Conflict and Harm in the Context of Restorative School Physical Education

By: Michael A. Hemphill, Emily M. Janke, Santos Flores, Barrie Gordon

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Abstract:

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to explore the issues of conflict and harm in physical education within a school recognized for its exemplary restorative practices.

Method: A single case study approach was employed to examine one restorative school in Wellington, New Zealand. The school was purposely selected to participate in this study based on its recognition for exemplary restorative practices. Participants included physical educators (n = 11), administrators (n = 4), and students (n = 25). Data sources included interviews, observations, and reflection documents. Data were analyzed using a collaborative qualitative approach.

Results: Three qualitative themes described the context of restorative school physical education, types of harm that occurred, and how physical educators were positioned as central figures in creating a context where harm was addressed.

Discussion: This study provides insights into restorative practices and has implications for teaching social and emotional learning skills.

Keywords: conflict transformations | restorative practices | social and emotional learning | teaching personal and social responsibilities

Article:

Experiencing positive relationships with peers and significant others is important for the healthy development of youth (Donlan, Lynch, & Lerner, 2015). It is for this reason that so much attention has been given to relationship development in the positive youth development literature (Li, Lynch, Kalvin, Liu, & Lerner, 2011; Zaff & Varga, 2018) and the related area of sport-based youth development (Armour, Sandford, & Duncombe, 2013; Holt et al., 2017). Some scholars consider the development of positive relationships as a prerequisite for optimal success and the "active ingredients" to successful schools (Li & Julian, 2012, p. 158). Researchers at the Search Institute have defined the critical role played by positive relationships in youth development. They describe

trustworthy, purposeful relationships wherein young people discover who they are, cultivate the abilities needed for them to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them (Roehlkepartain et al., 2017).

The importance of positive relationships is also emphasized within the growing movement to promote social and emotional learning (SEL) in schools (Wright, Gray, & Richards, 2020). The SEL literature has identified the negative impact that unresolved conflict has on relationships and the necessity of youth developing conflict resolution skills to build positive relationships (Elias & Weissberg, 2000). The need to develop conflict resolution skills has also been identified in school physical education where several commonly used instructional models (e.g., sport education, cooperative learning, teaching personal and social responsibility [TPSR]) include explicit attempts to help students peacefully resolve the conflicts that emerge in class (Dyson, Howley, & Wright, 2021). Despite this awareness, the types of conflict that students and teachers are experiencing in physical education are not clear. It is also unclear whether conflicts are resolved and, if so, if they are resolved in a manner that builds relationships and maintains strong communal bonds among students.

Some physical education scholars have recognized the need to be more explicit about the role that conflict plays in physical education. Ennis, Solmon, Santina, and Loftus (1999), for example, developed a "Sport for Peace" curriculum integrating aspects of peace education (Carson, 1992) with sport education (Siedentop, 1994) to provide an additional and explicit focus on conflict negotiation in an urban context. This curriculum "focuses on strategies for settling conflicts that do not involve force" and includes a range of pedagogical tools to educate students on "negotiation, conciliation, mediation, arbitration and fact finding" (p. 36). Research on this approach showed that focusing on conflict resolution can enhance opportunities for equal participation in physical education (Ennis, 1999). The findings suggest that an explicit focus on conflict resolutions skills can strengthen relationships and disrupt aggressive behaviors in physical education (Ennis et al., 1999).

Scholars of peace and conflict studies define conflict broadly to include "struggle[s] between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals" (Hocker & Willmot, 2014, p. 13). In the context of sport and physical education, this could include, for example, a conflict between two students whose competition for a preferred role (e.g., starting position on a team) creates tension in their relationship. Other conflicts could arise in a wide variety of situations, including issues of equipment use or through physical contact during activities. The most commonly discussed conflicts in physical education stem from bullying, which can include trauma-inducing name calling or social exclusion based on real or perceived differences (Jiménez-Barbero et al., 2020). Although conflict is often considered something to be avoided, Lederach (2014) argues that conflict is normal and inherent within human relationships and can provide opportunities to strengthen relationships.

Three approaches have been identified as being suitable to address conflicts. A mediation approach focuses on coming to an agreement and typically includes a third-party facilitator who may either determine the outcome or facilitate mutual agreement (Moore, 2014). A resolution approach focuses on helping parties to identify the root of their differences such that the parties are able to resolve any ill will as well as the issue at hand (Deutsch, 1994). The transformation approach to conflict expands the focus of conflict beyond a single instance, or a particular issue, where differences need to be resolved. Rather, it explores the role of conflict as a process through which relationships can be deepened, made more resilient, and restored. This approach goes

beyond resolving conflict to the satisfaction of the impacted parties to include a focus on rebuilding relationships in a way that might look different from the one in which the conflict emerged (Lederach, 2014).

Since the publication of the Sport for Peace research, the academic conversation on conflicts in physical education has diminished. Meanwhile, a broader movement focused on restorative justice and restorative practices in education is providing physical educators an opportunity to consider conflict and the harm caused by conflict (Hemphill, Janke, Gordon, & Farrar, 2018). One physical educator described his experience with restorative practices as a transformative pedagogy that helped him address discipline issues in a way that deepened student relationships and promoted an inclusive learning environment (Lynch & Curtner-Smith, 2019). Other physical educators have explained that they use restorative practices to help address discipline problems (Gray, Wright, Sievwright, & Robertson, 2019). Hemphill, Janke, Gordon, and Farrar (2018) have introduced a "Restorative Youth Sports" framework for integrating restorative practices in physical activity contexts through an extension of Hellison's (2011) teaching personal and social responsibility model (TPSR). More research is, however, needed to understand the types of conflict and harm that teachers and students encounter in physical education. The purpose of this study was to explore the issues of conflict and harm in physical education within a school recognized for its exemplary restorative practices.

Theoretical Framework

Restorative justice is both a philosophy of justice and a set of distinct practices. In response to rule breaking, restorative justice offers "a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible" (Zehr, 2002, p. 37). Drawing on lessons from indigenous practices (Drewery, 2014), contemporary approaches to restorative justice have been developing in communities throughout the world since the 1970s as an alternative to traditional justice systems. Proponents of restorative justice argue that focusing primarily on punishment cannot meet the needs of crime victims or the communities who have been harmed. Victims and offenders have unique needs that must be considered in a restorative process with an end goal of healing individuals and communities who have been harmed. As an alternative to punitive forms of justice, restorative approaches pose three fundamental questions as a response to harm: (a) What happened? (b) What harm has been caused? and (c) What needs to happen to repair the harm? (Zehr, 2002). These questions guide a restorative process that shifts focus away from the offender and their actions toward the harm caused and the underlying issues that led to harm. Decisions on consequences are then guided by the need to restore communities in a way that is fair and just to all parties. Restorative justice recognizes that conflict causes harm to relationships and creates obligations to restore relationships to the fullest extent possible (Reistenberg, 2012).

Restorative practices are an extension of restorative justice that emphasize conflict transformation in community contexts, such as schools. A restorative approach to pedagogy acknowledges the inevitability of conflict in relationships and the need to have proactive strategies for developing positive relationships among teachers and students that can be resilient when conflicts do occur (Wachtel, 2016). In response to rule breaking in schools, restorative practices aim to identify the harm caused to the school community and adopt strategies that focus on restoring community and understanding root causes of misbehavior (Reistenberg, 2012). Although this is one intention of restorative practices, many schools implement restorative practices

narrowly as a means to reduce out-of-school suspension (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016). This limited focus on reactive restorative practices disregards the importance of proactive restorative measures to build relationships (Kervick, Moore, Ballysingh, Garnett, & Smith, 2019). When used as a school discipline strategy, restorative practices work best when school officials identify the root causes of misbehavior and connect students to school and community support structures that keep students connected to school (Milner, Cunningham, Delale-O'Connor, & Kesternberg, 2019).

Holistic implementation of restorative practices can be categorized into three distinct levels (see Figure 1). Level 1 focuses on a variety of social and emotional learning strategies to build relationships across the whole school context. This can include relational activities such as listening circles (Reistenberg, 2012) or teachers' use of affective statements (Wachtel, 2016). Level 2 involves targeted strategies to address harms that commonly occur in relationships. This might include a circle process (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2014) to discuss classroom expectations or a targeted discussion on the impact of bullying in schools. For Levels 1 and 2, a restorative circle process is a common pedagogical tool that many teachers employ to invite the diverse perspectives of all students into a conversation (Brown, 2018). At Level 3, a restorative conferencing process is reactive and used to address severe rule violations. Implementing this level typically requires advanced training and administrative support. Level 3 may involve a conference between students involved in a physical altercation or a focus on reintegrating students into the school community after a conflict has been addressed (Wachtel, 2010).

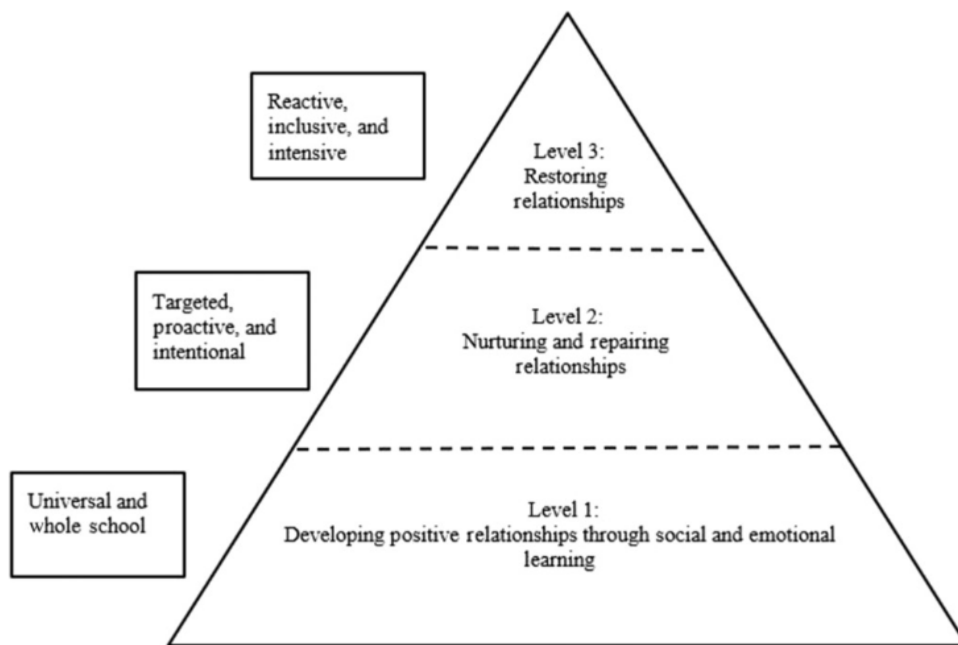

Figure 1—Levels of restorative practice.

New Zealand is a country where restorative practices have been introduced widely within the education system. Restorative conferencing was initially adopted in the late 1990s as a part of the Ministry of Education's Suspension Reduction Initiative. Reports indicated that the initiative helped to reduce suspension, which then inspired a more extensive adoption of restorative practices, including pedagogical tools such as restorative chats and circle processes (Carruthers, 2014). Restorative practices are now adopted widely in New Zealand schools, guided by the

Ministry of Education's (2014) Positive Behavior for Learning (PB4L) model, which asserts that "by building and maintaining positive, respectful relationships within a school, staff to staff, staff to student, and student to student, issues are more easily managed" (p. 3). The model is currently practiced at over 200 schools, which are generally referred to as "restorative schools." This approach has shifted the focus from suspension reduction toward a primary focus on the "production and maintenance of respectful relationships" (Drewery, 2016, p. 191). The PB4L model includes three levels of practice that align closely with descriptions of restorative practices in scholarly and professional literature (see Figure 1). "Restorative Essentials" is the first level of PB4L and focuses on having a relational approach to students, effective communication skills, and engaging in restorative conversations. The second level focuses on "Restorative Circles" as a pedagogical tool used routinely for community building, dialogue, learning, decision making, welcoming or culminating events, and conflict and healing circles. The third and final level focuses on "Restorative Conferences" as a reaction to conflict and harm that can include miniconferences, classroom conferences, or formal restorative conferences (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 23).

Reviews of PB4L suggest that the model is implemented widely and includes proactive and reactive restorative practices (Boyd & Felgate, 2015). For example, one case study describes a student who displayed poor behavior at home, in school, and in the community (Wearmouth, Mckinney, & Glynn, 2007). Following an intensive restorative conferencing process, the school helped to shift the focus away from the student and his actions and toward "putting things right" with the community (p. 41). This case study emphasized that repairing harm is complex and time intensive for schools. It also often requires schools to find external community support to help address problems that intersect schools and neighborhoods (Wearmouth et al., 2007). The whole-school PB4L approach led to better student behavior outcomes when compared with schools that focused solely on restorative discipline approaches (Drewery, 2016). One study suggested that restorative practices are similar to the use of TPSR in physical education because both approaches employ an asset-based approach to their focus "on the reduction of problematic behaviors" and "fosters positive personal and social competencies" (Gray et al., 2019, p. 348). Some authors suggest that the whole-school approach may not commonly extend to physical education and school sports (Hemphill et al., 2018). A recent article described that promising examples of restorative practices are occurring in physical education, but the research documentation is still lacking (Lynch, Schleider, & McBean, 2020). As one example, Ellison, Wynard, Walton-Fisette, and Benes (2020) explained how the restorative circle process can support trust building, empathy, and student learning in physical education.

The purpose of this case study was to explore the issue of conflict and harm in physical education within a school recognized for its exemplary restorative practices. The research is purposely situated in New Zealand to get an understanding of restorative practice in a natural setting where the practices are recognized as exemplary across public sectors. The literature on restorative justice often highlights New Zealand's restorative justice practices in its justice system (Zehr, 2002), community settings (Maxwell & Hayes, 2006), universities (Karp, 2015), and public schools (Carruthers, 2014). The authors believe cross-sector adoption of restorative justice and restorative practices is unique and can provide insight into the possibilities for restorative practices in physical education contexts where restorative approaches may not yet be embraced.

Method

A single case study approach was employed (Yin, 2018) to examine the issue of conflict and harm within a restorative school's physical education program. This method was deemed appropriate because the research was exploratory in nature. A review of the literature revealed little about the role of restorative practices in physical education, leading the authors to conclude that a single case study of physical education in a restorative school may provide new insights and inspire further research on this topic. The researchers sought one school that fit the case definition: identified as a PB4L restorative school, had achieved notoriety in the community for its use of restorative practices, and explicitly aimed to include physical education in its work on restorative practices.

Positionality

The lead authors are researchers based in the United States who have an interest in restorative justice. The senior author is a physical education researcher from New Zealand who assisted the researchers in understanding the local context. All authors were familiar with the TPSR model (Hellison, 2011) and believed it may offer a complementary framework for restorative practices in physical education. In choosing New Zealand as the site of this study, the researchers assumed that the practice of restorative justice was qualitatively different from restorative justice in American schools and were convinced that New Zealand had a strong record of implementing restorative justice in various contexts. Therefore, the authors were positioned as outsiders who were curious to learn about exemplary restorative practices. As a result, the authors did not interrogate the strengths/weaknesses of restorative practices. Instead, the authors aimed to identify the existence of restorative practices in schools and develop an understanding of implications for contexts such as their primary site of work in the United States. This is a strength of the study because it may identify new pathways for implementing restorative justice in the United States. It may also be a limitation because the lead authors do not fully understand the contextual nuances of the New Zealand education system.

Setting and Participants

One restorative school in Wellington, New Zealand was purposely selected to participate in this study. Capital College (pseudonym) was identified as a school that fit the case definition through purposeful sampling. The school was established as a PB4L restorative school, and its principal was selected as a mentor to schools aiming to achieve restorative school status. School administrators were in a network with a local university's research center on restorative justice where they were often consulted on school-based restorative practices. When contacted by the researchers, Capital College suggested that members of its physical education faculty were involved in training related to PB4L. Capital College enrolled approximately 1,500 students in Years 9 through 13 of school (aged 14–18 years). The majority of students identified as New Zealand European (57%) along with other ethnic groups, including Maori (16%), Asian (14%), and Pacifica (12%). As a measure of student engagement, schools in the Wellington region reported a number of "stand-downs," referring to punitive disciplinary measures, such as school suspension. Capital College had approximately nine stand-downs per 1,000 students, which compared favorably with an average of 19 stand-downs in the Wellington region. These data

suggested to the authors that the school experienced fewer Level 3 conflicts relative to peer institutions in the same region.

The school employed 11 physical education teachers (seven females and four males), many of whom also were sport coaches (see Table 1). Varying levels of teaching experience were represented, which are categorized as early career (2–5 years), mid-career (5–20 years), and late career (20+ years). The head of the physical education department was responsible for overseeing physical education instruction and the school sport programs. School sports were positioned as an extension of—not separate from—the physical education program and served all students who elected to play a sport. This is consistent with a "sport for all" philosophy that influences a strong focus on sport education in New Zealand secondary schools (Grant, 1992, p. 307). Therefore, we discuss physical education and school sports as a part of a broad physical education program and use the terms "teachers" and "coaches" interchangeably to reflect the context of the data being presented. When the context of teaching or coaching is not especially relevant, we use the terms "teachers" or "physical educators" to describe the coaching/teaching roles because of their positionality within a school physical education structure.

Table 1. Case Study Participants

Physical educators	Experience	Restorative practice administrators
Tara (F)	Mid-career (PEC)	Kelly (F), restorative practice facilitator
Sam (M)	Mid-career	James (M), restorative practice facilitator
Carolyn (F)	Early career	Bill (M), dean of restorative practices
Sara (F)	Early career	Luke (M), school principal
Carly (F)	Mid-career	
Mona (F)	Late career	
Abbie (F)	Late career	
Misty (F)	Early career	
Scott (M)	Mid-career	
Paul (M)	Early career	
Eric (M)	Late career	

Note. F = female; M = male; PEC = physical education coordinator.

Data Collection

Adult participants in the study included all physical education teachers (11), three school staff tasked with overseeing restorative practices, and the school principal. Youth participants included 25 year nine students (ages 14–15) who were involved with focus group interviews. Data were collected in three phases over 2 years. During the first phase of data collection, the authors visited the school to get acquainted with the teachers and administrators and to learn about their views of restorative practices. This phase of the research provided the school administration with an opportunity to learn about the authors' research objectives and provide feedback on how to examine restorative practices in physical education. During three site visits in 1 week, the researchers met with the physical educators and received tours of facilities and an overview of courses. A general agreement was reached that it would be mutually beneficial for the lead author to spend extended time at Capitol College to interact with teachers, students, and administrators. The school agreed to support the research project as best they could, and the lead author agreed to provide elective professional development workshops to volunteer coaches and a leadership

session for student leaders. The second phase of the research occurred approximately one year later. The first author spent 12 school days on-site at Capital College collecting most of the data in this study. To help build rapport with students and faculty, the school principal facilitated introductions of the first author at faculty meetings and encouraged teachers to support the project. The final phase of this study included a return visit to the school where a member checking process (Patton, 2015) was conducted. During this phase, two authors visited the school for one school day to present their research findings to adult participants from Capital College (i.e., administrators and physical educators) and invite their input on the findings.

Focus group interviews A total of 25 students from Capital College participated in five focus group interviews during the second phase of data collection. The interviews were coordinated by school administrators, who arranged for five students to participate in an interview during a recess period over 1 week. Participation was voluntary and determined, in part, by whether or not the students had completed other obligations common to the recess period. The researcher was provided with the first names of students and no other demographic information. A semistructured interview guide was followed that discussed students' knowledge of restorative practices, their experiences related to conflicts in school physical education, and their suggestions for improving relationships and resolving conflicts that do emerge. For example, students were asked questions like, "Can you describe a conflict that is common in physical education?" and "What are the best ways to solve conflicts in sports and physical education?" The interview was conducted in the format of a circle wherein each student had an opportunity to answer each question. This strategy was used because students were familiar with the circle format and it helped the researcher develop a rapport with students.

Individual interviews A total of seven of the 11 physical education teachers, administrators with direct oversight of restorative practice (N = 3), and the school principal volunteered to participate in individual interviews. All adult participants were interviewed at all three phases of the study with the school principal participating in entry and exit interviews at each phase for a total of six interviews. The interviews of adult participants focused on their perspectives on how restorative practices apply to physical education and school sports. The following are examples of the questions: "How do restorative practices connect to physical education?" and "What challenges or barriers do you see in implementing restorative practices in the physical education context?"

Guided reflections A total of seven teachers completed structured reflections guided by the Tool for Assessing Responsibility-based Education (TARE), following lessons of their choosing. The reflections were completed at the discretion of each teacher, leading to a total of 21 reflections completed during the second phase of research. Grounded in the TPSR model (Hellison, 2011), the TARE asks teachers to reflect on responsibility-based themes (i.e., integration, transfer, empowerment, and teacher–student relationship), students' levels of responsible behavior (i.e., self-control, participation, effort, self-direction, and caring), and includes an open-ended comment section (Wright, 2016). The teachers were instructed to use the open-ended section to comment further on restorative practices. For example, the instructions included the statement, "Can you elaborate in the notes section on ways that restorative practices inform your teaching but are not captured within the categories of the TARE instrument?" The teacher reflections often led to informal conversations among the teachers and researchers. Selection of this reflection tool was supported by previous research indicating its utility in supporting teachers' reflection on personal

and social responsibility in physical education (Hemphill, Templin, & Wright, 2015; Wright & Irwin, 2018), its general alignment with teaching social and emotional learning (Wright et al., 2020), and the finding of a connection between TPSR and restorative practices in a recent study (Gray et al., 2019).

Field notes Written field notes (N = 22) were taken by the first author throughout each day during the second phase of the data collection. The field notes reflected informal observations of courses, impromptu conversations with students and teachers, and observations of formal and informal group meetings at the school. During the extended visits to Capital College (second phase of data collection), teachers and students were aware of the purpose of the study and often approached the researcher with comments and questions. As one example, an English teacher approached the researcher to explain that she would be leading a restorative circle process with her class. She believed the classroom-based circle to be different from the way physical educators used circles and invited the researcher to get that unique perspective. In this instance and all others, the researcher used written field notes to capture the experience.

Documents Teachers and administrators voluntarily provided the researchers with several documents that helped contextualize restorative practices at Capital College. For example, the school had a handbook to explain the policies and best practices for implementing restorative practices. The administrator provided this document to the researchers and further explained its use in the school. Another example was a physical education document that students were required to complete if they did not wear the proper attire to class. The teacher believed it was relevant to the study because it adopted a restorative approach, requiring students to reflect on the impact of their behavior on themselves, their classmates, and the teacher. A total of 13 documents were collected and included in the analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by three members of the research team using a multiphase collaborative qualitative approach (Richards & Hemphill, 2018) grounded in inductive and deductive analysis as well as constant comparison. The process had deductive elements as the authors used restorative justice as a framework through which to interpret the participant's experiences. The authors purposely looked for instances of conflict, harm, and conflict resolution. The analysis was also inductive as the authors intentionally sought out data to better understand restorative practices in physical education (Patton, 2015). This inductive process was collaborative as two authors independently coded subsets of data and presented preliminary themes to the third researcher in the form of research memos. The memos were discussed among the research team to determine which emergent themes were best supported by data, identify areas of overlap between the two coders, and discuss any areas where the independent coding was in conflict. This process led to the development of a codebook reflecting the consensus of the researchers. The constant comparative method was applied as themes were developed within the agreed-upon codebook (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). Several methodological processes were adopted to enhance the trustworthiness of the research. The senior author served as a peer debriefer who had knowledge of the research context and experience with qualitative research. The collaborative coding process provided triangulation among researchers, and data triangulation was evident in the use of multiple data sources. A member checking process was also implemented wherein the findings of the

research were presented to all participants and time was provided for the participants to share their impressions of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

Three themes describe the results of this study. The first theme describes restorative pedagogy physical education at Capital College. This theme contextualizes the physical education program with teacher perceptions of student behavior and the use of responsibility-based pedagogy. The second theme explains the types of harm that occurred within the physical education program. This theme illuminates issues that restorative practice is designed to address. The third theme describes how the physical educators were positioned as the central figure in creating a context in which harm was addressed. This helped contextualize the important role of adult leaders in creating a context for restorative practices to help in relationship development.

Restorative Pedagogy in Physical Education

A total of seven physical educators completed 21 TARE postteaching reflections that were combined to reflect the context of physical education at Capital College (see Table 2). Teachers perceived that the teacher–student relationship (2.92) was frequently evident throughout lessons. Teachers described several examples of intentional pedagogy, such as “greeting students,” “asking how their day is going,” “being approachable,” and giving “choice of who wants to teach/coach.” They reported sharing responsibility with students through choice and leadership, supporting their occasional use of empowerment-based strategies (2.28). Teachers also reported occasionally using integration (2.10) of responsibility roles, which they attributed to a common practice wherein “every student has leadership roles they must incorporate into the games.” Transfer was least reported (1.34) with five of seven teachers rarely or never making connections to the application of life skills in other settings. Student behavior was perceived to be strong or very strong across five categories (see Table 3) of self-control (2.90), participation (3.19), effort (2.78), self-direction (2.76), and caring (2.57). The seven teachers who completed TARE observations perceived it to be a good tool to capture the essence of their restorative practice. One exception was noted because many teachers believed their focus on relationships in restorative practices was broader than teacher–student relationships presented in the TARE. Tara explained this notion further:

> Regarding restorative practice, I believe relationships are the key to teaching. Understanding and knowing students’ home lives, what is going on with them so you can understand why they are behaving a certain way. So perhaps [add] a section on creating meaningful relationships.

The physical educators believed their pedagogy connected to Capital College’s holistic approach to restorative practices. When asked to explain these connections, Sam pointed to the frequent use of “one-on-one chats” that were commonly observed during physical activity. These chats were consistent with the “restorative chats” that are prioritized in the PB4L model. Another connection was the use of circles. The most illustrative example was observed when Tara became frustrated with a lack of enthusiasm during a team activity. At her direction, the class was asked to sit in a circle and “reflect on enjoyment.” Students followed with examples of activities they perceived to be “boring,” including “wait time” during teacher explanations to the class. Following several

suggestions to improve enjoyment, the class was rewarded with free play. As was commonly observed, the class returned the following day to an opening circle where the teacher explained class adaptations to promote enjoyment. Circle activities were consistently employed at the beginning and end of each class. However, circles were an area of pedagogy distinctly different from other areas of Capital College. Observations beyond physical education confirmed that circles were used more routinely in class subjects such as English, and these circles would often last entire class periods. In contrast, physical education circles were often rushed, and teachers reported that "I don't think I made things clear" (Sara) and "leadership roles must be incorporated into the games" instead of circles (Scott) due, in part, to the need to prioritize time for physical activity. Consequently, the use of restorative circles that gave voice to all students was not observed in physical education.

Table 2. Means and *SD*s for Responsibility Themes From TARE Postteaching Reflection

Teacher (*N*)	Integration	Transfer	Empowerment	Relationships
Carolyn (4)	2.25 (2.06)	0.75 (1.50)	3.00 (1.41)	3.00 (0.82)
Sara (3)	2.33 (1.15)	1.00 (1.00)	2.67 (1.53)	3.00 (1.00)
Sam (4)	2.71 (0.96)	3.00 (0.82)	2.75 (0.96)	3.00 (1.50)
Tara (5)	1.40 (1.52)	0.60 (0.55)	2.40 (1.14)	3.25 (0.50)
Mona (3)	2.00 (1.73)	0.00 (0.00)	2.33 (1.53)	2.67 (0.58)
Misty (1)	1.00	0.00	1.00	3.00
Paul (1)	3.00	4.00	2.50	2.50
Combined (21)	2.10 (0.71)	1.34 (1.55)	2.38 (0.65)	2.92 (0.23)

Note. Rating scale: (0) never = throughout the entire lesson, none of the teacher's words or actions clearly convey or align with this theme; (1) rarely = not generally implemented into the teaching but may be reflected in some isolated words or actions of the teacher; (2) occasionally = some of the teacher's words and actions connect to this strategy, either directly or indirectly, during the lesson; (3) frequently = theme is addressed directly and evidenced at several points in the lesson through the words and actions of the teacher; (4) extensively = theme is seamlessly addressed and evidenced in multiple ways through the words and actions of the teacher. TARE = Tool for Assessing Responsibility-based Education.

Table 3. Means and SDs for Student Behavior From TARE Postteaching Reflection

Teacher (N)	Self-control	Participation	Effort	Self-direction	Caring	Teacher (N)
Carolyn (4)	3.00 (0.00)	3.00 (1.15)	2.75 (0.96)	2.75 (0.50)	2.25 (0.96)	Carolyn (4)
Sarah (3)	3.00 (0.00)	3.00 (1.00)	2.33 (0.58)	2.67 (0.58)	3.00 (0.00)	Sarah (3)
Sam (4)	3.00 (0.00)	3.00 (0.82)	2.75 (0.50)	2.75 (0.50)	2.75 (0.50)	Sam (4)
Tara (5)	2.80 (0.45)	2.80 (0.84)	2.20 (0.84)	2.40 (0.89)	2.40 (0.89)	Tara (5)
Mona (3)	3.00 (0.00)	3.00 (1.00)	2.67 (0.58)	3.00 (1.00)	2.00 (0.00)	Mona (3)
Misty (1)	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	Misty (1)
Paul (1)	2.50	3.50	—	—	—	Paul (1)
Combined (21)	2.90 (0.19)	3.19 (0.42)	2.78 (0.64)	2.76 (0.23)	2.57 (0.41)	Combined (21)

Note. Rating scale: (0) very weak = few, if any, students displayed this responsibility; (1) weak = some students displayed this responsibility; (2) moderate = many students displayed this responsibility but many did not; (3) strong = most students displayed this responsibility through the lesson with only minor and/or isolated exceptions; (4) very strong = all students displayed responsibility throughout the lesson with no observed exceptions. TARE = Tool for Assessing Responsibility-based Education.

Types of Harm in Physical Education

All students discussed experiencing conflict and harm in the context of school sports and physical education. Students described several examples related to bullying that routinely occurred, such as "pushing and shoving each other," "bad sportsmanship," "cheating," and "targeting players with verbal abuse." Many students reflected on harmful statements from their peers, such as "you suck" or "you can't shoot," suggesting that it was common for students' verbal insults to have the potential to escalate into more serious conflicts. Program observation confirmed that harmful statements were common, although they did not seem to have intent to cause harm. For example, observation notes explained that "a couple of students seem to be teasing each other during activities but they respond well when the teacher intervenes." The observer noted the use of "sarcasm" with intentions toward "good fun," but this was also met with silence from students on the receiving end of teasing, making it possible for some instances to be received as "bullying" even if they were intended to be more friendly. In contrast, more clear instances of verbal harm were quickly addressed by the teacher. The researcher observed one student tell another to "shut up," to which Paul quickly replied, "There are other ways to ask peers to be quiet." Teachers were often aware of "good fun" but did not perceive it to cause harm. Mona explained in a lesson reflection that "at times a couple of students use put-down language toward each other, but the students still get on well."

Students, teachers, coaches, and administrators all clearly understood the need to address issues right away or else risk the conflicts escalating. For example, when asked what caused conflicts in physical education, students explained that "not solving conflict straight away," "not talking problems through and expecting them to work out by themselves," "avoiding [conflicts]," and "letting it build up and get worse" were the main reason conflicts grew. This sentiment was consistent among physical educators, as Eric explained: "We generally like to discuss [conflicts] straight away because I think particularly in team sports it has to be resolved quickly." Although this sentiment was widely held among students, teachers, and administrators, the use of restorative circles or conferences was not observed or noted as a mechanism to solve conflicts.

School administrators explained that more serious instances of harm were less common than the routine verbal insults but did occur periodically. These instances included things like "stealing from the locker room," "fighting" during gameplay, and "bullying" on social media platforms. Upon probing, administrators could recall only two examples of significant conflicts that stemmed from physical education. First, Luke explained that "a couple of [older] boys stole from younger kids after a basketball game." As is common in restorative practices, the administration spent time preparing for a restorative conference (Level 3 response): "There has to be a lot of preliminary talking about what went wrong, getting the stories straight, and making sure there will be no surprises at the meeting." During the conference, the older students learned that the young students previously admired them: "I used to go to your basketball matches and looked up to you," one of the victims explained. "Now, to be honest, you're nothing in my eyes," the young student continued, expressing the harm caused to his relationship with the student. After expressing regret, the group collectively agreed to a strategy to repair the harm; the offenders "ended up acting as assistant coach[es] to the kids basketball team and they also had to undergo a program of doing extra work and help out at home." The second restorative conference stemming from physical education focused on "a bullying thing which occurred on Instagram." Bill explained that "the kid was having a hard time because he wasn't so good at sports . . . it went on for a long time, when the issue came to school it was appalling." In this instance, the victim of

bullying chose not to participate in the conference, "so we just left a spot for where he would be" (Luke). The resolution was satisfactory as "they all apologized and the kid came back to the team and is still playing" (Bill). Luke reiterated, however, that "it worked out well, but honestly the hours it took were exorbitant because it hadn't been dealt with earlier."

At Capital College, participants identified different instances of harm being committed in physical education and school sports. For example, we heard of verbal harm and physical harm. Verbal harm included teasing, shaming, blaming, and taunting. Students also experienced physical harm, such as pushing and shoving. We saw harm that occurred between teammates in competition (e.g., taunting) as well as in areas adjacent to physical education (i.e., stealing and excluding). Teachers, students, and administrators were aware of the need to address conflicts early on or risk them escalating and causing more significant harm. This proved to be true in the two instances of more severe conflicts occurring where administrators implemented restorative conferencing processes to successfully restore relationships.

Physical Educator Is a Central Figure to Harm

The physical educator was commonly described as either the central figure in causing harm, resolving conflicts, or creating a positive climate. Observations found that physical educators did "structure activities in a way that minimized harm." Teacher reflections provided examples, including intentional strategies from teachers who tried to "be aware of their own role," establish "norms that are respected," or "check in with students via the circle process and try to set a positive tone" (Carly). Physical educators often explained that "good practices come from the top down" (Eric), implicating the physical educator's central role. According to the physical educators, conflicts were resolved in a positive manner when the "teacher is trained in restorative as opposed to punitive approaches" (Scott). Sam explained that "teaching strategies that instruct coaches to focus on certain behaviors" were likely to develop "responsibility" in physical education. It was observed that all teachers emphasized asking students to reflect on their behavior in physical education in circles at the beginning and end of every class. As Tara explained, reflective practice was important to teaching responsibility by "letting the students talk in a really direct way."

The idea of restorative practices in physical education was viewed by teachers as requiring their leadership for effective implementation. Their responsibility in restorative practices was to teach to "guarantee the [emotional] safety of our players," "be more holistic and inclusive and get the [students] to be a part of the decision-making process." That could be accomplished when teachers "take time on a one-on-one basis" and worked with the "mindset" of the students by tapping into "generational and cultural things as well." Strategies to enhance student participation included "getting the kids to demonstrate the initiative and come up with the ideas and how to resolve issues wherever they come across them" (Paul). A few teachers indicated that they applied a restorative approach to physical education by stating that "above everything was the philosophy of having fun and teamwork and unity, all those type of things and working for each other," that they maintained "high expectations of youth," and that they were open to the expectations that youth had for them. Teachers described restorative practices in physical education as "giving [kids] the best opportunity to be the best version of themselves."

Students pointed out that conflict could be shaped in different ways by physical educators. They often described the physical educator as "setting the tone" for issues of conflict. For example, when the "referee has no authority," or when students have "too much freedom," or there are no "explicit expectations stated," the students experienced confusion and tension that could escalate

into conflicts. There were also examples of negative impacts and harmful norms constructed through teaching and coaching behaviors like “yelling at players,” “aggressive and abusive coaching,” or “negative reinforcement.” This could lead to conflicts between players in which youth feel it is unfair when they “don’t get equal game time,” or they may express themselves by “playing dirty and pushing others over,” “deliberately causing disadvantage or harm,” and “being overly competitive and compromising values and fair play for success.” Students felt that sports “need a responsible coach to help children improve.” Without a responsible coach, students felt that there was “misunderstanding and miscommunication” when conflict arose and that coaches were “ignoring the conflict and moving on, thus making it worse.” The examples from students made clear that issues of conflict were present in their physical education experiences. They viewed physical educators as having the power to develop expectations that were conducive to minimizing conflicts and resolving them appropriately as they occurred.

Issues of conflict and harm were commonly experienced by students at Capital College. The findings suggest, however, that the physical educator has an important role in shaping the experience of students who inevitably will need to navigate conflict in their physical education experiences. When teachers focused on solving a conflict right away, it seemed to help keep conflicts small. The use of intentional and proactive pedagogical strategies (e.g., restorative circle process) helped physical educators to set clear expectations and provide students with space to express concerns. It was notable that physical educators’ responsibility seemed to relate to proactive relationship building (Level 1 of restorative practices) and implementing targeted responses to conflicts in general (Level 2 of restorative practices). Luke emphasized that physical educators were expected to build relationships with students to “be more empathetic towards them.” He concluded, “that’s really the crucial part of it—realizing that every kid comes with a different background and to really deal with them you need to have a sense of their wholeness.”

Discussion

This article reports on a study of the conflict and harm experienced by students in physical education in a New Zealand restorative school. It is acknowledged that the experiences of the physical educators in this study have been shaped by the school-wide embrace of restorative practices, and in this context, they, and the students, may have been well prepared to address issues of conflict and harm. The findings confirm that issues of conflict and harm were commonly experienced by students; this is consistent with previous scholarship on the role of conflict in relationships. As Hocker and Wilmot (2014) explained, students “do not have the option of staying out of conflict unless [they] stay out of relationships” (p. 13). Violations of property and relationships were discussed by students and teachers as types of conflict that occurred in their school. Violations of property included stealing or withholding items or resources, whereas violations of relationships included blaming, shaming, taunting, and excluding. These violations can be important because, if harm results from them, this can negatively impact students’ experiences in physical education, in school generally, and outside of school. Although many instances of harm were found to be confined to the physical education context, others extended beyond school, including social media platforms where adults were unaware of the students’ experiences.

This study adds to the body of research examining physical education in New Zealand schools. One study (Gordon, Thevenard, & Hodis, 2012) involved a national survey of New Zealand physical educators on their use of the TPSR model. The results showed that a large number

of New Zealand schools and teachers utilized TPSR in their daily practice. Gordon's (2010) in-depth examination of one New Zealand school-based TPSR physical education program noted that tensions could arise when the values encouraged by TPSR were not shared by other teachers or were not overtly supported across the school. This suggests that teachers applying restorative practices in physical education may find the process easier if they are working in fully restorative schools. In another study, Dyson, Howley, and Shen (2019) examined the teaching of physical education in New Zealand schools and concluded that many New Zealand teachers prioritized the teaching of SEL, used restorative conversations, and implemented circle practices with their classes. These studies suggest that many New Zealand physical education teachers hold philosophical beliefs around education that align with the restorative processes approach. This alignment may support future professional development aimed at connecting restorative practices to physical education.

The relationship between a school's commitment to restorative practices and the expectations held of physical education is interesting. Hemphill et al. (2018) noted that secondary schools that focused on restorative practices did not necessarily connect this approach with physical education and sports programs. This study suggests that there is potential for whole-school approaches to restorative practices to consider physical education as an integral part of the process with the potential to contribute in a significant way. Many of the examples included in this study may be unique to physical education and sport contexts. This illustrates the importance of scholarship on physical education, considering how conflict and harm impact participants and their development of life skills. Physical education scholars have previously considered this issue and have identified different approaches to addressing conflicts. These include a reflective approach (Hellison, 2011), conflict negotiation (Ennis, 1999), and restorative practices (Hemphill et al., 2018). Although many would assume that conflict is addressed positively in physical education, this is not always true. O'Connor and Graber's (2014) study, for example, found that physical educators acculturated students to support a bullying climate. This type of response can have wide-ranging consequences for participants, including feelings of isolation from physical education.

Consistent with the findings of this study, the theory of restorative justice in education suggests that proactive relationship-building strategies are necessary within school subject areas (Winn, 2018) and that reactive strategies can be employed to repair relationships and prevent conflicts from escalating (Gregory, Ward-Seidel, & Carter, 2020). These classroom-based restorative practices complement restorative conference processes that can be effective at reducing punitive and exclusionary discipline practices (Kervick et al., 2019). The emerging conversation on restorative practices in physical education argues for a shift in punitive norms toward a trauma-informed restorative physical education. This aligns with democratic practices that provide students with a voice in decision making (Lynch et al., 2020). The routine use of circles is a foundational restorative pedagogy to invite the voices of all students in conversations on conflict, relationships, and curriculum in physical education (Ellison et al., 2020). Consistent use of restorative practice may prove useful in surfacing conflicts before they escalate in severity. One study illustrated, for example, that routine circle practices helped to address issues of conflict that were "percolating beneath the surface" but not yet apparent to teachers (Wang & Lee, 2019, p. 181). It was observed in this study that conflicts can be out of sight from physical educators on social media platforms. More research on the use of circles and other restorative pedagogies is needed to understand the potential of restorative practices to address harms that commonly occur in physical education.

This study also has implications for the growing area of research and practice on SEL. Restorative practices can be linked to SEL (Kervick et al., 2019) with conflict resolution skills embedded within relationship skills that are emphasized as one component of SEL. Where they differ from SEL is that restorative processes prioritize an explicit recognition of conflict in relationships and call on educators to address harms (Reistenberg, 2012). The authors note that systemically prioritizing restorative practices may facilitate a school climate conducive to SEL and the restoration of school communities from the impact of harm. Future research is needed to understand how restorative practices work in schools and in physical education in particular. Although restorative practices proved useful at Capital College, instances of severe conflicts were rare. When Level 3 conflicts did emerge, the response was resource intensive. This may limit the ability to implement restorative practices as a solution where strong relationships do not already exist and conflicts are more common. A focus on interpersonal relationships was also evident in this study as is common in some literature (Reistenberg, 2012). Other scholars argue that restorative justice overemphasizes student behavior and should, instead, consider systemic and cultural factors to help understand and respond to student behaviors (Winn, 2018).

More research on restorative practices in physical education is needed to better understand how restorative practices can be implemented and adapted. For example, the restorative circle process is widely viewed as the most common pedagogical tool used in restorative practices (Reistenberg, 2012). Circles were commonly observed throughout Capital College, but their use was abbreviated in physical education. This was due to teachers' and students' interest in physical activity time during class, which does not align well with the use of circles. Physical educators, instead, opted to use restorative pedagogies that could be integrated with physical activity, such as one-on-one restorative chats. Circles were often modified to provide voice to a few students in physical education as opposed to voice being given to all students in classroom settings. This is consistent with empowerment-based pedagogies described in physical education curriculum models (Dyson et al., 2019), such as the TPSR awareness talk and group meeting (Hellison, 2011). The use of the TARE reflection tool also supports bridging restorative practices with existing pedagogical approaches in physical education, such as TPSR. Findings from this study suggest that restorative practices may offer teachers new ideas to address challenges such as the pervasiveness of bullying in physical education (Jiménez-Barbero et al., 2020; O'Connor & Graber, 2014).

In conclusion, this research suggests that restorative practices can work well in physical education in a school context where restorative practices are valued. As restorative justice and restorative practices come into focus in the United States (Winn, 2018), this may provide opportunities for physical educators to support the development of positive relationships through proactive and reactive restorative pedagogies. More research is needed to understand the types of restorative practices that are most applicable to the physical education context. The commonly used restorative circle process, for example, may need adaptations to be effective in physical education due to its time intensiveness and the need for physical educators to ensure adequate amounts of physical activity. The physical educators in this study suggested through their reflections that responsibility-based teaching strategies (Wright, 2016) facilitated their implementation of restorative practice. The TPSR and other instructional models may hold promise for integrating restorative practices in physical education pedagogy and scholarship.

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