding question of this study was, To what degree did first-year teachers implement the classroom management system advocated by their teacher preparation program, in this case, Restorative Practices? Through the data analysis process, a number of trends emerged. The two most commonly used components of Restorative Practices, both of which were used by 11 of the 16 participants, were affective statements and circles. Participants who used affective statements in the classroom reported that this particular approach was useful in helping resolve the day-to-day conflicts that arose between students. For instance, first-grade teacher Amelia (all names are pseudonyms) said, "I taught them to . . . say, 'I don't like it when you are throwing paper or doing this because . . .' and then tell them why." She continued, "I do a lot of 'I' statements where it's more like focusing on the actions we're doing instead or reprimanding the student." Laura, a fourth-grade teacher, said that the affective statements had given some students an avenue for talking through their emotions before acting out. She said, "A couple [students], during math, they'll raise their hands and they'll say, 'I'm really frustrated,' and I'll say, 'Good. Thank you for telling me. I'll help you figure it out.'" Molly, a first-grade teacher, mentioned that the affective statements have helped students avoid superficial apologies and instead talk through problems when they arise. She said that this approach has helped the "classroom environment and community of the classroom." Susan, a third-grade teacher, noted,

> Just the other day I saw a girl sitting over there and the boy next to her was doing something distracting and she said, "Can you please stop? You're distracting me and I can't work." At first he was like, "Well I'm not doing it," and then he said, "Oh I'm very sorry." He kind of reacted and then he caught himself and was like, "I'm sorry. I'll stop."

These examples reflect how the first-year teachers taught students to enact a collaborative approach to conflict resolution and to articulate how one person's actions might be affecting others, both of which are principles of Restorative Practices.

Similarly, the use of circles was prevalent in the respondents' practices, with eleven of the sixteen participants using circles at least once a week. Some participants used circles regularly as part of the classroom routine. Said Jody, "We have a class meeting every Friday, and I've got a Justice Journal [so students can] report if there are injustices or inappropriate behaviors. Based on that, we have a topic we talk about every Friday." Additionally, Jody talks with students about goals and procedures for the class during circles. Susan also uses circles regularly to address

issues she was seeing before those issues escalated. She said, "I'm trying to think of ways I can incorporate into my morning meetings [the difference between] tattling and telling. That's something that's come up in the last few days." Violet mentioned that they do a circle every day in her first-grade classroom to ensure that students "feel like they're a person, not just a student." Sara also does circles on a routine basis, in part because it is a school policy to do so. She said, "There's a greeting, the sharing, the activity, and then the morning message that we're doing every day to some extent." While this specific iteration of circles is not exactly aligned with Restorative Practices, it does echo some of the features, like bringing together the entire class for a discussion and ensuring that all students are seen and heard by others in the class.

Other teachers implemented circles as needs arose. For instance, Margaret, who teaches first grade in a trauma-informed school, implements a circle when there has been a significant disruption in the room caused by a student. She said,

> If it's something that's happened in the classroom, or all the kids are seeing it, we'll have a circle and we'll talk about, "How did that make you feel when that was happening?" And then we'll talk about, "When that's happening, what can we do with ourselves to stay calm?"

Likewise, Fiona implements a circle "if there's an issue or something" they need to talk about. She added that she teaches students about conflict resolution during circles: "I actually have a little box of situations, and every day we'll pull one out" and resolve it as a class. However, not all participants experienced success with circles. Anne said,

> I did circles at the beginning of every day at first, and then after about a month, I did a blind survey for the students asking whether they liked what we're doing at the beginning of the day. And not a single student enjoyed the circles.

In response to this student feedback, Anne discontinued her use of circles and now only convenes a circle if an issue arises in the classroom. She said, "I had to take a step back and realize, 'Okay, not everybody's going to like what I do.'"

Of all the characteristics of Restorative Practices, affective statements and circles were the most commonly used by the first-year teachers. Less prevalent were two other components of Restorative Practices: informal conferences, used by seven participants, and practices informed by the social discipline window, used by eight participants. Informal conferences are intended to help students resolve a conflict as it arises and to restore a damaged relationship as needed. They entail a brief conference between the parties involved and are typically facilitated by the teacher.

Andrea offered an example of how she has used informal conferences. She said that after a problem arises, she brings students together and asks them how they might remedy the situation. In one instance, a student who tore up another student's paper decided to put the paper back together for the student. She said, "In the moment, you might just give them the consequence, but then I always bring the kids back" to resolve the problem. Susan shared that she works with students

to help them understand the effects of their actions through informal conferences. "I'm now to the point where I can just pull them over, and they say 'I'm sorry,' but I say, 'You don't need to be sorry; let's just talk,'" she said. Amelia likewise uses informal conferences and expressed exasperation when that process is not used by others in the building. She asked, "Who is sitting with this child and trying to have a conversation, figuring out why this behavior is happening?"

Some aspects of the social discipline window were used by half the participants in this study. For the purposes of this study, I coded responses related to giving students autonomy over classroom rules and procedures as a key aspect of the social discipline window in that it reflects the willingness of the teacher to enact discipline with students rather than doing discipline to students. This process proved to be motivating for students as some participants noted. Jody, for instance, said, "They're so excited! I really wanted to give them choice in what we were doing because I knew that if they didn't buy into whatever system I was using, it wasn't going to work." Margaret mentioned that the class-designed rules were useful, saying, "I still have them hanging up there because even today we went back and reminded ourselves of our class rules." Anne likewise allowed students to determine consequences for some of their actions. She said, "They were talking about, 'How do we give time back to someone [when it has been wasted]?' They even came to the idea of, 'Well, we should stay in for recess if we're wasting someone's time.'" Ellen, working with eighth-grade students, had students develop expectations of her as their teacher. They asked that she "be honest. If I'm not having a good day, come in and let them know." They also asked that she not yell when she was frustrated with them, a request she eagerly accepted. Nina had her third-grade students write ideas for classroom rules on sticky notes to post around the room. The class then grouped similar ideas together and created the classroom rules as a class, and Laura had students determine guidelines for themselves during class presentations.

Far less commonly used by the first-year teachers in this study were affective questions, a series of structured questions intended for use during informal conferences to help students understand the effects of their actions and restore a relationship. While I assume that most participants used affective questions during informal conferences, only four participants shared specific examples of those affective questions or referenced the term directly. Anne, for instance, shared that she poses questions like "Can you tell me what happened?," "What can we do to fix this?" or "What can we do to make this person feel better?" Similarly, Susan leads her third-grade students through a series of questions like "What would you like to be done to make you feel better about this?" She added, "They kind of talk between themselves, and I try to act just as guidance. I'm not trying to get in the middle of it because they are in third grade, and they need to start solving problems on their own."

The component of Restorative Practices that was absent from the data was formal conferences, but because this process is enacted by a trained facilitator and presupposes schoolwide adoption of Restorative Practices, it is understandable why

this was not mentioned by any participants. Only one participant indicated that her administrator and colleagues were familiar with Restorative Practices. In light of this fact, it is safe to assume that the first-year teachers' use of Restorative Practices is likely the result of the curriculum in their teacher preparation program. Figure 1 summarizes the frequency of use of the six Restorative Practices components by the 16 participants.

During their teacher preparation program, the student teachers were open to the Restorative Practices approach but, because they were not solely responsible for the classroom at that time, were not able to fully implement the approach to find out for themselves whether it was effective for them. The need to study the use of Restorative Practices was highlighted by Buckmaster (2016) when he noted that no studies have "deeply investigated the experience of individuals struggling with using restorative practices" (p. 6). While this study was an initial attempt to answer Buckmaster's call for more study, it is admittedly only a starting point. The results of this study indicate that all 16 participants were able to implement at least some aspects of Restorative Practices in the first few months of their first year of teaching. Table 1 summarizes which participants implemented various aspects of Restorative Practices.

Despite this marginally encouraging finding, further data analysis revealed that all but two of the first-year teachers also implemented incentive and/or public

**Figure 1**
*Number of Participants Using Components of Restorative Practices*
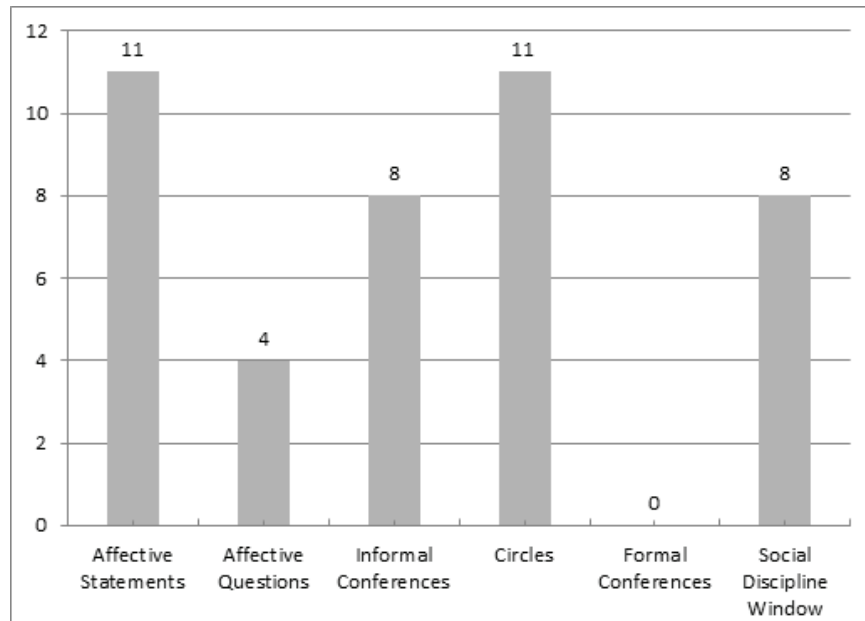
classroom management systems like PBIS, ClassDojo, and clip charts in tandem with Restorative Practices. Susan aptly said,

> It makes me cringe whenever I take points away [via ClassDojo] or pick purposefully who I'm going to give points to so that others follow. I know it's not the best practice, but it's kind of what has to take place right now just so I can keep my classroom running.

While I did not ask participants to justify their chosen classroom management approaches, I did find that most first-year teachers adopted the same classroom management practices as the later-career teachers in their buildings (see Gray, 2019). This decision reflects beginning teachers' propensity to fit in with and be accepted by their colleagues, who likewise mentor and support first-year teachers on a daily basis.

## Discussion

As Susan articulated and many other participants implied, during the start of a teacher's career, there is a collision between idealized notions of what classroom management should be and what classroom management must be due to the realities of teaching. While beginning teachers may enter the field with a clear commitment to a particular way of conducting classroom management, they nonetheless often revert to classroom management systems that are far removed from that original

**Table 1**
***Summary of Participants' Implementation of Restorative Practices Components***

| Pseudonym | Grade level | Affective questions | Affective statements | Circles | Informal conferences | Social discipline window | Formal conferences |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fiona | 1 | X | | X | | | |
| Amelia | 1 | | X | | X | | |
| Jody | 4 | | X | | X | X | |
| Laura | 4 | | X | | X | X | |
| Margaret | 1 | X | X | X | | X | |
| Molly | 1 | | X | X | | | |
| Cara | 4 | X | X | | | | |
| Violet | 1 | | X | X | | | |
| Andrea | 1 | | X | | X | X | |
| Anne | 3 | | X | X | X | X | |
| Chloe | 1 | X | | X | X | | |
| Ellen | 8 | | | | | X | |
| Nina | 3 | | | X | | X | |
| Susan | 3 | | X | X | X | | |
| Sara | 1 | | X | X | | | |
| Marissa | 1 | | | X | | X | |
| Totals | | 4 | 11 | 11 | 7 | 8 | 0 |

ideal. There are a number of possible explanations for this disjuncture, one of which is illuminated by Lortie's (1975/2002) apprenticeship of observation theory. Teaching is perhaps the only career in which future teachers have the opportunity to observe other teachers enacting instruction for 13 years while they are students themselves. This exceptionally long apprenticeship imbues future teachers with a set of norms regarding what it means to teach. However, during this apprenticeship of observation, the young students lack the analytical acumen needed to critically assess the practices of their teachers and so are more likely to emulate those absorbed practices rather than enacting the progressive pedagogies advanced by a teacher preparation program.

A second possible explanation for the first-year teachers' use of incentive and/or public classroom management systems relates to figured worlds (Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, & Cain, 2001). First-year teachers arrive, not in an insulated classroom, but rather in a school that is replete with existing practices, cultures, artifacts, and activities. Because the figured world of the school is no doubt robust, first-year teachers may try to find ways to blend into those figured worlds to leverage the support network available there, a support network on which they will rely during the difficult induction process. It is little wonder that beginning teachers often acquiesce to the classroom management systems that are already in existence in the school, most of which are incentive driven and/or public in nature. At best, they often adopt a hybridized approach (Strom, Dailey, & Mills, 2018).

Another possible explanation that is tangentially related to the figured world of the school is illuminated through Labaree's (2005) chronicling of the philosophical battles that have embroiled education for decades, particularly the tension between administrative progressives, who advocate for schools to work efficiently, and pedagogical progressives, who promote natural learning that is intrinsically engaging and authentic. This tension between administrative efficiency and progressive pedagogies is no doubt felt in the everyday workings of the social environment of the classroom. Given the emphasis on efficiency, evidenced in most schools by teachers' ongoing need to prove their own effectiveness through data, it is not surprising that efficient classroom management systems like PBIS and ClassDojo are appealing and often adopted schoolwide. Owing to the appeal of efficiency, first-year teachers often abandon romantic notions of what could be and go with what works. Sadly, procedure wins out over "creative brilliance" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 102).

This adjustment of expectations, or as Dicke, Ellig, Schmeck, and Leutner (2015) called it, this lowering of standards, might even reflect the early stages of teacher burnout. The initial crisis (Friedman, 2000) between what could be and what must be flags the start of a disillusionment that beginning teachers often experience, a disillusionment that is typically resolved by "finding a compromise between 'quality' teaching (as dreamed of by the teacher prior to actual teaching) and the quality of teaching dictated by reality" (p. 600), a reality constructed through years of competing notions of what constitutes quality in education in the first place.

So, what can teacher preparation programs do to help beginning teachers navigate the tension between what they have been taught and what they feel they must do? One possible answer to this conundrum arose through my analysis of the data for this study. During my initial reading of the transcribed interviews, I began to notice a pattern in my own interactions with the participants, so I chose to include my comments in the full data set. Aside from my statements explaining the nature of my research and the questions drawn from the interview protocol, two additional types of comments emerged, one of which reflected my intention to provide mentoring, support, and encouragement. As the first-year teachers shared their struggles with me, I stepped out of my outsider role as an interviewer and instead became an insider who was there to support the beginning teachers. In all, I coded 219 comments and statements I made that fell into this mentoring, support, and encouragement category.

At times, my comments were intended to offer ideas to resolve a problem the first-year teacher was experiencing. For instance, Jody shared that students were tattling on one another too often, so I shared a conversation I had had with another teacher, saying, "I'm just going to share this with you, and maybe you've already heard this, but [this other teacher] talks to her students and says, 'Are you tell-ing me this to get someone in trouble or out of trouble?'" Jody indicated that she appreciated that perspective and planned to use those questions to help students distinguish between tattling and telling.

When talking with Margaret, I offered a suggestion for how she might extend one of her classroom practices. At the beginning of each day, Margaret had stu-dents place a stick with their name on it in one of three cups to indicate how they were feeling upon arriving at school: happy, worried, or sad. This practice allowed Margaret to gauge the kinds of support students might need during the day. Upon hearing this, I encouraged Margaret to take a picture of the cups each day so she could assess whether there was a longitudinal pattern as to how children were feeling. I said, "That could be your own little mini-self-study." I shared with her a summary of a recent article I had read stating that, in low-income areas, shoplifting increased at certain times of the month due to SNAP (food assistance program) benefits running out. We talked about the fact that some children's families might be running out of food at certain times during the month, which would have huge implications for her classroom and the students' sense of well-being.

Additionally, when talking with a number of participants, I was able to reiterate the principles of Restorative Practices. For instance, I said to Cara,

> Well, Restorative Practices doesn't say "Don't give consequences." You have to have consequences, right? The question is, what do you do afterwards? How do you then kind of restore that relationship and give someone a new chance to start over?

I also offered encouragement and many times told the first-year teachers that I was proud of them, that they were doing a wonderful job. When Lisa told me that

she solicits students' comments on her lessons so she can improve them, I said, "It strikes me how much humility that takes on your part to have that conversation. That's really impressive, Lisa. I mean, there are probably a lot of . . . experienced teachers who are afraid of asking that question." Other times, I affirmed their frustrations—"Everybody cries. Don't feel bad!"—and offered commiseration. When talking with Ellen about the challenges she experienced teaching eighth graders in a self-contained classroom, I said,

> But I know that you have the right disposition. And I know that you believe in your students, and I know that you never give up on them, and you really are there for them. And if it's any consolation, no one I've talked to has said, "No it's going great. It's awesome." No one. No one feels that way.

By sharing that all first-year teachers have struggles, I was hoping that Ellen would be able to see that her struggles were not atypical.

In addition to this pattern of mentoring, supporting, and encouraging, there was also a much less prevalent pattern in which I pushed back on things the first-year teachers were doing in their classrooms. While these types of comments were few, with only 16 in all, they were distinct from the mentoring comments in that my intention was to have the first-year teachers reconsider their practices through the lens of the teacher preparation program. In this way, I did step completely out of my researcher role and back into my role as their student teaching seminar instructor. When Cara was describing the economy system used in her classroom, I asked, "But what if they didn't get paid [fake money] or anything like that? What if you gave compliments without there being a reward attached?" When talking with Nina, I pressed her on her use of extrinsic incentives, saying, "So what would happen if you had more . . . intrinsic rewards? How would it play out for them if you were to just instead say something like, 'You're really respectful of other people's learning! That's very kind of you'?" When I did push back on the first-year teachers' practices, I always did so through a what-if kind question or by using phrases like "I wonder what would happen if . . ." My intention through this phrasing was to engage in dialogue and avoid the appearance of judgment.

## Implications

Through this study, I was able to better understand the challenges first-year teachers face as they attempt to enact Restorative Practices. This information will be tremendously valuable to me as I prepare for the next iteration of the student teaching seminar, during which I intend to situate the use of Restorative Practices within real-life contexts and situations to show how Restorative Practices can be used in place of incentive and/or public classroom management approaches. This more explicit instruction will ideally yield better transfer from the teacher preparation program to the classroom.

However, what is perhaps a more important outcome of this study is the value of continuing contact between a teacher preparation program and its graduates. Following my interviews with the participants, I contacted them on numerous occasions to check in and to share a draft of my research findings. This continued contact resulted in continued mentorship with the beginning teachers. At times, I made phone calls to help a teacher problem solve a dilemma; at other times, I emailed with a teacher to share resources or to have her share resources with me. A number of participants have commented that the interviews themselves helped them revisit what we had spent so much time talking about during student teaching: Restorative Practices. As captured in my field notes, one teacher said that prior to the interview, "I had honestly completely forgotten about Restorative Practices until you brought it up. Now I realize it's another tool that can be really helpful to me." Another participant said, "[The interview process made] me reflect on my current classroom management strategies, which is always a good thing." Another commented, "I'm definitely struggling to find the classroom management system that works best with my group this year . . . but I'm looking back at things I learned [through the program] to help me out."

While not all teacher preparation programs can physically follow all graduates into the field once they start teaching, it is nonetheless worth considering how they might still support and mentor their graduates. With myriad electronic platforms available to teacher educators, the results of this continued contact would be worth the effort. Not only do the first-year teachers benefit, but the teacher preparation program benefits as well, as the program adapts to more accurately reflect the lived experience of the classroom. As for me, I plan to continue to follow our students into their first classrooms and, in so doing, try to ensure that some of their romantic ideals are preserved and made real.

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# Appendix
## Interview Protocol

**Past Experiences**

What do you remember about how your elementary teachers managed your classroom?

What kinds of rewards or consequences did they use?

How did those strategies work for you as a student?

**Current Experiences**

What is a typical day like in your classroom?

Tell me about how your classroom is managed.

What has been your biggest struggle in terms of classroom management?

What have you noticed about how students interact with one another?

**Restorative Practices**

What do you recall about restorative practices from the student teaching seminar?

What aspects, if any, of restorative practices have you been able to enact in your classroom?

Has anyone else in your school heard about restorative practices? Who? What do you think they understand about restorative practices?

If you've enacted restorative practices, what has worked and what has not?

**Open Ended**

What else do you want me to know about your classroom management system?

What questions do you have for me?