

The Dynamics of the Learning Circle in High School: Teacher and Students in “Equal
Partnership”

by © Boluwade Bukola A Thesis submitted

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Abstract

The learning circle (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2014) is a concept that Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) is beginning to explore. It is a practice that allows the teacher and students to engage in equal partnership, which benefits both teaching and learning. The dynamics of the learning circle (LC) as a pedagogical tool are limitless, but as a science teacher, I have noticed a gap between theory and praxis in the practical ways teachers use restorative justice learning circles to teach, especially for teaching the science curriculum in high school (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, Riestenberg, 2012). This study explored this pedagogy in St. John's, Newfoundland (NL), Canada in order to contribute to the existing literature on LC, especially for teaching science classes, where more real life experience is still needed to understand student engagement. Using a qualitative narrative case study, I examined the impact of the LC on teacher and student relationships and explored whether perceptions of moving towards equal (shared) partnership positively influence participation and achievement (Wadhwa, 2016). The findings and results revealed that the teacher and the students were impacted in various ways. Although the challenge of time constraints, reaching equal partnership, and inadequate prior knowledge and skills for practice were some concerns, after introducing the LC in the science class, the teacher participant acknowledged the potential of the LC for knowledge-based science topics and remained hesitant about its use for calculation-based topics. The students experienced an improved level of interaction with the teacher and had more time to process information when sharing reflections and wanted it introduced in their other classes as well.

Keywords: Restorative Justice, Relationship First, Equal Partnership, Critical Reflection, and Transformation.

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1: Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem- Research Rationale

The inspiration for this study was derived from one of the chapters of Anita Wadhwa's (2016) book *"Turning Paradigm on its Sides" Youth-Adult Power Dynamics in a Student Apprenticeship Model of Restorative Justice*. The author critiques the "traditionally hierarchical relationship between students and faculty-one in which adults have *power over*, as opposed to *power with*, youth. This is pictured as a vertical alignment with adults at the top and students on the bottom" (Wadhwa, 2016, p.116). Wadhwa examines the complex dynamics that played out at one small school implementing restorative justice, where practitioners strove to carry out the mission of youth empowerment by offering students input on disciplinary matters (Wadhwa, 2016). This is an interesting topic to me as I reflect on my experiences as a teacher from Nigeria and a student in Canada, where teachers exercise power (control) over students, and the new pedagogy of restorative justice. In a typical traditional class, the students sit facing the teacher as she/he gives instruction in front of the class with little or no interaction between them. This, however, is not the case with restorative justice circles, where the teacher and students sit together in equal partnership. Like Wadhwa, I also see the need for a paradigm shift from "adult on top and youth on the bottom" to "adult and youth being on the same side." The adult and youth should be able work together as equal partners.

My motivation for this study increased when I learned that the "concept of restorative justice was introduced at "Equity" in an unlikely place: a science class...The chemistry teacher wanted to integrate the science curriculum with the school vision that focused on social justice" (Wadhwa, 2016, p. 118 - 119). "Equity" is a pseudonym for the school Wadhwa studied. This teacher used his initiative to collaborate with a university law school to "work on an

extracurricular project, one that was unrelated to science but relevant to social justice” (p. 119). So as a science teacher, I became curious about how science classes might use this kind of pedagogy to help teachers teach science curriculum and “foster leadership skills in the students in an effort to trouble the traditionally hierarchical relationship between teacher and students in which teachers have *power over*, as opposed to *power with*, students” (Wadhwa, 2016, p. 116). This implies that the teacher and students can experience equal partnership in relation to power dynamics. The teacher can be on the same level as the students without discrimination and intimidation to achieve both teaching and learning outcomes.

The words “equal partnership” are used by Wadhwa (2016) in line with the perspective that Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) is putting relationships first and is grounded in relational theory, where “human beings are worthy and interconnected” (Vaandering, 2014). The circle is a process in which learning can take place in a balanced and shared manner (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2014, p. 69). The idea of adults and youth “in equal partnership” of course can be challenging, as is recorded by the author, but it also reveals that, “circles at *Equity* worked to dismantle traditional power dynamics between adults and youth and allowed students to interrogate and challenge hierarchies within the school and in the society” (Wadhwa, 2016, p. 116). This is insightful for me, as it shows that one of the ways teachers and students can be in equal partnership in school is through the practice of circles. There are different types of circles so I decided to use the learning circle (LC) as found in Hatcher, Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall (2009) for learning science, my teaching subject.

The learning circle is a concept and practice that RJE employs to nurture relational environments. Knowing that there is no universally accepted definition for restorative justice, I decided to use the one found in “*The Little Book of RJE*”: “facilitating a learning community

that nurtures the capacity of people to engage with one another and their environment in a manner that supports and respects the inherent dignity and worth of all” (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p. 8). An important component of RJE is creating just and equitable learning environments, which is usually the outcome of working together in learning (or dialogue). Hatcher et al. (2009) explain that “community can be created in any classroom by following the Indigenous practice of forming learning circles” (p. 150). This implies that a community is formed in the learning circle. They reveal that students may arrange seats in a circle and pass a feather or stick (or other object with meaning for the group) to indicate who has the floor and the opportunity to speak. During this process, the teacher is a facilitator who can guide the educational process without dominating.

Although Wadhwa (2016) mentioned law and justice students sitting at the decision-making table with adults to advocate for district disciplinary changes that would embrace the practice of restorative justice, RJ is not limited to disciplinary matters, but is all-encompassing; it works for every aspect of the school system, whether it is curricular and non-curricular. Evans and Vaandering (2016) listed three components of RJ:

- Creating a just and equitable learning environment
- Nurturing healthy relationships
- Repairing harm and transforming conflict

These components summarize everything that takes place in a school; all academic and non-academic matters in and out of the classroom including discipline matters. I understand that “students have changed over the last twenty years perhaps as a result of a technology rich upbringing; they appear to have ‘different’ needs, goals, and learning preferences than students

had in the past” (Parsons & Taylor, 2011). To make provision for this change, I agree that there is “the need to better understand these youth and determine how to best engage them in learning”. Parsons and Taylor (2011) observed a notable lack of a “student voice” or student perspective in the literature on student engagement. I also observed that there are more entries on teachers than students in the RJ literature. This study is significant, as it bridges this gap and seeks to explore the learning circle to allow students have a voice that can be heard in the science class.

I have been in the teaching profession for more than two decades and have played different roles including those of a science teacher, guidance counsellor, principal, and consultant, all without knowledge of restorative justice in education and the practice of the learning circles. Now, having learned about Restorative Justice in Education (RJE), it is having a tremendous impact on me and I have greatly enjoyed implementing it in my various roles. It has impacted the way I perceive things, my relationships with others and the language I use. Among other discourses in restorative justice, the learning circle precipitated a significant shift in my teaching career. I perceive that restorative justice (RJ) philosophy is relevant to the discussions I have had with other science educators in Ed 6653 on contemporary issues in science education. The article, “Two-Eyed Seeing in the Classroom Environment” (Hatcher et al, 2009) motivated me to continue with my inquiry on the LC for teaching science. The article specifically mentions learning circles as an Indigenous practice where people can speak freely without fear or embarrassment (p. 150).

Learning circles are built on the principle and practice of putting “relationships first,” the Newfoundland phrase for Restorative Justice in Education as grounded in relational theory (Llewellyn, 2012 cited in Vaandering, 2014). The circle, which is an Indigenous practice can be

used to share stories, work in groups, collaborate or as a problem-solving mechanism (Hopkins, 2011; Riestenberg, 2012). It avoids the problems associated with shy or overly talkative students, and it allows people to speak freely without fear or embarrassment. The circle is a powerful symbol in Indigenous science as described in Hatcher et al (2009) because:

Everything the power of the world does is in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours...the life of a person is a circle from childhood to childhood, and it is in everything where power move. (Black Elk as cited in Cajete, 2000, p. 281)

This reminds me of the time I spent playing in circles with friends when I was a child. These were unforgettable experiences, as learning took place naturally, was always fun and involved creativity. As I have learned through my work experience, the circle is highly appreciated in childcare centres among pre-schools and school-age children (ages 3-12). The RJ circle is essentially a product of the Indigenous learning circle and is used to achieve a range of activities such as lesson circles. Riestenberg (2012), the author of *“Circle in the Square”* did significant work on various kinds of circles, including lesson circles, which can be used to teach curriculum. She described how, “A wide variety of teachers (For example math, science, writing, literature, history, civics, social studies, and health) used a circle to begin a lesson... and end a unit” (p.163). I was impressed at seeing science among the lists of subjects that the lesson circle was used to teaching.

Although testimonies were shared by some of these teachers as the impact of the lesson circles (same as LC) for their subjects, there was none for science; hence the need for this study.

This makes the study relevant in bridging this gap by exploring (a) how the LC can be used for teaching science curriculum, and (b) how the teacher and students can work together in equal partnership. The LC, like other circles, can promote interconnections between students, teachers and the entire school community. In the circle, the teacher is with the student, giving the support needed for every expectation. This is in contrast to the traditional system, where little or no support is given, so the students are simply left with textbooks and memorization. According to Boyes-Watson & Pranis (2014), “the circles are an excellent venue for developing student voice, for articulating one’s ideas for critical thinking, and for sharing one’s views” (p.69). This implies that the learning circle dynamically provides the teacher with the students’ perspectives on topics and this can be highly engaging. It is interesting to note, however, that according to the literature, little is known about this by some educators, especially for teaching curriculum (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). I see this as an opportunity to explore, learn and share possible ways this task can be accomplished by introducing the LC into a selected class.

One of the contemporary issues in science is student engagement in science education. Science is often a challenging subject for many students, partly because of the method employed for teaching it (Lyons, 2006). Most of the time there is a swing between the teacher-focused and student-centred classroom. In a teacher-focused classroom, the focus is on serving the needs of the society; hence the teacher teaches what she/he thinks the students need to know. On the other hand, in the student-centred classroom, the focus is on serving the needs of the individual thus, the students are left to explore and make inquiries, which usually involves paperwork being completed individually using textbooks or search engines with little or no support from the teacher. This usually results in serious problems for many students, especially those in high school science classes (Physics, Chemistry and Biology). Consequently, for both methods

discussed, they may end up memorizing information to pass tests and move on to the next grade without having gained an in-depth understanding of the subject (Lyons, 2006). This kind of experience can result in students not being engaged.

According to Parsons and Taylor (2011), “Student engagement is primarily and historically about increasing achievement, positive behaviors, and a sense of belonging in all students. However citing Willms, Friesen and Milton, 2009 they said, student engagement is primarily focused at students in middle school and high school, where disengagement typically becomes a concern” (p. 3). This reminds me of the reaction of both the teacher and students to a question posed by the instructor of a course I completed, “Education 6653: Contemporary Issues in Science Education I” and it reveals the possible reasons why students disengage (Pelech, 2017). According to her, only a few could come up with specific examples for describing a moment when they felt engaged in learning about science. Many students talked about how their teachers gave really good comprehensive notes or used stories to give examples. The inability of many of the students or teachers to come up with a specific example reflects her observation that, “The work our students do is memorisable... but it is rarely especially memorable” (Jardine, 2003, p. 87, cited in Pelech, 2017). This implies that something more is needed in the teaching of science to make it memorable. I, therefore, seek to understand what will make such experiences memorable for both the teacher and the students through the questions I have developed for this study.

1.2 Problem Statement

The learning circle is a dynamic pedagogical approach that can be used for teaching and learning purposes. As a science teacher, however, I have noticed a gap between the theory and practice of the practical ways science teachers use restorative justice learning circles to teach

science curriculum in high school which is echoed by Evans and Vaandering, (2016) and Riestenberg, (2012). Although the philosophy of RJ that individuals are worthy and interconnected is embraced by many, some teachers have not used the learning circles to teach for one reason or another. I also observed a notable lack of “student voice” or student perspectives in the literature on RJ in Newfoundland.

1.3 Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore various ways that the learning circle can be used in high school science classes. The aim of the study is to examine the impact of the LC on teacher and student relationships and to explore whether perceptions of moving towards equal (shared) partnership positively influence participation and achievement (Wadhwa, 2016). The word “equal” implies shared power between the teacher and the students, which allows the teacher to engage the students instead of being in control (Vaandering, 2011, 2013 & 2014).

1.4 Significance of the Research

As a qualitative research study, this study will build on the findings of previous studies on understanding the dynamics of class facilitation in restorative justice that bring teachers and students in “equal partnership.” The study will contribute to the growth of the implementation of restorative justice circles in schools and will provide tips for critical reflective thinking for teachers and students, whether they are adult or youth. The district and system leaders, principals, teachers and students in Newfoundland will profit from the research as well others who engage with the literature result from this study.

1.5 Research Questions

In this study, I seek an in-depth understanding of how an RJ learning circles can be used in a science class by asking the following questions:

1. How do teacher/students perceive restorative justice learning circles?
2. What are teacher and students' perceptions of "teacher and students in equal partnership" before and after participating in the learning circle?
3. What is the impact of the learning circle on teaching and learning outcome?
4. What evidence emerges that indicates high school students experience a paradigm shift with the use of the learning circle for science (1206) class?

1.6 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in critical relational theory. Since theory informs our practice "Thinking critically about practice, of today or yesterday, makes possible the improvement of tomorrow's practice" (Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, cited in Eagan, 2010, p. 429). The place of theory in practice cannot be over-emphasized, understanding the learning circle as a pedagogical approach is critical for teachers and students. Kincheloe (2004) reveals that,

Critical pedagogy wants to connect education to that feeling, to embolden teachers and students to act in ways that make a difference and to push humans to new levels of social and cognitive achievement previously deemed impossible. It is an ambitious entity that seeks nothing less than a form of educational adventurism that takes us where nobody's gone before. (P. 4)

Parsons & Taylor (2011) affirmed that, "students have changed over the last twenty years,...they appear to have different needs, goals and learning preferences than students had in

the past” (p. 4), and the learning environment is also changing in terms of physical structure, context and culture. There are a wide range of multiple intelligences in today’s classroom that demand a critical relational approach and an understanding that learning is socially constructed. When I was in Kenya, my son who was 9 years old then brought home an assignment about four seasons and the weather. He had to match the weather with the appropriate clothing. Even though the assignment appeared simple, neither my son nor I understood what to do because we are from a different country that has only two seasons: rainy and dry. I sought help from my son’s teacher, but she pointed me back to the book (which did not help). This experience was frustrating, and this is exactly the type of thing that most of our students experience, especially those from different backgrounds. I think this scenario could have been prevented if a pedagogy that allows students’ voices to be heard had been employed. In my experience, I have found that students thrive when given the support and attention needed in a traditional classrooms, standardized or authentic, as they tend to engage and achieve more (Hadjioannou, 2007; Bintliff, 2011).

The work of Eagan (2010) “*Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed*” and Kincheloe (2004), “*Critical Pedagogy*” are highly informative on the topic of the anti-oppression and emancipation of teachers and students, which I am seeking to examine in this narrative case study. I believe that learning takes place more successfully in a relational environment that allows teachers and students to learn in a horizontal organizational model (equal partnership) like the learning circle, where *they relate together as partners in progress*. Although some teachers have rarely been using the learning circles to teach for one reason or another, I seek to unravel how teachers can use RJ learning circles to teach, especially in science classes. I am particularly interested in science classes because I am a science teacher (the approach is of course applicable

to other subjects as well). It is interesting for me to study what works and what does not work for teachers in the classroom using the restorative justice philosophy and why. Vaandering (2014) who draws on relational theory for her worknotes that:

Relational theory has emerged to give voice to what I am now coming to understand as it places the comprehensive, relational restorative justice paradigm in tension with the prevailing context of governing social structures. Relational theory distinguishes between *individualistic equality*, which currently forms the core of dominant Western perspectives on democracy and justice-a static, ostensibly objective view of the rights of individuals-and *relational equality* -an organic, living view of people and the world that is at the heart of relational restorative justice. (p. 513-514)

The quotation above reflects my thoughts about teaching and learning. The use of “organic” stood out for me as a good description of a living classroom where everyone is alive, and actively participating in a relational environment, not focusing on one but all as a community of humans that are connected. Usually, in a class there is a curriculum to follow as a guide that should be flexible to accommodate life experiences as they emerge. Unlike individualistic equality, relational equality promotes respect, concern and dignity for others. There is a common saying that, “two heads are better than one.” I agree with this view and that is why I am adopting a lens that makes room for others. The teacher is not supposed to monopolise power over the students but rather should share power with them. Kincheloe (2004) noted that, “The critical pedagogical ways of seeing help teacher educators and teachers reconstruct their works so it facilitates the empowerment to all students” (p. 4). Critical relational theory seeks to explore the kinds of partnerships that need to exist between the teacher and the student for productive participation, engagement and positive achievement.

1.7 Definition of Key Concepts

1.7.1 Restorative Justice

In this study, I adopt the definition of restorative justice found in Evans and Vaandering (2016) cited earlier which reflected a learning community where the capacity of people is nurtured in a safe environment that honors all. Each of the words in RJE (restoration, justice and education) is significant and the word “justice” is central to the other words in RJE and this study. *My Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education*, “honors the inherent worth of all and it is enacted through relationships” (p. 7). I would like to establish here that equal partnerships are possible when there is justice. When justice is in place in a school or class, leaders will use their leadership position fairly with everybody by giving them the support they need. The teacher will be careful not to hurt the students through their words or actions, as some do, and rather will respect all boys or girls, weak or strong, white or black, rich or poor, good or bad, without preferential treatment. If justice were truly a part of our education system, people would be perceived as being worthy and interconnected. It is therefore important to take note that, “ultimately RJE (Evans & Vaandering, 2016) is a vision of education that acknowledge that our individual and collective well-being is enhanced less through personal striving than through collective engagement and support” (p. 8).

I have come to understand that RJ is more of a way of being than just a tool; it affects the way we perceive things (extrinsic and intrinsic). The article “*A window on relationships: reflecting critically on a current restorative justice theory*” (Vaandering, 2013) is insightful on how RJ is a way of being that honors all rather than judging but it will take some effort to reach, and like Vaandering (2011) clarifies that, “One cannot arrive at this point instantly, it is a complex journey and one that requires a faithful compass with a needle that keeps us headed in a

definite direction” (p.325-326). This way of being is critical for practice, so it is life (personality) before service or teaching (Jenkins, 2016). My experience of observing one of the RJ teachers with Grade 6 students proved to me that RJ is indeed a way of being. The teacher was incredibly friendly and accommodating and demonstrated a special kind of interest and respect for her students and other teachers. Her response to my questions when I had a discussion with her confirmed her to be a different person, one who had been totally transformed in her words and deeds (probably by RJ as a way of being and holding the belief that humans are worthy and interconnected). Despite the fact that she has one of the two most challenging classes with special needs students in the school, she was always calm and comfortable in doing her work. The feedback I got from her students about RJ circles was amazing and insightful. I have been encouraged to practice the same pedagogy in and out of school. It is therefore clear to me that RJ can help teachers control themselves instead of exercising control over their students. It can also assist in the development of the right use of language without discrimination or stereotyping. The lifestyle and attitude of a teacher is very important aspect of relationships, which is also described in equal partnership.

1.7.2 Equal Partnership

As stated by Wadhwa (2016) an equal partnership is an “RJ practice that can effectively work to foster leadership skills in the student body in an effort to trouble the traditionally hierarchical relationship between students and faculty-one in which adults have power over, as opposed to power with, youth” (p.116). This simply means two people or a group of people working together without preferential treatment or partiality. For teachers and students to be in equal partnership, a space is created for both to interact without discrimination or dehumanization. The teacher shares power with the students instead of being in control of them.

To be in equal partnership is not a sign of weakness as some may think. The teacher who is in equal partnership with the students is not an authoritarian figure but rather an authoritative figure that uses their leadership skills for the well-being of the students. Here, the students feel safe to express ideas that may be different from those of the teacher. The “Relationship window” helped me to have a better glimpse of equal partnership because it is “designed to encourage educators to think beyond a punitive-permissive response to inappropriate student behaviour to a restorative, authoritative response where adults work together WITH students in a more engaged and relational manner” (Vaandering, 2013, p. 313). This kind of relationship is more based on justice than fairness and it allows equal sharing of space and time between the teacher and the students. The equal partnership by extension includes equity; hence, students will get what they need to keep them going.

1.7.3 Relationship First

Another way of describing the heart of RJE is “relationship”. Therefore “relationships first” is used to describe Restorative Justice in Education. Vaandering (2014) reflected that, “Relationships First” is a public outreach project for professional development of educators so as to better able to engage with restorative justice comprehensively in schools.” It is the framework for RJE in Newfoundland. Indeed, relationships are the building blocks of a school system. They come before engagement and are needed for a school to run smoothly. The belief of Relationship First is that humans are worthy and interconnected while the key values include respect, dignity and mutual concern. All these together make Relationship First a way of being to relate to or engage with others in equal partnership rather than a mere tool that is used and discarded. This way of being will make the teacher interested in the student more than the material to be taught, while keeping in mind that education and curriculum are for the child and the child is not made

for the curriculum; therefore, the interest of the student should come first by building a good rapport through relationships. A student will open up to a teacher when they can relate.

1.7.4 Critical Reflection

Critical reflection is a practice that allows people to share thoughts and feelings about a matter or topic. Sherwood & Horton-Deutsch (2012) stated that, “Critical reflection is engaging in self-questioning by applying critical reasoning to reframe how one acts, thinks or knows” (p.12). Although I have not used this method much in the past, I now use it in class and online to share my ideas with others. It is a transformational and developing process for me, but I enjoy it because unlike before, when I depended on my teacher for almost everything as a traditional student, I can now generate my own ideas and get feedback from others. The ED 6936 instructor’s notes explain that, “What is most important is for you is to connect critical reflection to something that is relevant to your own experience personally and/or professionally” (Martino, 2017). He explained further that “Critical reflection is not general description. It is the isolation of particular details, evidence, arguments, ideas, that you then elaborate, interrogate, or consider from alternative perspectives given the context of your own background knowledge or experiences. Thus there are often dimensions of exposition, analysis and narrative/descriptive writing within a critical reflection” (Martino, 2017). I now try to think, write and discuss from others’ points of view or perspectives critically in my reflection. A teacher can use guided questions to assist students through the process of critical reflection. For instance, teachers can ask students to critically reflect on how the LC impacted their learning in science 1206.

1.7.5 Transformative Education

The various testimonies and stories recorded about the learning circle and the transformative effects it has are remarkable (Riestedenberg 2012; Bintliff, 2011). The experiences

are organic as life experiences are shared along the unit of discussion. Drawing from the work of Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2015) on “*teaching and learning*,” the word “evolving” (p. 74) stood out for me, meaning that teaching and learning is not fixed. For instance, the teacher may plan what to teach but may end up not using the lesson notes exactly as planned if he is open and flexible to change. This explains why “learning is not determined by teaching. However learning is dependent on teaching” (Davis et al, 2015, p.75). So, it is good for teachers to be responsive to the students and their context, especially those that can have a positive impact. This process is complex and illustrates how planning is understood versus just not following a plan.

Introducing the learning circle into the regular authentic classroom can open opportunities for real-life experiences to emerge, which can lead to memorable experiences for the teacher and students, especially in science classes, which are known for higher rates of disengagement (Parsons & Taylor, 2011). In line with Tite’s narratives, “*All-stars and discards: Schooling and the rest of our lives*.” I agree that, “we cannot separate education from personal experiences” (Nel Noddings, 1992, cited in Tite, 2008). Similarly Danforth (1997, as cited in Giroux and McLaren, 1992) states that “when a person finds her or his voice that strength and ability to name and describe life experience-then that person may become an agent for social change” (p. 13). Personally, my own experience echoes this in that I cannot over-emphasize how the sharing moments in RJE class have transformed my learning experience as a graduate student.

This narrative case study will focus on the power dynamics between teacher and students as the discourse continues across our school systems through the implementation of restorative justice, a relational pedagogy which allows the voice of everyone to be heard, especially the voices of students.

1.8 The Learning Circle in a Science Class

This refers to the learning circle that is used to teach science curriculum. Experts in the field call it differently but use it for the same purpose. For example, Wadhwa (2016) uses the term “teaching circle” to “reinforce the curriculum around RJ” (p. 50); Riestenberg (2012) refers to it as “the lesson circle”; Hatcher et al (2009) calls it the learning circle; and Hopkins (2011) suggests the use of circle meeting or sessions for secondary (high) school instead of circle time. For this study I chose to use the term learning circle (LC) as used by Hatcher et al (2009) because of how they noted its use for teaching Integrative Science in a standard classroom. In practical ways, the LC can be used in schools (K-12) to teach science with intention. Circle activities in the classroom help to get the full attention of students and can bring about the sharing of real-life experiences. The continuous decline in students’ interest in science is a concern to many educators (Lyons, 2006). The experience in our schools where students answer questions correctly without adequate understanding of the topic is a sign that something is wrong, and it calls for a new approach to teaching. According to research (Lyons, 2006; Hatcher et al, 2009), the way forward for science education goes against the common traditional method and should include inquiry, exploration through asking questions, divergent thinking and building relationships to engage students. Drawing from Reistenberg (2012), the teacher can use the learning circle at the beginning of lessons to allow students to share their knowledge, perceptions, ideas, and concerns related to the topic. Also, at the end of a unit, the circle can be used as a review for a test or to allow students to reflect on the unit and the impact it has had on them. Students have a chance to offer their feedback to the teacher about classroom activities and lessons (p. 163). All these make sense to me and I think that the practice will make a huge

difference to making my science class experience memorable especially through the sharing reflection.

1.9 Researcher's Background

For many, starting a relationship can be challenging, especially in a new environment with people from different backgrounds and cultures but I found the philosophy of RJ with the practice of the circle to be helpful. The act of interaction and expression of emotion is something to think about. I remembered a story that was shared in 2016 during a ministration in the church about a topic “single and satisfied”, which was told to encourage relationships, a forgotten act of love and care for others. It was on this occasion, in a personal conversation, I heard that when the foundation of relationship is destroyed, “remedial teaching and learning” can help to rebuild it. The idea of a remedial training in relationships stood out as something important for me to work on and I was able to connect it with two of my courses that place priority on relationships before rules. However, this research was inspired by two courses I took as part of my master's program curriculum: teaching and learning studies. The first course titled “*Family School Relations: Leadership and Policy Implications*” was the motivation for the second, “*Restorative Justice in Education: Promise and Challenges.*”

The family school relations course focused on the need to change education for diverse families, which can be achieved by encouraging a more family-friendly school environment where the needs of every child are met irrespective of family forms, diversity, and challenges. I learned that children (students) are unique with great potential to explore (Power, 2016). They learn better in safe environments, hence their learning needs must be met without discrimination. Relationships, respect, integrity and strong connections between families and the school are valued. There are tips on how teachers can effectively work with each type of family represented

in today's classrooms (Ray, 2005). Family and schools therefore should complement each other to prepare every student for a successful life. On a similar note, Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) offers practical ways of building and maintaining relationships, respect, and responsibility in a traditional school. This study will discuss these topics in greater depth in the following chapters.

I received my educational background in the sciences in the 80s and 90s when little to nothing was known about the RJE in my country Nigeria. The impact of these courses, especially Restorative Justice in Education was great and made me feel like starting school and my career over again for memorable experiences. For the first time in my education story and experience (primary to tertiary) I witnessed teachers and students working together while sharing space, time, power, and resources. The courses opened my eyes to ways of doing education differently. Education like the one I received prior to doing my masters needs a rethinking of policies and practices to one that addresses the social and emotional aspects of schooling along with the academics. There was an incident that I can recall now after graduating from the college to continue in the university. Although, I graduated with the best results in Biology (major) and Integrated (Basic) Science (minor), my dreams and goals of becoming the best biology student in university were soon dashed by the university, which introduced a program that year to pioneer a science arm of the Guidance and Counselling (G & C) Department. Some students that applied for science education were automatically selected to test run this program and I happened to be among those selected. This meant that I had to take G & C as my major instead of science education, which I applied for, and science then became my minor. My dreams were shattered because the biology I planned to study as a major was automatically changed to G & C. One can imagine a decision of a high magnitude like this being made without considering the effects on

the students. This was the kind of education system I went through; it was purely traditional, and you could not question it for many reasons. Although I am not the kind of person that accept anything, as I have preferences and personal choices, at this point I was helpless. Most of the public institutions in Nigeria are over-populated and spaces are limited for admission into university, so the rejection of an offer of admission was not common then and could be very challenging. I ended up accepting the Guidance and Counselling (major)/Biology (minor) and managed to come out with good grades, but it was never my career choice.

In my home country, teachers in various educational institutions, primary-tertiary, are treated as “thin gods” such that students have no say most times and the slogan is “obey without question/complaint”. To me, this is oppressive; I think there are better ways of providing education in the interest of all the parties involved. I found that this is possible in restorative justice, a practice that is grounded in the belief that humans are worthy and interconnected. This was my experience in the RJ course I completed; I have never felt safe and comfortable in any class like this before. The circle facilitation made a great difference to me. I experienced memorable learning that I would like to put into practice in and out of the classroom. The teacher is not the only one talking, there was sharing reflection that opened room for sharing of thoughts and feelings on a specific topic from the curriculum. The level of interaction and involvement was higher compared to other courses I have taken in my master’s program. The environment was safe, comfortable and non-judgemental so I could express myself freely. There were opportunities and support to practice group work with others in and out of the classroom. The approach was in support of collaboration, communication, critical and creative thinking. I appreciate the idea of working together with my instructor and other students which also impacted my performance and grade positively. It was from this class that the idea of my study,

teacher and students working together in equal partnership emerged after reading Wadhwa (2016) chapter 7 and Vaandering (2013 & 2014) articles on relationship window and professional development respectively and other resources. I decided to proceed. This was followed with the thought of embarking on an explorative research to see how RJ would work when introduced into a high school science class, with the hope and feeling that it will make an impact.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review features various studies that have been done to shed light on the present study. It confirms the theoretical framework of restorative justice in education (RJE) as the foundation for the dynamics of the learning circle, which supports teachers and students in equal partnership. Like the restorative justice (RJ) teacher who is invited to wear a lens that honors all, this study is supported by a particular framework that allowed me to make sense of what I was experiencing and observing. This chapter reviews literature that supports the notion that learning circles (LC) as experienced within a RJE framework creates potential and space for students and teachers to learn in equal partnership. I have organized this literature review into key topics as follows:

- an overview of the foundation of RJE;
- challenging education experiences signalling the need for change,
- teacher and students in equal partnership using learning circles,
- social constructivism and learning circles;
- empowering students through circles,
- positive discipline in the classroom,
- pedagogy, the learning circle and curriculum,
- transformation and the sustainability of RJE.

2.1 An Overview of the Foundation of Restorative Justice in Education

There are a wide variety of definitions of RJ in education as mentioned earlier. For this study, I will focus on those that define it as holistic and grounded in relational theory. Therefore, “digging deep to explore philosophical contexts of restorative justice and develop theoretical frameworks to explain, shape and strengthen its practices is needed to promote its sound

implementation and future policymaking” (Vaandering, 2013, p. 311). RJ works to “transform power imbalances that affect social relationships” (Morrison, 2006, p. 372). To confirm such imbalances in the school system, Wadhwa (2016) works with RJ to disrupt the “school-to-prison pipeline”, a phrase used to describe schools as institutions intertwined with the prison system and zero-tolerance discipline policies especially for certain marginalized populations.

There are cases of suspension, expulsion and dropout as a result of injustice, inequity and all forms of systematic violence. Wadhwa (2016) argues that “schools have operated to isolate and exclude minority students from mainstream culture through curriculum and physical separation” (p. 24). Her writing reveals that these acts do not occur in isolation, and they are impacted by local, state and federal policy. For instance citing Keen (2006) to buttress her point Wadhwa (2016) said that, “teachers who are held accountable through standardized test scores are prompted to send low-performing students on suspension on the day of testing,” (p.24) which eventually impacts students’ academic performance negatively. The school-to-prison pipeline is indicative of a massive failure. Furthermore, she expands on the discussion quoting Christensen, (2011) that:

It doesn’t begin with cops in the hall ways and zero tolerance discipline policies. It begins when we fail to create a curriculum and a pedagogy that connects with students, that takes them seriously as intellectuals, that lets students know we care about them, that gives them the chance to channel their pain and defiance in productive ways. Making sure that we opt out of the classroom-to-pipeline will look and feel different in every subject and with every group of students... (P. 26)

A safe and equitable environment needs to be created where the relationship between the teacher and student is considered first before rules and policies, the interests of the students is put before curriculum, and learning is organic where life experiences supersede the lesson plan. It should be noted that building relationships is important as it is a gradual process that develops through patience and practice. This process is described in the Little Book of RJE as planting a seed that germinates and grows to become a tree which takes root downward firmly in the ground and the shoots and branches reach upward (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

RJ is making its way into the community, the juvenile and adult legal systems, prisons and schools (Evans & Vaandering 2016). It is an approach that addresses institutional and individual systemic violence. Systemic violence is any “institutionalized practice or procedure that adversely impacts on disadvantaged individuals or groups by burdening them psychologically, mentally, culturally, spiritually, economically, or physically” (Watkinson, 1997, P. 5). RJ is grounded in relational theory, which argues that humans are worthy and interconnected. This belief makes a difference in the way practitioners perceive and priority is placed on relationships above rules. Other terms commonly used in place of restorative justice include restorative approach, restorative practice and restorative discipline. I chose to stay with RJ because the word “justice” gives meaning to the adjective “equal” that is used to qualify partnerships in this study as discussed earlier.

There is no universal definition of RJ. However, for this study, because of its holistic focus on teacher-student relationships as well as pedagogy, it is “a distinct praxis for sustaining safe and just school communities, grounded in the premise that human beings are relational and thrive in contexts of social engagement over control” (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012, p. 139). Although RJ has a relational way of doing school differently, the early practice of restorative

justice in education adopted a judicial setting, which led schools to model restorative justice as a strategy to address behavioral issues, resolve conflict, and address harm, which resulted in some failures (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). RJE as a social justice initiative (Wadhwa, 2016, P. 118) is not limited to repairing harm but encompasses the restoration of healthy relationships and ensuring a just and equitable learning environment, which is made possible through the Indigenous practice of circle conferencing.

When circle conferences were employed, Evans & Vaandering (2016) record that “substantial interconnected relationships became evident” (p.6). To facilitate circle conferences, an in-depth understanding of restorative justice in education (RJE) through training is needed by practitioners or educators. Practice that is not grounded in the theory and philosophy are the major reason for recorded failures of RJ, hence the need for “a strong conceptual or theoretical framework as this will help the practice from being misunderstood, diluted in a way that could actually create further harm” (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p. xiii). The learning circle is a form of circle conference designed to bring about reconnecting with healthy core self and others in the school with positive relationship. This kind of experience is only made possible when users are properly grounded in background theories for practice. According to Boyes-Watson & Pranis (2014), the six theories significant to understanding the power of circles in school include:

- The whole-child approach
- The importance of relationships in development and learning
- A whole school approach
- Positive discipline
- A trauma-sensitive learning environment
- Mindfulness practice

These theories are insightful to my study on learning circles. The whole-child approach seeks to attend to the whole person and to provide space for emotional, social, moral, mental and physical development. It is believed that Circles will strengthen trusting and caring relationships between/among adults and children, in a way that is highly beneficial to lifelong cognitive and social learning. A whole school approach highlights the importance of a positive school climate, a sense of belonging, and a connectedness among students and adults to the school community. Positive discipline is structured process for addressing harm. A trauma-sensitive learning environment is one in which a child, regardless of their needs, feels appreciated and cared for by adults at school. Mindfulness practice is a wellness technique with a long tradition within human societies. This includes meditation and breathing exercises as part of the structure of circles to improve the quality of attentiveness (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2014, p.6-8). The theories serve as a quick reminder to balance the practice of the LC.

There are books and education-specific resources on RJ with an emphasis on relationships which can inform practice. Hopkins (2011) in her work on the restorative classroom, places a “focus on making, maintaining and repairing of relationships in the classroom on a day-to-day basis with the development of social responsibility and a mutually supportive learning community in that classroom” (p.13). The learning community (Evans & Vaandering, 2016) works to support one another; for example, the teacher supports the students and the students support one another. Wadhwa (2016), provides insight into how teachers and students can work in equal partnership through restorative justice. Wadhwa says:

Restorative practice at their most effective do not only keep students accountable for their behaviors but also creates space for young people to critically analyse the political and

economic structures that contribute to their behaviour as well as the very phenomenon the practice is being used to counter the school-to prison pipeline. (P. 13)

Restorative Justice Education (RJE) is a shift in paradigm from the common practice of social control in the traditional school system to social engagement grounded in relational theory. RJE uses a different lens that centers on relationships before behaviour, as “RJE is an expression of the communities of care and respect that theorists and philosophers have historically encouraged in schools” (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p. 11). Evans & Vaandering (2016) focus on the basics that are needed for the successful implementation and sustenance of RJE. The philosophy is based on the belief that humans are worthy and interconnected and values which include respect, dignity and mutual concern from the core self to others. It is more of a way of being than a tool to be used and kept (Vaandering, 2013). It is meant to be a lifestyle that affects and transforms words, actions, thoughts and feelings. To embark on RJE, the educator as a leader must first partake in the transformative experience of relationship, the way of being that impacts life, curriculum and pedagogy.

2.2 Challenging Education Experiences Signal the Need for Change

“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” - *John Dewey*

The goal of education usually revolves around building lives but, in my experience, this is not always the case. In more than two decades of teaching science, I have experienced and also have found in studies that many go through education without education going through them. This implies that the impact of schooling is not felt in their everyday life, which can be measured by the frequency of memorable moments they can recall in their educational experiences. Many cannot remember anything unique or significant to share mostly because of the rigid, unfriendly

approach employed to teach in the classroom. For instance, an interpretive study reviewed studies (Lyons, 2006) from three different countries:

Sweden, England, and Australia, while the international literature identified core themes relating to critical contemporary issues in science education which revolved round transmissive pedagogy, decontextualized content, and the unnecessary difficulty of science commonly reported by students. The study provided insight into the widespread decline in interest and enrolment in high school and university science courses in different countries. (p.591)

According to the study, science is seen by students as a body of knowledge to be memorized, as lacking in creativity, difficult, boring, not personally meaningful, and not open to questions. They also said that:

It is frustrating and autocratic with little or no room to negotiate with content or teaching style. This idea is inconsistent with scientific inquiry and completely out of sync with democratic principles, as the science curriculum is overloaded, making teachers overly conscious of time and leading them to neglect students' affective and social needs. To my surprise, students who pass standardized tests are also experiencing the same thing; the self-efficacy of students is generally low, but it is not reflected in their performance. (p. 606)

This experience is not limited to science, as the rate of student disengagement is becoming a concern to school boards, administrators and teachers. Parsons and Taylor (2011) in their report cited a study showing that “a large majority of students begin to disengage from learning in Grade 6 and continue to do so until Grade 9, where levels remain consistently low

through to Grade 12” (p. 6). They go on to say that “Across Canada, as well as internationally, student engagement has become one of the key concerns and key strategies for educational and social reform particularly in middle and high schools” (p.7). The literature on the topic of student engagement shows its significance and offers suggestions that can make the experience better. Lyons (2006) reports the LUMA project in Finland indicates that to make science relevant to students “it should be linked to everyday life; another is the ability to explain concepts clearly and patiently and... then the need for teachers’ self-concept and self-efficacy” (p. 602-603). For instance, a student reflected that a teacher was good at explaining things to the point that even when stupid questions were asked, he did not laugh but sat down and answered them (Lyons, 2003 cited in Lyons, 2006). This revealed that if students will be engaged, the science curriculum ought to be relevant to life experience and the way of being of a teacher is also very important. This is why I think the RJ philosophy with the practice of circle is applicable. It is specially designed to accommodate the sharing of life experiences through reflection.

If the real goal of education is to be achieved, new ways of teaching and acting are needed in schools. Nevertheless, we should not throw out everything schools do now, but rather that we should look more deeply at what we define as learning, be honest and try different things and see what works (Littky & Grabelle (2004). The way forward has always been a demand for a relational approach that is grounded in critical pedagogy. Respectful relationships and interactions – both virtual and personal – are essential to improving student engagement. Students today are intensely social and interactive learners. They want to interact with people both within and beyond the classroom and school environment (Willms, et al. 2009). To engage learners in learning, new educational curriculum and activities must include the following – “interaction, exploration, relevancy, multimedia and instruction, engaging and challenging

instruction, and authentic assessment” (Windham, 2005 cited in Parsons & Taylor, 2011, p. 36).

To fix what is missing in education and the challenges discussed above, interaction should come first, showing the importance of relationships for which RJE is known.

The idea of getting the basic knowledge from the beginning is therefore critical for RJ teachers to be successful, especially when engaging with the LC. It is insightful that in certain alternative programs designed for students that drop out of high school because of behavioural issues, drugs and academic failure; these students thrived when their interests were taken into account in a relational way that invited them to take ownership of their learning (Wadhwa, 2016 & Bintliff, 2011). The question many, like me, may ask is where was this kind of approach before the students dropped out of school? Much of the damage caused by traditional school systems could be prevented if changes could be made to accommodate “curriculum, pedagogy, and the very foundation of restorative justice which is building relationship” (Wadhwa, 2016, p. 26). I think the best place to build relationships is in the circle. Bintliff (2011) in her book *Re-engaging Disconnected Youth Transformative Learning through Restorative and Social justice Education*, declares that “it is in the circle that I feel true caring for others begins to develop” (p. 6). I agree with her, the place of care for others can never be over-emphasized and truly needs to be developed.

At this juncture, I admit that my teaching of science would have been more memorable if I had known about this pedagogy earlier in my career. Science is a subject that many students find difficult. This is confirmed by three different studies from different countries indicating that science is a difficult subject that has no time for creativity, social or emotional expression (Lyons, 2006). The success of teaching and learning depends much on the style or the approach employed for discussion. Educators, professors and teachers have been trying to find other ways

of doing things in education or in schools as a way of improving students' engagement and participation. I will be discussing three such ways by comparing and contrasting with the learning circle; they are: in-class discussion forums, authentic discussion and teacher-student partnerships.

a. In-class forums

Grevers (2002) in an attempt to increase understanding of the topic of memorization, which is common among students, especially in science, carried out a study involving around 50 Agricultural students using a discussion forum to engage them in critical thinking. During the forum, the classroom was arranged into groups of 5 to 6 students and each group was asked to discuss a problem that pertains to the module for 30 minutes. The professor tried to maintain a balance between introverts and extroverts by setting a rule for both to talk. Individual students were then expected to prepare a brief report on any of the seven forums which form part of the course assessment. Grevers reported excellent class attendance, but the voice of the students were not heard. Although the professor had good intentions, he was still in control like in any traditional classroom; the whole process was designed and controlled by the professor, and the students were just following instruction probably because they were being assessed (Grevers, 2002). The RJ learning circle is not just a group discussion, but a setting that empowers students to take ownership of their learning. In the circle, there is no assessment, no one is higher, space is shared, power is equalized and the teacher also accepts vulnerability by learning from students using his/her authority voice when necessary to keep the discussion going while listening to their views.

b. Authentic Discussion

In Hadjioannou's (2007) article on authentic discussion, the contextual framework was grounded in relational psychology theory. The writing shared a lot of RJ's beliefs and values but did not include the circle practice. There is a perfect description of a restorative practice and a democratic community, but the circle practice was not mentioned. They set norms that guide participation during discussion and practice active listening that allows one person to speak at a time. The qualitative case study examined the features of the environment of a fifth-grade classroom community (24 students and their teacher) where authentic discussions were frequent. The teacher was noted as belonging to a "special collaborative grade-level group of teachers" (p.395) with no reference to the LC. Also similar to my concern about the LC, Hadjioannou noted that despite their effectiveness (referring to authentic discussion), they are rarely used. The impact of discussion from the literature revealed that "authentic discussion greatly enhance student understanding, foster critical thinking, improves students communication skill, have a positive effect on interpersonal relationship between class members, help prepare students for participation in a democratic society and its process" (p. 371). Although to me the philosophy described in authentic discussion was grounded in relational theory similar to RJ, but nothing was said about RJ or circles, which made me think whether it is possible to practice RJ without using circles. Like Hadjioannou, I agree about building a relational community where relationships take priority over rules but I think that it is the circle that helps to build the relationships. This involves flexibility, and the teacher can therefore discern when to use circles depending on the availability of space, time and choice.

c. Teacher-student partnership



The next study under consideration is teacher-student partnership; it discussed how the teacher and the students worked together, with the teachers accepting vulnerability by allowing students who were trained in the operation of certain technology to teach them. Ormiston (2017) described teacher-student partnership as “the process of students and teachers becoming learning partners”. Ormiston reveals that the ultimate goal of the study is to build capacity for teaching and learning in the digital-rich classrooms across the district for the entire learning community. In the proceedings, the selected 52 students known as “special Ops team members” were engaged with the use of technology tools, including Kahoop, iMovie, WeVideo and Animoro. The study established that the students were experts when it comes to technology, so “the session started with a group to create a buzz and help teachers understand that even very young students can share their knowledge as partners in learning” (p.4). This is what some teachers do not want to accept (Ormiston, 2017). They believe that they know all, and the students do not have knowledge and need to be told almost everything. Although technology tools were used, the author noted that “tools will continue to change so instead of focusing on tools alone, focus on rich instructional strategies, ranging from simple recalling knowledge to synthesizing information and making judgment” (P.4). This idea of not focusing on technology resonates with me. The advent of technology also came with its challenges; the students can now gain access to the knowledge that was once kept to only the teacher making the teaching to be of less impact to the student but the only thing that can make a difference is an engaging pedagogy that can bring about new experiences as it is at the heart of RJ learning circle.

The impact of this approach was tremendous, as according to Ormiston, the students taught each other even though they were not experts and despite the changing nature of

technology. They collaborated without getting frustrated, giving up or misbehaving. They were eager to create products to take back and share with their peers and teachers. Also, they had a mission, a deadline, specific goals and the expectation to teach what they had learned to their classmates and teachers. The author reported that the principal, teachers and parents were impacted as was evident in their comments. This study revealed that a lot can happen when teachers are in partnership with students. Therefore in support of this study on teacher-student partnership, Healey, Flint, and Harrington (2014) note that “Partnership is encouraged between teacher and students because it opens possibilities and that the wider adoption of research findings on engagement through partnership can lead to significant improvements in student learning and success” (p.11). Teacher-student partnership usually makes room for interaction and productive discussion, which impact teaching and learning positively.

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The three studies provide different perspectives that help establish the theoretical foundation of the present study. All the three sound relational in their approach, like RJE, with keen interest in the students’ learning, but with careful look at their conceptual framework, the first study was out rightly traditional because the teacher was still exercising control over the students which was not in the support of RJE philosophy. The second and third drew my attention to the importance of authentic discussion and partnership, as found in RJE literature but their failure to mention the use of circles, a practice designed to bring about that experience calls for caution. Although Ormiston,(2017) and Ascough, (2011) did substantial work on partnership describing how teachers and students can work together to achieve the learning objectives, outputs and outcomes, in this study, I seek to explore the type of partnership as used by Wadhwa (2016) with the practice of circles.

Wadhwa (2016) in her work added the word “equal” as an adjective to qualify partnership. According to Wadhwa, this means that in terms of youth and adults (the youth can be students and the adults can be teachers), the paradigm is not a vertical bottom-up approach where youths are on the bottom and adults are on top, but it is horizontal, as the adults and youth are in equal partnership. The arrow instead of being one way, from adults to youth  is instead a two-way arrow  where there is dialogue both ways between students and adults. She expounded on this during an interview, stating that a shift in the idea that students are to be seen and not heard is gradually changing. This is used to balance all kinds of power imbalances that exist between teachers and students so as to increase participation and improve performance.

The Restorative Justice Classroom (Hopkins, 2011) offers a balance between teacher-centered learning and student-centred learning to a community of learning through relationships. Hopkins clearly identified three groups in her work on restorative classrooms: those who need to develop a teaching style that matches how they react to discipline issues; those who need support in order to respond to challenges and difficulties in ways that model the cooperative style, in which lessons are run and make use of the leadership skills being developed in the class; and those that need to consider both what they teach and how they teach and suggest ways of integrating a social curriculum into their academic curriculum (P.14).

Drawing from the contextual framework of RJE, a foundation to implementing and sustaining RJE, substantial work has been done to attest to the impact of learning circles if they are carried out with a deeper understanding and the creativity of the teacher (Boyes & Pranis, 2014; Riestenberg, 2012; Wadhwa, 2016; Hopkins, 2011; Bintliff, 2011 & Akins & Trowbridge, 2003). In 2015, during a short segment interview on the “*RJ on the Rise Program*” Pranis provided insight on a similar theme, “*working with the power dynamics*”, that I would like to use

to explain equal partnership. She shares ways to assume equal distribution and ownership of a circle; that is, the issue of equalizing power imbalances. This means that no one is higher than anyone else in the circle. She said, sitting in the circle puts the teacher and students on the same level, sitting side by side. The teacher is not higher than the students or the students lower. Furthermore, she concluded that “to give up power, a talking piece is used” (Pranis, 2015). This means that the talking piece helps to distribute power in the circle, giving room to one person at a time to speak while others listen.

### **2.3 Teachers and Students in Equal Partnership Using Learning Circles**

The power imbalances which affect social relationships are a common discourse among educators (Evans, Lester & Anfara, 2013). Traditional education with hierarchical power dynamics expects educators to manage, control, shape, and mold students (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). In the quest for normality and standardization, “the teacher is expected to be the dominant person in the classroom, managing learning experiences, supervising behaviors, and so on. At the same time, the teacher is subject to similar controlling structures— and, in fact, has considerably less autonomy than a classroom-level view might suggest” (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2015, p. 48). A good example of this exists between the teacher and student where the teacher assumes the position of authority by treating the student as an object to be controlled to conform instead of a subject that is free to make informed decisions about learning.

Studies reveal common concerns about education systems that focus on standardized tests, results and common assessments; students did not feel strongly cared about by teachers and other adults at school. Bintliff (2011) citing MN Department Education (2004) reports that “only 10% of males and 11% of females felt cared about very much in Grade 12” (p. 6), which implies that the remaining in each percentage felt uncared for. She supported this with the work of

Nodding (1992) that “the current school structures work against caring and, at the same time, the need for this care is greater than ever” (p. 6). This stood for me and I agree that something needs to be done differently to address the school structure that work against caring for students so that they can have time to reflect and be honestly listened to (Bintliff, 2011). Some science students in an interpretive study reported their displeasure with science because of the use of an approach that does not give space for social and emotional feelings (Lyon, 2006). The traditional class setting usually limits the social construction of learning, as students are to be seen and not heard and in terms of power dynamics, teachers exercise power over students instead of sharing power (relationship) with them. This is reflected in the use of all kinds of words, language and actions that dehumanize students, causing violence and misbehaviour, which at times leads to suspension. Normalizing students by referring to them as either stars or discards, good or bad, and smart or dull, among others, may be demoralizing (Tite, 2008). This kind of practice pollutes the learning environment and may lead to students in the classroom not learning as expected, low performance and some eventually may drop out when their needs go unmet.

These are all cries for other ways of doing things to re-connect with students who are disengaged. I agree with Bintliff’s (2011) belief that “connecting to one another and providing time to answer the big questions in life is as important as the science, social studies and English curriculum” (p. 6). Relationships and connection are made possible through communication and there cannot be communication, which is needed in true education, without dialogue. In an attempt to analyze dialogue as a human phenomenon, Flinder and Thornton (2013) reference the writing of Freire in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in regards to revealing that words are the essence of dialogue. “The word which has two dimensions, reflection and action, was discovered in which if one is sacrificed the other suffers... when words are deprived of their dimension of

action, reflection automatically suffers” (p.157). This indicates the importance of words and action in communication. Therefore, for dialogue to exist there must be love, humility, faith, hope, trust and critical thinking (Flinder & Thornton, 2013).

Supporting this idea, Kincheloe (2004) affirmed that “nothing is impossible when we work in solidarity with love, respect and justice as our guiding light” (p. 3). Also drawing on the work of Paulo Freire, Kincheloe said,

He always maintained that education had as much to do with the teachable heart as it did with the mind. Love is the basis of an education that seeks justice, equality, and genius as promoted by restorative justice in education...Critical pedagogy uses it to increase our capacity to love, to bring the power of love to our everyday lives and social institutions, and to rethink reason in a humane and interconnected manner. (p. 3)

Critically, this supports the fact that RJE is a way of being that centers on relationships and love. This implies that there can never be a relationship without love. It is the relationship in love that allows dialogue and communication between the teacher and the students. According to Flinder & Thornton (2013) dialogue requires critical thinking, which is made possible through creating a safe environment. Engaging in critical thinking allows dialogue to exist. Dialogue is an integral part of education, “thus the dialogical character of education as a practice of freedom does not begin when the teacher-student meets with the students-teachers in a pedagogical situation, but rather when the former first asks himself what he will dialogue with the latter about” (p. 160). This idea is supported by the work of Vaandering (2012 & 2013) on the relationship window. Flinder & Thornton (2013) further explain that “authentic education is not carried on by A for B, or by A about B, but rather by A with B mediated by the world which

impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it” (p. 160). This is what equal partnership is; being totally free from the aggressive and oppressive tendencies common among banking educators (as used by Freire) that are anti-dialogical and do not give room for the opinions of others. A teacher becomes an oppressor when students are silenced from expressing themselves for one reason or another either explicitly or implicitly.

Flinder & Thornton, (2013) said that “Oppressors are the ones who act upon men to indoctrinate them and adjust them to a reality which must remain untouched” (p. 160). This kind of traditional perception of management and control in teaching and learning dehumanizes and demands rethinking to other ways of doing things as found in Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) and modeled using RJ circles. Kincheloe (2004) notes “the critical way of seeing helps teacher educators and teachers reconstruct their work so it facilitates the empowerment of students” (p. 4). With equal partnership, a teacher as a leader endowed with power shares the same power with students as both learn together without one dominating the other.

Studying teachers and students in equal partnership using the learning circle is a shift from the traditional way of doing things and involves critically addressing policies and practices that are oppressive in nature and prevent students from learning. It is important to note also that, “the traditional education invents its themes, language, and materials from top down rather than from the bottom up” (McLaren & Leonard 1993, p. 31). These are policies and practices that foster a climate of violence or those that appear to be neutral but result in discrimination and dehumanization (Watkinson, 1997). There may be questions about the feasibility of teachers and students ever being in equal partnership. There are some studies that have covered ground on “partnership” but not so much on “equal partnership”. The phrase “equal partnership” is specifically chosen to address the social control that is prevalent in school systems instead of

social engagement, where the teacher as a leader can share power with the students without losing power (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Evans & Lester 2013). Sharing power without losing any is usually a challenge for many in leadership position which was confronted by the Wadhwa (2016) in her work for a rethinking that will foster leadership skills in youth. Similarly, Hopkins (2011) also wrote extensively on how the teacher as a leader can share power with the students instead of being in control over them. In summary, the teacher as an authoritative figure ought to use his/her leadership skills for the well-being of the students by doing “less telling and more listening” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2015, p. 61).

RJE creates education cultures that emphasize social engagement with students in a way that honors individuals in the context of their communities such that everyone can thrive and grow to their full capability (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Having established words as the essence of dialogue through reflection and action, critical theory makes it clear that knowing and learning are socially constructed, and this is made possible through interaction, discussion and the sharing of ideas, which are not limited to only the teacher (Kincheloe, 2004). Students ought to be given a voice to express their needs freely without fear of intimidation by the teacher. This is where RJE comes in through equal partnership that sees humans as worthy and interconnected. The teacher is present to give support when needed and the students can give support to one another and the teacher to fulfill the goal of being a lifelong learner that will be able to work independently and with others while giving back to the community (Littky & Grabelle 2004). The equal partnership enables the teacher to empower the students to take on a leadership role.

## **2.4 Social Constructivism of Learning**

The way students learn should be of interest to teachers who honor and respect all without exception and irrespective of diversity. Understanding students from their point of view



is important because “each individual has constructed his or her own version of reality, but individuals are influenced by their culture and contexts” (Willis, 2007, p. 49). Understanding the place of culture and how contexts are different from place to place and person to person should be important factors to think about in our choice of pedagogy. Smith (2001) states that “classroom knowledge is socially constructed rather than being merely transmitted from teacher to student” (p. 221) hence, the student voice needs to be heard. Transmission pedagogy or the teacher-talk-student-listen approach is one of the themes discussed, among others, as reasons why students’ interest and enrolment in science courses are declining (Lyons, 2006). When the teacher is the one doing the talking without the view of the students, the knowledge delivery becomes imbalanced. If ‘education is life’ ( Dewey, 1916, p. 239) then the teaching should be living, not fixed or one-sided like the traditional approach top down design that gives power to the teacher to be in control. The sharing of culture and contexts is only made possible when the story or experience is invited. This reminds me of the saying of one of my professors that “education and teaching is organic” thus, lesson plans or notes should not replace the students’ voice and contribution in the classroom. Learning is socially constructed; therefore, students learn through interaction with one another and their environment. If teaching and learning are truly living and organic, they should be evolving and this will happen when there is room for social interaction and the expression of emotion, feeling and thoughts through the sharing of life experiences.

RJE is a pedagogy that combines social and emotional dimensions with academics in a relational and safe environment where students interact, share and learn from each other freely without fear or anxiety. There are other learning strategies that are student-centred, for example the inquiry-based learning among others, which is a good authentic learning strategy that is

different from transmissive pedagogy. It also centres on individual learning that limits the sharing of knowledge and experiences and thus usually centres more on individual learning rather than the collective. The level of interaction depends on the teacher's knowledge and skill of the inquiry approach and this can limit the sharing of knowledge and experiences. Two heads are better than one is a common saying, so it is good to hear the perspectives of others rather than keeping to oneself (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2015). The students should not be left alone with worksheets or projects to be completed without connection and application to everyday life experiences. All that teachers give students to do should, "open up a pedagogical territory worth of teachers' and students' attention and devotion" (Jardine, Clifford & Friesen, 2003, p. 8). I think this describes the equal partnership and collaboration that allows the students to take ownership for their learning.

Teachers as leaders occupy a very sensitive position that can either make or mar (break) lives through their teaching philosophy and methods. Think about a classroom "where a one-way monologue of teacher-talk silences the students" (McLaren & Leonard, 1993) denying the students of the opportunity of working together with the teacher and their peers learning, which is socially constructed. I want to use myself as an example here. As an international student and an immigrant, cultural differences are usually a challenge in the class and the only thing that made a difference to me in RJE class was the approach. With the use of circle for sharing reflection, I was able to hear the views of others and in the process of interaction, I was able to learn new language, words, metaphors and to get to know people better who made me feel safe and comfortable in this multicultural environment.

To me it is evident that apart from the conceptual knowledge of RJE, the learning circle is a practical way that this interaction can take place for students to learn. RJE works to guide

against harmful practices and procedures in the school system that prevent students from learning. This includes policies and practices that foster a climate of violence or those that appear to be neutral but result in discrimination and dehumanization (Watkinson, 1997). The concern of the RJE is not only about reducing school violence, but it is also changing the condition that leads to violence (Evans, Lesta & Anfara, 2013). From what is known so far about RJE, Evans et al (2013) identify seven principles from the literature that guide RJ practice: meeting needs, providing accountability, making things right, viewing conflicts as a learning opportunity, building healthy learning communities, restoring relationships and addressing power imbalances. RJE embraces a democratic education by building a community that values and treats others with respect (p. 58-60). Relationships are a common RJ discourse as an approach that moves from rules that discriminate or hurt. Relationships usually begin with self, then by extension to others (adults, youths), pedagogy and curriculum, and institutions and policies (Vaandering, 2014).

## **2.5 Empowering Students through Circles**

The circle is an inherent part of restorative justice, “a new paradigm that aligns with the vision of fostering leadership in its students” (Wadhwa, 2016, p.113). Wadhwa identifies three types of circles: talking, healing and teaching. Circles have the power to transform relationships between teachers and students. According to Wadhwa, every teacher has their own way of doing RJ in their class, particularly in terms of how each develops one-on-one relationships with students. It is a real alternative to suspension. Teachers received training on circle facilitation and modeled it to the students, who also modeled it to others in the class. Students worked together with faculty members to craft the program and curriculum at the school where RJ was practiced (Wadhwa, 2016, p. 117). Akins & Trowbridge (2003) reported the implementing of a restorative

justice program in one of the four schools chosen for the implementation of the RJ programme in a school district. They discuss that:

The major component at the middle school level involved “circling” for discussion and activities in the homeroom each morning... In the homeroom, the teacher welcomed the students in enthusiastically and asked them to take their place in a circle where an icebreaker activity was used to begin the foundation of a caring community within the homeroom and they both continued to develop a sense of belonging. (p.23)

The report covered many RJ subjects such as training for the teacher through the process of developing skills in group facilitation so as to help the students address behavioural issues such as bullying, stealing, cliques and so on. There was a shift “from one person being in control to one of shared decision making and that the circling process empowered the students, ensuring an effective circle that promoted respect, responsibility, and cooperation” (p.23). The authors reflect that circling provided more opportunities for student leadership as students were effectively trained to plan and facilitate their homeroom circles as well as in other facets of their lives. This description showed the place of training in student empowerment. It is important to bear in mind a quote written by Jane Nelson cited in Akins & Trowbridge (2003) that “people are not born with social interest [but it] takes education, training and practice” (p. 25). This is in support of the need for education, training and practice on relationships that can promote social interaction, emotional expression and eventually empowering students for leadership roles.

Empowering students therefore means students getting to decide instead of teachers deciding for students. Among several other comments made in the report that resonated with me is that of a reluctant student who did not participate in school activities regularly but as he was given the opportunity to take on the facilitator role within his homeroom “there was a complete

transformation over time; he began to see himself as a significant part of the school community through his natural leadership abilities” (Akins & Trowbridge, 2003, p. 23). It is interesting to know that this experience did not end just within his circle; he transferred it into his academics and behavioural performance. The report is evidence that the circle is a means to an end, a place where leaders are developed.

## **2.6 Positive Discipline in the Classroom**

I decided to connect my narrative in this section with the work of Jane Nelson, co-author of *Positive Discipline in the Classroom*, which is cited in Akins & Trowbridge (2003) because it reminded me of the first time I heard about positive discipline in the Mosaic Newcomers Family Center at Winnipeg. It sounded so strange and was hard for me to comprehend that punishment is not a proper way of addressing offence and misbehaviour. I was brought up to believe that traditional discipline was more effective if serious discipline was to take place. I understand that punishment is meant to correct and should be applied with caution. I thought, as I also found in Korb (2011), that an offender deserved punishment or consequences for an offence committed so as to stop reoccurrence. However, I eventually completed the training on positive discipline and got a certificate but the new method of discipline without inflicting pain using physical (beating), verbal or non-verbal means was new and difficult to practice immediately, but I tried to adjust because of the knowledge gained and the new environment in which I found myself. It is therefore interesting to come across the word “positive discipline” again, but this time I have a better understanding because of the emphasis on a change that moves from retributive punishment to a “relationship” through restorative justice. The shift does not make the latter weak and it does not mean “no discipline” as I used to think; rather, it causes “healing” to occur that is lacking in punishment. The one who causes harm is able to take account of offences

committed by making restitution to the one harmed, which results in the healing of any hurt caused.

Positive discipline is discussed here to address and counter the common belief that restorative justice allows students to get away with misbehaviour. Durrant (2013) defines positive discipline as “non-violent and respectful of a child as a learner. It is an approach to teaching that [help children succeed, give them information, and support their growth]” (p. 2). Positive discipline yields a lasting result compared with the traditional punitive approach because of 3 words that resonates for me in the definition above- help, give and support (Durrant, 2013). With positive discipline, the root of misbehaviour is addressed without causing harm. Actions, words and language that hurt are thus discouraged. Wadhwa (2016) explains that “teachers should assert authority when participants reify traditional hierarchies (power dynamics) and when norms in circles are blatantly disregarded” (p. 132). This supports the way a teacher or facilitator as a gate keeper in the circle ought to use the authoritative voice to remind everyone about the guidelines and ensure that no voice is silenced in the circle by any act, language, comment or laughter.

## **2.7 Pedagogy, the Learning Circle and Curriculum**

Hatcher et al. (2009) discuss how to create a psychologically soothing classroom community by referring to the “indigenous cultures where learning is life long and the student’s family and community is usually part of the learning process” (p. 149-150). This supports the idea of making RJE a whole school affair where parents, teachers, students and community members will be active members of the school community. The work reflects RJ in no small measure in terms of what the environment should be. The RJ environment is safe, student-friendly and one that respect and care, a place where people feel as worthy human beings”. The

steps to follow in creating an integrative science classroom are relevant to this study and the learning circle was specifically mentioned in number 6 (Miller, 2007 as cited in Hatcher et al, 2009). They include:

1. Recognize the importance of the nonverbal and the messages that contain so much information.
2. Pay attention to the aesthetic environment of the school and classroom.
3. Tell stories about the school and weave stories about present and past students and teachers into the fabric of the present.
4. Use celebrations and rituals to give students a sense of connection to their community and of the changing of the seasons.
5. Value trust and authenticity and make sure that what we say is what we do.
6. Encourage a nourishing voice where people can speak freely, without fear or embarrassment. One way to do this is with the use of learning circles.

All of these 6 components can take place in circle where every student takes turns sharing by using a talking piece. In this format, every person in the circle has an equal place and time for participation, including silence. As Vaandering (2014) indicates all that is said is accepted as valuable and there are “opportunities for the introverted to contribute and the extroverted to listen” (Vaandering, 2014, p. 520). The RJ circle is not a group discussion where participation is limited and students’ ideas may not be respected. Facilitating the circle dialogue requires an understanding that every aspect of the process can contribute to the development of respect, concern and dignity for all (Hopkins, 2011; Reistenberg, 2012). Professional development is therefore necessary to learn to facilitate an RJ circle successfully. Critical to the success of the circle is ensuring that participants have equal opportunity to discuss without any discrimination

between the weak and the strong students; students should be given the opportunity to reflect on the topic of discussion and ask questions (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

The learning circles, teaching circles and lesson circles are all the same things. They are all used for teaching and learning the curriculum (Wadhwa, 2016; Hatcher et al, 2009; Riesenber, 2012). While describing the teaching circle, Wadhwa recorded some teachers who used teaching circles to facilitate discussions around why RJ was being practiced in a school. Some questions were prepared to this effect to help students understand the content. When thinking about pedagogy, the LC and curriculum, she discuss that “teaching circles and curricular activities help students receive at minimum a rudimental knowledge of RJ and the context in which it is being practiced in urban schools across the country” (p.50). This implies that the LC can also be used to engage the students with the curriculum, Science and other subjects. The LC circle is a unique arrangement for learning. It is not just a seating style or arrangement like the traditional row/column, U-shape, clusters and combination. I found sitting in circles different from other kinds of seating arrangements; it allows face-to-face contact, which promotes social and emotional learning, and it allows everybody in the class to see each other’s verbal and non-verbal expressions while speaking. The LC has the advantage of connecting all as discussion moves around and works towards “getting at somewhere” as Hopkins puts it (p. 49). This shows that it has a goal which is more than seating in the circle and evidence abounds on the use of learning circles to achieve teaching and learning outcomes.

In her book “*Circle in the square*” Riesterberg (2012) recorded notable testimony from teachers who teach curriculum using the lesson circle (the same as teaching or LC), which ensures that all people are able to speak and actively participate, whether as a speaker or a listener. The important thing about the way the students are seated is that they are able to achieve



the best of the teaching of the curriculum because they can easily connect, interact and hear one another than when seated in rows. All seating arrangements have their pros and cons, which is why it is important for a teacher to figure out the one that will put the students at the best advantage. The educators are in the best position to make this happen and the best way to share group experiences is the circle, which is better known and more often used in primary schools but less known and practiced in secondary schools (Hopkins, 2011, p. 49). There is equal opportunity for everybody when relationships are valued.

The term “equal partnership” is used by Wadhwa (2016) in line with the perspective that RJE is all about putting relationships first and is grounded in relational theory, where “human beings are worthy and interconnected” (Vaandering, 2014). The circle is one of those processes where learning can take place in a balanced and shared manner. Boyes-Watson and Pranis (2014) featured many models that a teacher can use, and it works to bring both the teacher and students into an equal partnership where the teacher shares power. In the circle, no one is higher than anyone else. This pedagogy is good for the development of critical reflective thinking. The transformation that results from this kind of approach is worthy of note.

## **2.8 Transformation and Sustainability of RJE**

The changes in language, thought, feeling and action reported by RJ practitioners are the product of the beliefs and values of RJ (Bintliff, 2011; Wadhwa, 2016; Vaandering, 2013; Hopkins, 2011 & Boyes & Pranis, 2014). RJ usually results in the use of words such as “what happened” instead of “why” during conversations, and RJ teachers display empathy to keep their temper under control instead of controlling others. Mutual respect is valued by members in the classroom. Any attempt to practice RJ without the foundational understanding and experience of the key beliefs and values will amount to nothing. Most of the failures recorded in practice are a result of a lack

of knowledge of the conceptual framework. Vaandering (2011) addressed this in “*A faithful compass: rethinking the term restorative justice to find clarity*” stating that “What is needed is a broader understanding of justice, one in which justice is identified as honouring the inherent worth of all and enacted through relationship” (p. 307). The perception of the teacher is seen as the basis of the transformation experience in RJ. A change of perception from retributive to relationship is necessary for the successful implementation of RJ practice in school systems. The teacher sincerely needs to experience what they are practising to progress. The transformative approach of teaching and learning resonate with me, especially with the use of the learning circle, which allows life experiences to emerge during discussions where participants bring their stories into the circle.

The emphasis on the need to secure an adequate conceptual framework of restorative justice is seen to be pivotal for the use and sustainability of the learning circle. When the philosophy is firmly laid, the learning circle can be used to build relationships from the core self to others (Riestenberg, 2012; Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2014 & Wadhwa, 2016). Laying a strong and solid foundation is the first step in moving from theory to practice. The experience usually moves beyond the circle to affect other aspects of life positively, including academics. The equal partnership is only made possible when the parties allow a change in perception from the core self to relational that values mutual respect for others, cooperation and responsibility (Akins & Trowbridge, 2003). The professional learning goes beyond knowledge; it transforms the mind and reflects in our way of being, which also grows to affect day-to-day activities in the school system, classroom (in/out), office, hallway, library/resource centre, dining hall, gym and playground. Some of the common challenges include a lack of conceptual clarity, clashing philosophies and time consumption (Riestenberg, 2012, Evans et al, 2013). Although there are

challenges, the success or failure of the implementation and sustainability depend greatly on the depth of understanding of RJE.

The practice of restorative justice is replacing the punitive traditional approach in education in many countries across the globe. Research has revealed the successful implementation of Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, England, Scotland, South Africa, Canada, and the United States (Evans, Lester, & Anfara, 2013). Recent studies show that it is gradually growing in West Africa-Nigeria (Korb, 2011). RJE is clearly not just about discipline, repairing harm and transforming conflicts; it helps to create a just and equitable learning environment and nurtures healthy relationships (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). The importance of the training of practitioners cannot be over-emphasised. McCluskey et al (2008) note that “the key features associated with successful implementation, in primary and secondary schools, included readiness for change, and also balance of clarity and flexibility about identification of aims” (p. 412). They associated successful implementation with high-quality training and leadership. Professional development is necessary for the successful implementation of RJ in schools.

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The dynamics of the learning circle with the power of allowing equal partnership between the teacher and the students cannot be over-emphasized as the literature I reviewed illustrates. Following the literature reviewed in this chapter about various experiences elsewhere, I am curious to explore and find answers to my research questions which are asked to know why it is not used more extensively and what can be done to encourage the practice and further its circulation or implementation in Newfoundland and Labrador schools.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Having established the goal of this study through reviewing the literature, this chapter describes the set of directions for conducting this study. A methodology with emphasis on teachers and students is a systematic inquiry that is “of particular value of teachers wishing to shine a research spotlight on themselves, on their action towards pupils, and their own thinking, feeling, and being as teachers” (Wilson, 2013, p. 330). There is a distinct difference between methodology and method. Harvey (1990) sees methodology as the interface between methods, theory and epistemology. However, the way of acquiring knowledge in this study is the methodology, while the procedure (instrument) used to get the knowledge is the method. It involves the steps taken to test the research questions and describes the participants, instrumentation and procedures (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). In this methodology, I will discuss a qualitative narrative case study, data collection methods, participants’ selection, data analysis, and the creditability and validity of this study and then conclude by sharing my thoughts and feelings on the experience.

A qualitative approach best fits this research topic because “it is more concerned with the reasons people have for what they say and do” (O’Toole & Backlet 2010, p. 28). It involves talking, watching and listening (Whitt, 1999) to teachers and students in learning circles, phenomena that can create a just and equitable environment that endeavors to bring everyone to the same level while working together without discrimination.

3.1 Narrative Case Study

The narrative case study is a research instrument used for the in-depth study of various social concerns, to understand stages or phases in processes, and to investigate phenomena within their environmental context (Gilgun, 1994). Because “people live storied lives” (Creswell,

2015, p. 503) researchers can use narrative research designs to describe the lives of individuals, to collect and tell stories about the lives of people, and to write narratives of individual experiences (Creswell, 2015). Since little is known about learning circles, especially for teaching science curriculum (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, Riestenberg, 2012), the narrative data of a single case study will be collected for an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its natural context using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003). The narrative expression makes room for the deeper understanding of a case study (Vaandering, 2009). Apart from Vaandering's works on narrative case studies, which help inform this study, there are others that I found useful in finding answers to my research questions. They are the qualitative method for data collection in an interpretive research such as in Wadhwa, 2016; Boyes-Watson & Pranis 2014; Riestenberg, 2012; Hopkins, 2011; Bintliff, 2011; Hatcher et al., 2009; Hadjioannou, 2007; Lyons, 2006; and Akins and Trowbridge, 2003. I intend to get responses to my research questions from teachers and students through observation, interviews, and focus groups.

This study will record individuals' (teachers, students and my own) personal experiences of the impacts of introducing the RJ learning circle for teaching and learning in a science class. This qualitative narrative case study will give me the opportunity to share my own experience (autobiography) and narrate the life experiences (biography) of a recruited teacher and students in an environment that participants are familiar with. The research will give intensive analyses and descriptions of a single case bounded by space and time (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). The study will provide in-depth data that will aid in the understanding of how learning circles can allow teachers and students to work towards equal partnership. Also, the results might be used to gain insight into the possibilities for encouraging the use of learning circles in science or other classes.

3.2 Role of the Researcher

Knowledge of RJE for me also came with a rethinking and shift in the way I have been teaching. I embrace the philosophy, a way of being with the belief that humans are worthy and the practice of using the learning circle as a tool to build on that experience in various ways. Moreover, when I attended RJ professional learning (PL) with some teachers, I discovered that not all of them are using the learning circle for teaching curriculum, especially in the science area. I became curious to know why, so I networked with the principal and the science teacher as potential gatekeepers for my research site and participants. In the process, I was able to come up with my research topic and questions to find out: How do the teacher/students perceive class discussion using restorative justice learning circles? What are the teacher and students' perceptions of "teacher and students in equal partnership"? What is the impact of class discussion using the lesson circle on teaching and learning outcomes? What evidence emerges that indicates the high school students experience a paradigm shift with the use of the learning circle for the science 1206 class?

In this narrative case study, I planned to obtain information from the source directly through observation, interviews, focus groups, and documents, so part of my role is to spend a considerable amount of time interacting with the settings, participants, and documents I am studying (McMillian, 2016). In view of this, since I knew I had a period of only one month for data collection as a participant observer in the research, in order to understand the teacher, students, system and structure of the study site, I decided to embark on some familiarization visits before commencement of my study. I use a table to give the general overview of the research site, class and the participants.

Featuring	Pseudonyms	Brief description
Research Site (General)	Progressive Urban High School(PUHS)	-A 4-storey block of classrooms -RJ project school -There are 42 Staff -Student population is over 680 from grades 10-12
Research Class (Specific)	NA	-A multimedia class with row seating arrangement for 34 students -The science subject has 4 units- Chemistry, Weather Dynamics, Physics, and Ecology.
Science Teacher	Mr. Patrick	-An M.Ed. Curriculum Teaching and Learning Studies (CTLs) graduate -RJ trained (5PL days in 2016-2017) -Has more than 10 yrs. teaching experience -Teaching Physics/Science 1206 in PUHS for 7 yrs.
Teacher Intern	Stanley	-A university student who practise teaching methodology under the supervision of Mr. Patrick -He is not RJ trained.
Student Participants	Elizabeth, Justine & Becky	PUHS, grade 10 Science 1206 students.
Researcher	Bukola (Actual name)	A university graduate student in Faculty of Education, CTLs Dept. with research interest in RJ learning circle (LC).

Table 3.1: General Overview of the Research Site, Class, and the Participants.

3.3 Research Site Selection, Participants

The network I built earlier with the principal and the science teacher made getting a suitable research site for my study a reality. I needed a high school and a teacher that is familiar with restorative justice practice in one way or another. This could have been challenging because RJ is a new and growing field in Newfoundland and Labrador, but I was able to gain access to one of the RJ project schools in the NL English School District (NLESD) through those that I contacted during RJ PL.

3.4 Progressive Urban High School (PUHS)

“Real magic in relationships means an absence of judgment of others” - Wayne Dyer.

Progressive Urban High School the research site I chose has one main part of the building with a 4-storey block of classrooms. The public school has a top-down, traditional governance model where educators report to the administrator, who in turn reports to the district leader. The principal was first introduced to RJ in 2012 when she was a vice principal in another school. The population is 42 staff and 680 students. The principal and five teachers in the school are passionate about restorative justice (RJ). I learned about the school as a result of my supervisor’s invitation to me to attend the restorative justice project school professional development in 2017, where their team was also represented. I used the opportunity to network with the principal and a science teacher with the hope of someday carrying out a study at the school. The principal gave me an informal invitation during one of the sessions, which I promised to honor. I began processing the ethics approval, submitted a proposal indicating the contacts that I have made with the school under *Section 3.1- Organizational or Community Consent* and was hopeful of getting it approved in less than six weeks. Its approval, however, was delayed.

The research required ethics approval from the Memorial University of Newfoundland and Newfoundland English School District (NLESD) because it would involve human subjects (teacher and students). The student participants are from a vulnerable population, as they are under 18 years of age, so a parental information and consent letter needed to be prepared and made available stating the safety of participants, voluntary participation, withdrawal provision, possible benefits and risks, the anonymity and confidentiality of data and pseudonyms to be assigned to all respondents.

Prior to conducting data collection, I visited the school after booking an appointment with the principal. When I got to the school for the first visit, my exploration began. I looked around the school environment, and it was quiet and serene with classes in session. As I moved around the school, I saw many quotations everywhere on the walls with an emphasis on relationships. The one I saw first on the lintel of the office front desk was captivating. It read: “Real magic in relationships means an absence of judgment of others” - Wayne Dyer. I thought this quotation made sense and that indeed no one should judge another if a relationship is present. Seeing all the quotations around, I concluded that this must have been the handiwork of the RJ team in the school as a way of promoting the RJ philosophy of placing relationships first, but I later found out from Ms. Bishop¹, the principal, that “the relational quotes were painted by the student group who works in Mental Health initiatives, but they were chosen with a relational theme deliberately in keeping with RJ”. This increased my confidence in the research I was about to carry out, since the school was already aware of the practice of restorative justice, a relational culture that I would also be engaging with. What a great relief to know that I would be working with those that shared the same teaching philosophy! She later took me to Mr. Patrick, the science teacher and my potential participant for the study. My meeting with the principal and some of the RJ team members was instrumental to my being able to carry out the study.

Because I was conducting a single case study for a short period of time, knowing the teacher and the students was important, so as soon as I got the ethics approval (see Appendix 1), I attended the class a couple of times to acquaint myself with the students and their environment. The class was a typical North American public school traditional setting (“Canada Guide”, 2018). The classes were based on a formal curriculum with an emphasis on worksheets and getting students on task to complete them in preparation of a test or examination. I observed that

¹ Pseudonyms are used for used for all research participants and the school.

the teacher's teaching method alternated between transmission and demonstration. On many occasions, Mr. Patrick did the talking while the students listened with little or no interaction, and other times students worked independently or raised their hands for clarity. At certain points while teaching, he would stop to ask if the students understood and at other times he invited them to arrange a time to see him personally after the class, especially when he was running out of time. Cooperative learning involving group work or discussion was rare. The interpersonal social skill of interaction was not common, as some students preferred to work individually, while those who managed to work in groups did so with friends or ended up copying from the "intelligent" students among them. I also met with the teacher intern who came to work with Mr. Patrick to learn teaching methodology as a potential teacher while I was there.

I made an effort to interact with the students during my familiarization visit, and I asked a quick question to get to know their thoughts and feelings about science class (a blank piece of paper was passed to them to write). The answers I got were similar to what I found in the literature about science classes such as a large volume of work, a lot of reading, boredom, memorization, a lack of social interaction and emotional expression, among others. Getting this information was crucial to the relevance of this study and the gap it is trying to address. I also asked to find out if any of the students had any circle experience and one student raised her hand. I was happy to get one response for a start and felt there may be some who chose not to talk (Mr. Patrick had already told me that they do not like to talk). I used the exercise to get an idea of what the class I would be working with was like. I realised most of them might be passive because I am new to the class, but I trusted that it would get better. At another time when I was meeting the class for the recruitment of research participants, I conducted a brief check-in (an RJ

practice to open risk-free dialogue with reference to the topic of discussion) to test-run the integration of the circle in a traditional classroom and watch for reactions.

I invited the students to come out of their seats, which were in a row to form a circle for the introduction, where I asked them to say their name and where they are from. To identify with the science class, I used a science tool (wooden test-tube holder) I found in the class as a talking piece. This allowed them to take turns while talking with the aim of increasing their level of participation and interaction. I also asked another question relating to the unit of discussion, weather dynamics, to express how they were feeling on that cold winter morning. Although the majority talked, which was a positive indication that the students might actually be interested in talking (as opposed to the message I was give that students are passive and not wanting to talk that I was told), I observed that the majority were not comfortable as indicated by their facial expressions of surprise, smiling uncomfortably or raising their eyebrows. I rounded up the check-in that morning by thanking them for participating, and then explained the reason for all I had done in order to give them an idea about the study. I backed this up with a brief PowerPoint presentation to share my personal, educational, and professional information and to discuss the basics of the learning circle, which is grounded in RJE. This was necessary for the students to understand the framework that guides the practice. I sensed that the learning circle discussion may have seemed strange to the students because it was different from what they were used to: transmission and demonstration. Then, I moved to the recruitment of participants for the study.

Having given Mr. Patrick the information and consent letter for the teacher earlier (see appendix 5), I took a copy of the information and consent form for the students (see appendix 6 & 7) and handed a copy to each student present in the class that day (24 in number) before explaining the content. I solicited their voluntary participation by asking them to go through it

again on their own, getting their parents' permission, signing it, and returning it to a designated place on the front desk of the office on the day I was starting. I also handed the teacher's copy of the forms to the teacher intern while seeking his consent to also participate (this was not in the original plan, but since he would be teaching under the supervision of Mr. Patrick and after consulting with my supervisor, I decided to invite him along, realizing that his participation would also impact the study).

3.5 Participants

The selection of participants for this qualitative research was purposive and involved deliberately seeking knowledgeable respondents who could contribute substantially to the study (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Therefore, based on my academic background in science, this study focused on teacher and students' experiences in an RJ learning circle of a science class. For the case study, I selected a Grade 10 science high school teacher who was RJ-trained but was not using the circle for teaching his students. The Grade 10 students, who were minors, were provided with parental consent/assent forms. Participation was voluntary, and the forms provided them with the opportunity to also sign along with their parents after reading and indicating their willingness to participate. Three students eventually returned the signed forms so the overall number of participants for the study was five: the science teacher, a teacher intern working under the supervision of the science teacher and three students. I was a participant observer and was co-planning and co-teaching with the teacher and the teacher intern throughout the study. I observed the class and interviewed the teacher, the teacher intern and the three students individually and as a focus group. The data collected from them was used for analysis.

3.6 Data Collection

Qualitative case studies “rely heavily upon qualitative data obtained from observation, interviews, and documents” (Merriam, 1988, p.68). I collected data from class discussions where I co-planned and co-taught with the science teacher using learning circles conducted over 12 class periods in a 4-week time period in the winter of 2018. I used a purposive, critical case sampling technique (Patton, 1990). This type of sampling is used as a way of understanding a larger phenomenon, especially for topics that are not well known. The learning circle was sampled as a way of understanding the larger phenomenon of learning circles in science classes. All these are in support of the overall purposes of a qualitative research, which is “to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.15). I seek to develop an in-depth understanding of the case by collecting multiple forms of data such as pictures, audio/videotapes, field notes and electronic platforms” (Creswell, 2015). Data in this study include:

- a. The sharing of my autobiographical experiences of teachers and students in equal partnership in both the Nigerian and Canadian context.
- b. Observations, audio recordings, open-ended semi-structured interviews (see appendix 8), and written narratives and reflections from the science teacher and students in the circle.

The procedures for data collection “provide detailed description of the exact steps taken to contact research participants, obtain cooperation, and administer research instruments” (Rudestam & Newton, 2015, p.115). The following section will show where, when and how data were collected.

3.7 Data Collection Steps

Step 1: Observation of class discussion using the RJ learning circle.

As a participant observer:

- a. In preparation for each class, I usually co-plan with the other teachers to co-facilitate the learning circles with them using circle design, which includes sitting in the circle, following set guidelines, the use of a talking piece, activities that relate to the curriculum content (unit), and reflection.
- b. I adopted the example used in Hancock & Algozzine (2006, p.49) to write up my observations, which included the participants and setting, time, place, and length; and the descriptive observations of the class with or without the learning circle for teaching and learning, I used the RJ framework questions, which are good for critical reflection (see appendix 2).

Step 2: I conducted open-ended, semi-structured interviews, which enabled me to ask specific questions of the teacher and student participants in the study while also being open and willing to follow unexpected leads. The guiding questions for the interviews can be found in Appendix 5.

Step 3: Focus group

Using the same interview questions (see appendix 8), I also brought the students I interviewed individually together as a focus group to gather data that could help inform my study during interactions bearing in mind that, “an individual’s attitudes and beliefs do not form in a vacuum: People often need to listen to others’ opinions and understandings to form their own” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 114). Participation in the focus group was through voluntary invitation from those interviewed. The benefit of focus groups is that they give people time to

reflect while they listen to others (Tite, 2010). This interaction often leads to a richer understanding of what is being studied. Some insightful themes emerged from the focus group discussion (see Chapter 4).

3.8 Data Analysis Steps

The data analysis for this qualitative narrative case study initially consisted of developing a general sense of the data and then coding descriptions and themes about the central purpose and research questions. Suter (2015) notes, much qualitative and critical data exists in the form of narrative, or text, scripts, commonly gathered from interviews, survey questions, journals, recorded observations, and existing documents, among other sources. “Words combine into meanings, but meanings must be sorted, interpretations considered, and conclusions reached” (p. 350). To make sense of the large quantities of data, I adopted a well-organized, clear and comprehensive strategy (Rudestam & Newton, 2015, p.209). This analysis will be guided by the following process (Creswell, 2015; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Yin, 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016):

(a) Organize data

I organized the data collection since the beginning of the study. I made journals and kept notes during observations in and out of class indicating the date, time and useful details for subsequent analysis and discussion.

(b) Transcribe data

This was an aspect of the analysis I did not enjoy. It was difficult sitting to transcribe the audio recordings from observations and all six interview sections. I tried finding software to ease the process but could find none that did not involve me listening and typing. I contacted other

graduate students for assistance on transcription and discovered that their experiences were similar. Some advised me to use Oregon, but I eventually met a PhD candidate who introduced me to oTranscribe. oTranscribe is a free web app created by Elliot Bentley (<http://otranscribe.com/>) for transcribing recorded interviews. It reduced the pain of transcribing a little, but the bulk of the work was done by me. I still have to listen to the device and type as I hear using an alpha-numeric pattern (assigning a letter to each participant interview and a number to each sentence or paragraph). This stage took me days to complete as a beginner qualitative researcher. I then moved to the next stage, which was the analysis.

(c) Analyze data

I analyzed by hand into themes that address the research questions. These include but are not limited to reflections on learning circles, equal partnership, and a paradigm shift from the traditional approach to the RJ learning circle for teaching science (curriculum) in high school, students' participation, social engagement, and achievement. The result of the process was narrative in nature and included the description of key aspects of the case. The following themes emerged from the data analysis:

1. The great beginning: rough and tough
2. The learning circle: introduction and complications
3. The picture of a class without the learning circle
4. Dynamic learning circle: teacher and student in equal partnership
5. Shift in thoughts and feelings about the learning circle
6. Suggestions for future integration of the learning circle
7. Insightful ending

3.9 Qualitative Quality (Validation-Trustworthiness)

To achieve trustworthiness, credibility or validity in this study, I gave adequate attention to the context in which the data were gathered (Yin, 2013). Keeping triangulation in mind, I used multiple methods for data collection and analysis (observation, interviews, and field notes). Data were gathered for a period of four weeks in order to increase the validity of the findings. The field notes were presented separately from the interviews and observations. I also carried out member checks by taking some unclear data and interpretation back to the participants from whom they were derived for clarification. Finally, I conducted peer examination, asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerged.

3.10 Limitation

Prior to the research, I envisaged a lack of adequate knowledge about the Canadian high school experience, since I was educated in Nigeria. I also knew that cultural differences may be a major challenge, so before the research commenced, I decided to meet Mr. Patrick and a course mate, Gabriel, for my questions and clarifications as detailed below:

3.11 Meeting with Mr. Patrick

I did not take anything for granted about the need for adequate preparation; I know my limitations of not having high school teaching experience in Canadian (NL) classrooms. Therefore, as part of my role as a researcher I thought of spending more time with Mr. Patrick to get to know him better. On the day of the meeting in January between 1 pm and 2 pm, I arrived before the appointed time and went straight to the staff lounge, a place staff members use for their breaks to eat and relax. The place is well furnished with a couch, television, computer and kitchen area and two washrooms for males and females. A lot of discussions take place in the staff lounge. When I came in, I saw him eating and talking with other staff, so I sat down to wait

for him to finish before getting his attention when he was about leave. He replied in a friendly manner as usual and was ready to attend to me almost immediately. I felt respected and honoured and thought this would be a relationship in the making, a way of being that sees humans as worthy and to be respected. Mr. Patrick embraces the RJ philosophy in the area of relationships and respect but had not yet practiced the circles. During our discussion, he said that “RJ philosophy matches my personality” (FN p. 10²). I agree with him because he has very good relationships with people, and the students seem free with him and they approach him for help regularly. He always makes himself available for students both inside and outside the classroom. There was a time when a student approached him while we were walking together in the hallway to ask him question and he attended to her. He uses fun, play and demonstration methods as strategies to engage students academically. I could see that the stage was set, and that he had what it takes to integrate the learning circle for better results, but I wondered why he had not yet chose to.

For my planning, I needed to know how he had been teaching the topic (i.e. extreme weather) in the past, the number of periods used, the approach, the lesson plan and much more. I learned from our discussion that he had always given group project for the topic and had never used the circle in the class. I told him that I am also trying to use the circle as a new learning approach and to see its impact through practice. I showed him the lesson plan I prepared with the idea of modeling a learning circle to introduce the topic. The teacher intern came to join the meeting and it was good to have him around so he could start learning about circle processes from our discussions. We agreed that we would use two classes to complete the remaining topic in the unit.

² Field notes references will include the notation FN followed by the page number i.e. FN p. 10

Having known that Mr. Patrick was not using the learning circle and the teacher intern did not have experience with it at all, I reiterated my intention of integrating the learning circle, an RJ practice, into the existing classroom structure, as it is helpful for promoting social interaction and emotional expression, which are missing in many traditional classrooms. There is always a type of circle that can fit each class irrespective of the topic – check-in/up/out for introduction, feedback, level of understanding, and giving assignments. Testimonies abound in the literature about the success of LCs, so I thought it would be great to use it to make a memorable experience for the students. I also seized the opportunity to clarify my thoughts about the need for regular co-planning (in person or virtually) before each class to draw up an agenda as well as to promote understanding and support for each other. This would also be significant for me as someone new to Canadian classroom culture. I need to know what works and what does not work for high school students in the choice of circle activity such as “the energizer” and “mindfulness moment” (Boyles-Watson & Pranis, 2014). I told them that I want everyone to feel safe with having me with them in the class. Then, I invited them to feel free to ask me for anything they did not understand about me or the study.

I brought out the consent forms to re-emphasize the information and the need for them to sign them. I told them I would like to schedule a time to interview them before the end of the research (post study interview). I chatted with Stanley, the teacher intern, and asked him why he chose to be a teacher. He said it had been his plan since high school and that he enjoys spending time with students. He plays basketball and has also been coaching some of the students at PUHS. He also went to the same junior high that my son is presently attending. He then left for a class while I continued the discussion with Mr. Patrick and this time it involved more personal information as a way of building our relationship. I told him that I am a Nigerian and am married

with three kids. He listened with rapt attention and said I “must be busy”, and I replied “yes, very busy”, and I smiled. He also opened up and told me that he is from Newfoundland and that he completed his undergraduate studies in Physics at MUN, and his master’s in Education CTLS in science methodology. I asked for his teaching portfolio, if he had one, and he promised to send it to me. He has worked in other schools before crossing over to this current school seven years ago (2011-2018). He expressed his love for PUHS and testified that the school is good place to be, it is relational, and said he might spend the rest of his career there.

Furthermore, he shared the story of his woeful experience with the circle once in his physics class last year. He confessed, “I was so nervous about it, and to make things worse, when I passed the talking piece for the students to talk, all of them passed it round without talking. So after that experience, I stopped using it and now I only embrace the aspect of being human and being respectful to all” (Fn. p. 13). This was the answer to my question on why he chose not to use the circle for teaching despite the cordial relationship he had built with the students. The answer was thought-provoking, but I think the response he got from the students was not unusual, especially when introducing something new like the circle to the class for the first time. This reminds me of the work of Tite (2008) in an article about social justice and how transformative teaching “is not just about the teachers and children or students; it is a project that engages all of us as co-learners. If I am invisible, silenced by a cloak of derogatory cultural sentiments, then so too are my students” (p. 90). Therefore, what we do when something does not work the way we plan matters. It takes courage and passion to keep going in the face of challenges (refusing to be silenced). So, introducing something new demands patience, risk taking and being open to different reactions from people. Change is usually a gradual process. Although I am convinced about the possibilities of circles in getting students to talk, I do not

expect the magic to happen almost immediately, especially here in North America where the individualistic lifestyle is a dominant part of culture and the issues of privacy and confidentiality are approached very differently from in my country. For instance, we can engage in personal discussion without a feeling of intruding into others' affairs.

After the whole meeting and sharing, my vulnerability, nervousness and fears gave way and I felt more confident than ever with knowing that I can co-plan and get support from others on the team to carry out my research. Mr. Patrick offered me a handshake, I think for the first time since I had been visiting (a sign of acceptance maybe). I felt good and comfortable, thinking that he seemed to be gaining more confidence in my abilities for the study.

3.12 High School Students

The word "passive" stood out when discussing my study with Gabriel, a PhD candidate whom I attended a research course with. The course was designed such that it focuses on our research topic of interest. Gabriel's research focuses on science teachers (teachers in action), while mine was on using an RJ learning circle in a high school science class. This shows that we were both science-inclined. Patrick has been teaching Biology and Science 1206 in high school for many years, so I saw him as a great human resource for my study; I went to him from time to time (before, during and after) to share in his experiences (especially the Canadian ones) and to get ideas and advice. He got to know about the RJ circle as a means of connecting with others through a professional learning presentation he attended, and he has used a form of the circle in small groups ("not big groups," he told me). When I perceived his interest in my study after sharing in class and our similar background in science (Biology) I asked if I could conduct the research in his class, but he said he is currently on leave from his program. During our discussion, he told me "the high school students are somehow passive in the classroom, not

wanting to participate and that is why I use the methods that will make them active like the one you are studying, circle”. This was thought provoking as I had to ask myself if there could be other factors responsible for students not talking. Carrying out a research in this new environment without Canadian teaching experience in high school demands my adequate preparation and that is why I usually contact Gabriel for necessary information that will guide my study. So, I was not completely thrown off balance when Mr. Patrick told me “the students don’t talk” and I already had an idea. I am an African and I live a communal lifestyle, so I thought that talking and encouraging others to do the same should not be a problem if the environment permits. In addition, the RJ learning circle is specifically designed to encourage talking.

I studied and found in Wadhwa (2016) that in her experience “RJ was introduced in an ‘unlikely place’: a science class in a school by a chemistry teacher” (p. 118). This example also was encouraging to me, as it was good to hear that the learning circle could be integrated in a science class. The desire to change and do things differently led me to come up with a working lesson plan prepared from samples provided in the book *Circle Forward* (see Appendix 1).

3.13 Conclusion

This study is meant to inspire educators to rethink and embrace the various possibilities in a restorative classroom, especially using the learning circle for class discussion. Significant work has been done by researchers about training and the response of educators and teachers, but the voice of students is not heard as much. This narrative case study is targeted toward students to nurture the RJ principle and the practice of respect, responsibility and relationships. My passion and educational goal is to witness a paradigm shift from the usual traditional approach of transmission of the teacher always instructing and being in control to the teacher working side by

side with the students in equal partnership (relationship) whether it be sitting, standing or walking (Wadhwa, 2016, Boyes-Watson & Pranis 2014; Riestenberg, 2012; Hopkins, 2011; & Vaandering, 2009). I was eager to get responses to deepen understanding of the study through the research questions and the choice of methodology.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Research Findings

This chapter includes my findings using an analysis of the research data collected from the participants during the study. Drawing from my own perception of RJE and personal experiences, I narrate the story of the findings in themes using a critical framework to analyse the observations, interviews, focus groups and documents from the participants. What follows is the description of the participants, researcher and participants' impression-shifts, thoughts/feelings, best/hardest components and participant suggestions for a way forward.

4.1 Participants and Information

The research participants occupy a very significant position in the general outcome of the study. In my search to understand the equal partnership between teacher and students, the participants in the study are differentiated into two groups, teachers and students. In the following section, I will introduce each participant represented in the different groups by providing their personal and/or professional information, and my personal reflection about their participation.

4.1.1 Teacher-Participants

This includes Mr. Patrick, the science teacher, and Stanley, the teacher intern who was one of the teacher participants.

a. Mr. Patrick

Mr. Patrick has taught for more than a decade and had been teaching in other schools before his appointment as the Physics and Science 1206 teacher in PUHS 7 years ago. He shared his teaching philosophy with me during the first planning meeting that I had with him and later sent an electronic copy to me through email. It is supportive of rich relationships (see appendix

3). In summary, his teaching pedagogy “focuses on developing a positive teacher/student relationship based on respect.” Therefore, for successful teaching and learning to take place, according to him “students need to feel safe to take risks.” He doesn’t believe in memorization. He supported this with a quote from Confucius, “I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.” With this in mind, he always gets students to solve questions after being shown an example. “Sometimes, I ask them to complete the examples independently while I describe the solution concurrently on the board. I believe students should be taking responsibility for their own success and failures. As teachers, we have to facilitate this transition of students being dependent on the teacher for academic results and behaviours to independent and intrinsically motivated learners. In my experience this is a challenging goal but an essential one.”

The teaching philosophy of Mr. Patrick is really relationally inclined with the goal of developing a positive teacher and student relationship based on respect, but he is still faced with the challenge of holding the students accountable for their learning. However, this study is carried out in response to this common challenge among teachers through the use of the Learning Circle (LC) that dynamically brings about an equal partnership between teacher and students. By so doing the teacher is able to provide the needed support for students to take ownership or responsibility for their learning.

b. Stanley

Stanley is a university undergraduate final year pre-service student and as part of the requirement in fulfilment of his first degree he came to complete his internship with Mr. Patrick. Although he was not in the original plan of my study, and since he would be working under the supervision of Mr. Patrick to learn teaching methodology as a potential physics and mathematics

teacher, I made a slight adjustment for the three of us to work together instead of two. The arrangement with Stanley as with Mr. Patrick is almost the same except that Stanley is not RJ trained. The emergence of the teacher intern affected the study; it led to divided attention from Mr. Patrick, who also complained about the tight timeline and said “the combination of the intern coming in, I need to learn this new process, there is a lot of learning going on which made it more complicated” (A 27). That is, he felt the complication of accommodating two of us with different agendas at the same time. The presence of the student intern added more responsibility for him than if I were the only person. Working with someone without the basic knowledge of the LC was also a serious concern for me. Where do I start from when the person trained finds it difficult to practice a circle, let alone of someone without any circle experience?

4.1.2 Student-Participants

There are three student participants, namely Elizabeth, Justine and Becky. The three student participants happened to be friends with different personalities which made them a good representation of the class. Hence, I made the best use of their participation during my class observations, individual interviews and the focus group. Elizabeth is an introvert who can hardly make eye contact; Justine and Becky are extroverts who can easily express themselves freely. I did not have any personal contact with them until I started the study. The three student participants are easygoing, consistent and independent learners. Whenever I move around during observation to check students' work they are always on task. They have no problem raising their hand to answer questions or ask for help in class. There was an occasion when I went to check on them while working on scientific notation, a mathematical aspect under the module on motion. While others responded calmly, Becky responded sharply, saying “I am doing my work” (FN p. 36). I perceived she wanted to be left alone, so I moved away to another student. I also notice

that they usually sit with each other in the class, working together as a team. This arrangement seems to be helping them to support each other's academic needs in one way or another. They enjoy learning, wanting to make use of every learning opportunity as much as possible before starting to pay tuition after high school at a higher institution of learning (F31-32)

I want to acknowledge the respect the students have for me and the study by making themselves available during the LC. They are regular and punctual in class. They are enthusiastic about learning; hence they have a consistent willingness to play their role genuinely throughout the study. I got to know them more during the interview and they related freely, as if we had been together for a long time.

4.2 Reflection on Recruitment

Recruiting the teacher for research participation was easier than recruiting the students, likely for legal and ethical reasons; they are mature adults who make informed decisions and give consent legally, but the students in this study are minors, under 18 years old so they needed parental consent to participate. Hearing from students is very important to me but when I searched for literature on the topic, I discovered that the voices of students have been scantily reported. I now understand that this may be due to ethical reasons, as the process of seeking ethical approval for participation for minors can be demanding and at the same time, frustrating for adults. I knew this but chose to endure every step because of my goal to explore how students experience a restorative justice LC in a science class as a science teacher. How will it affect learning?

I expected more student participants than I got. To my disappointment, out of the initial twenty four (24) copies of information and consent forms that I distributed to students and an additional one later to make 25 copies in all, only three students gave their consent to participate.

I made efforts to add more participants throughout the study by reminding them in the class to sign and return the parental consent form and I also met some of them personally. but these tactics did not result in more participation. This was discouraging; I tried to reassure myself, knowing that I had set myself a big goal as an international student to work in a Canadian classroom where students barely talk with the teachers they know well. Nevertheless, while hoping for more student participants to join, with courage and continued support from others I continued to work with the three that were recruited. Besides, for narrative studies number is not an issue for concepts such as saturation or validity. Sometimes less is better to understand the complexity of the case (Zin, 2013). Though there were only three, each of them made huge contributions that are critical to in-depth understanding of the study about using a LC for a teaching curriculum.

4.2.1 Reflection on Research site and Participants

The main reason for the choice of research site was based on my knowledge of RJE. Despite my decades of learning and teaching in Nigeria, now, in Canada, I could see a range of differences in the way we do things. The method I am used to is mainly teacher-centred, so I decided I needed a way to blend in and connect with the system here. I became open to new strategies that provide that experience as I progressed in my master's program in the university. Apart from other ways of educating, it was in RJE that I found the LC as a way of being, an Indigenous practice that I can easily use to build relationships and make that connection in the classroom (Hatcher et al, 2009; Evans & Vaandering, 2016). The philosophy helped me regain my sense of belonging and self-confidence to handle all forms of intimidation to carry on with my study knowing that a relationship ought to start from me, then ripple out to others illustrated in the following diagram (adopted/reproduced from Vaandering, 2016).

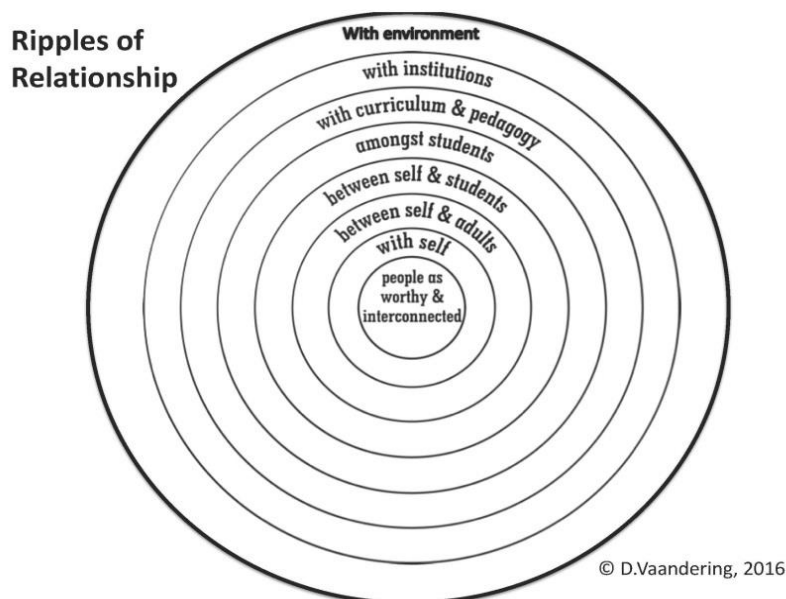


Figure 4.1: Themes of Relationship Rippling out From Core Values

This picture always reminds me that implementing RJE (relationships first) from the ground up is a way of life that grows with the practice of a relationship rippling from the core self to others. Therefore, I need to believe in myself and see others as worthy, ready to connect, irrespective of differences. The differences are not meant to separate us but rather to nourish the uniqueness in us. All these principles are in accordance with my Christian beliefs and my African culture that teaches love, relationship and respect for all without exception. This attitude, by extension, will make me believe in my students and their abilities rather than imposing my ideas. The work of Freire, a progressive educator, also delineated, a shift from being teacher-focused to student-centred, clearer. His progressive pedagogy, according to McLaren & Leonard (1993) is:

Offering a system in which the locus of the learning process is shifted from the teacher to the student. And this shift overtly signifies an altered power relationship, not only in the classroom but in the broader social canvas as well. (p.8).

After comparing my former way of teaching and RJE with Freire's critique on the banking approach to pedagogy as described by McLaren & Leonard (1993), I now understand that teaching ought not to be limited to academic discipline and training so, as a teacher I ought not to teach to suit my own needs but rather the students'. They should be "actively involved in their education" because, with reference to learning, "no genuine learning can occur unless students are actively involved, through praxis [i.e. *practice informed by reflection*)] in controlling their own education (p. 9). Seeking to make sense of this praxis, I discovered that the focus was on reflection. McLaren & Leonard (1993) discuss this:

Freire emphasizes 'reflection,' in which the student assimilates knowledge in accordance with his/her own needs, rather than rote learning and is dedicated, like some elements of his progressive tradition to helping the learner become a subject of his/her own education rather than an object of the system's educational agenda. (P. 9)

The word "reflection" stood out for me in my RJE learning process from day one. It made a major difference in my teaching and learning experiences. The method I am used to is that of the teacher doing the telling, leaving no time for reflection. Unlike other courses that I took, it was in RJE class, where the circle is a common practice to teach curriculum, that I started to understand the essence and action of reflection. It was a great transformation for me! The LC is usually a time to hear from others. Everyone is treated equally; teacher and students work together as learner partners sharing power, space, time and resources. I personally like it because it allows me to practise and develop a reflection skill when interacting with others in a safe

environment where I can express my emotion without any kind of intimidation and discrimination, implicit or explicit. It is dynamic not static, subject to change and easy to integrate during class instruction time at the beginning, middle or end. Usually, the students are invited into the circle to discuss a topic from the curriculum or other relevant topics of interest; open-ended questions (where the teacher does not know the answers) are asked to provoke critical thinking and deep insight usually emerges when sharing. With this knowledge, I constantly review my way of being and teaching practice to check whether I am honouring or measuring students and the message I am sending (Vaandering, 2014).

It is on this basis, the progressive pedagogy of Freire, that I chose to study the school of a teacher who is RJ trained (but does not use a circle). My aim is to introduce a LC where students will be able to reflect and assimilate knowledge in accordance to their own needs, rather than relying on rote learning (McLaren & Leonard, 1993). This may be challenging for a traditional teacher who may not know what to do, but with training and practice I trust that it is the best way to “help students achieve a grasp of the concrete conditions of their daily lives, of the limits imposed by their situation on their ability to acquire what is sometimes called ‘literacy’. of the meaning of the truism *Knowledge is power*” (p. 9). The RJ LC is truly powerful; dynamic and specially designed to allow sharing of insightful experiences that can breathe life into the curriculum content in the classroom.

In this study, I am aware that the education system that focuses on individual and independent learning usually limits social interaction and emotional expression among students (Davis et al, 2015). Secondly, the students have not been introduced to a LC specially designed to promote healthy relationship as a way of bringing social and emotional knowledge into academic curriculum. Thirdly, I am thinking that if a teacher chooses to reject this new pedagogy

in teaching practice, despite having a basic RJ knowledge of circle practice, it would also be helpful to know why. Finally, I am confident that expertise comes through consistent practice. The knowledge of RJE as a whole, coupled with resources available, was enough backing for the practice. I see different possibilities in RJ circles, and especially the use of LC for teaching and learning a curriculum, but adequate preparation is needed to prevent a poor performance (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2014; Hopkins, 2011). Hence, a sample is prepared as a guide to follow for check-in/up/out (See Appendix 2), as used for this study.

The sample is flexible; it can be changed to suit a specific purpose at the teacher or facilitator's discretion to check for students' understanding, introduce a new topic/unit/concept, develop tips and strategies in doing homework (so students support and learn from one another), share reflections, and exam/test reviews. Given my understanding as a researcher that the RJ LC has the potential for building social interaction and emotional expression in classrooms, especially in the science class, I explored the impact and provide recommendations for practice and further study.

4.3 Setting the stage for the Starting Day

I arrived early before the first period which starts by 8.55a.m., placed the drop box at the main office and posted a notice to direct the return of the consent form. My intention was to start the collection by co-teaching but I had learned that the mid-term exams were in progress I then decided to use the opportunity to rearrange the class from traditional square structure with a row seating arrangement into a circle. I discussed this with Mr. Patrick who agreed but was wondering how it would look. It was an exploration so I started arranging. He was watching initially but later joined in to help. We succeeded in getting a big circle setting together; the class could not contain all the desks so we arranged the rest behind the circle, for

those who may not want to sit in the circle and also to allow choice because circle processes is intended to be invitational. The class was set for the dynamics of the LC for teaching and learning. (See Fig 1 below for the class sitting arrangement before and after). It is dynamic because it is flexible, not static, and can be designed to meet the needs of users. The users can position themselves by sitting or standing, depending on the length of time, for the activity. It can be used for check-in/up/out at the discretion of the teacher or facilitator to check for students' understanding, introduce a new topic/unit/concept, develop tips and strategies in doing homework, so students support and learn from one another, share reflections, and exam/test reviews.

Before



After



Figure 4.2: Picture of Classroom before and after Arrangement into Circle

The class was rearranged into a circle from the row setting but was not spacious enough to accommodate all the students connected chairs and desks; about 20 could fit into the circle. The remaining units/ones were arranged behind the circle, as shown in the picture. It was a great accomplishment that excited Philip and me. (We both took pictures; Mr. Patrick said it will serve as a reminder for future arrangement- FN p. 16). I noticed an uncommon excitement in Philip because of the change; the class was really looking different. The students could easily sit in a

circle and gradually adjust to the change as they entered the class without wasting time. Also, I thought the arrangement would make them more able to talk and interact. I felt great, because my first attempt to arrange the class into a circle was successful. It was an encouragement and a good sign for the integration of the circle into the class. The hardest thing for me was a space constraint. The chair-desks were heavy to move around and too numerous to form a single circle from rows. Mr. Patrick and I were affected because this was the first time of arranging the class into a circle setting. The change of the class structure into a circle looked more perfect after the arrangement. The class was set for LCs to begin.

I will continue by sharing the data analysis from the participants. The following themes emerged from participants as implications for practice:

1. The great beginning: rough and tough
2. The LC: introduction and complications
3. The picture of a class without the LC
4. Dynamic LC: teacher and student in equal partnership
5. Shift in thoughts and feelings about the LC
6. Suggestion for future integration of the LC
7. Insightful ending

4.4 The Great Beginning: Tough and Rough

Everything was ready for the introduction of the new pedagogy, the LC. The three of us were available for co-teaching. After discussing the plan with Mr. Patrick and Stanley, the class began. Stanley, the teacher intern, was calling the attendance and I was writing the class agenda for that day on the whiteboard. Greeting was the first thing on the agenda and Mr. Patrick sat in the circle to welcome the students back from, their mid-term exams. He opened the circle by

asking how they felt about the just concluded mid-term. He then passed the talking piece that I provided (a brain toy with an inscription “let talk science”) and the students took turns talking.



Figure 4.3: Picture of Talking Pieces

The choice of talking piece is tied to the topic of discussion so it is not arbitrary. The introduction of the talking piece in the LC is not child’s play as some think; it provides a solution to the problem of talking and sharing among the students (Riestenberg, 2012). At another time I used a car toy as a talking piece for a check-in I conducted during a class discussion on distance for the unit on motion. The talking piece is usually passed from one person to another other in the circle to show who has the right to talk. The individual holding the talking piece speaks while others listen actively as they wait to take a turn. It makes equal distribution of power within the circle a reality. Pranis (2015), when interviewed for “*RJ on the Rise Program*” about “Working with power dynamic: Insights on shared power, facilitation, and circle processes” said there is a tendency of the facilitator to impose an opinion on others, so he/she can give power up by using a talking piece. She encouraged the listeners to “honour the way the talking piece works because the talking piece distributes the power in the circle”; therefore, “no one is higher than anyone

else.” The teacher ought to be thoughtful and creative about the selection and use for it to make sense to the students.

Out of the 17 students present in that period, 16 responded and one passed. In this study, I observed that participation was not limited only to those that signed up, so bearing ethical reasons in mind; I usually reiterate voluntary participation by invitation. Sitting in/out of the circle was more a matter of choice and I was flexible about it. Majority of the students sat within the circle and some chose to sit outside. It was a great beginning because the students participated and talked. Mr. Patrick then handed the session over to me and I continued with the introduction by teaching the basics about a LC, stressing the importance of each item in the class/circle guidelines starting with the talking piece (see Appendix 2, adapted from Boys-Watson & Kay, 2014). I tried to practice the circle as I had learned from my RJE mentors, Dorothy Vaandering and David Martino, as an approach to build relationships, respect and responsibility with others, curriculum and pedagogy. I followed the formal circle model, so before starting I put some writing materials in the centre of the circle for all to gain access and placed the circle guideline at the center of the circle. When everything needed for the circle was in place, I began by passing around a piece of paper for them to make name tags for identification purposes because knowing the students’ names was important to me, as I also wanted them to know me and my identity (a process I started to build before the study began during my familiarity visits). I watched for reactions as I progressed, some of them responded and some were staring at me as if it were not important.

After this, I moved to the next stage on the lesson plan, which was setting the class guideline along with the circle guideline that was already in the center of the circle for all to see. This was an attempt to create a safe place for all, so I invited them to pick the paper and markers

placed in the center of the circle to write response to a the following question: “What do I need from others to be my best?” that is one thing (word) that would make them feel safe working with others in the class. It was not easy for them to reach the center of the circle because the desks arranged in circle which were blocking the passage so Mr. Patrick helped to get them the materials and some wrote, but not all. I gathered all the written phrases, (friendly, unbiased, kind, patience approachable, love, quiet and care space, communicate, building positive relationship, respectful, open-mindedness, and empathy) and I added these to the one that had been placed on the class wall before the study (titled “*classroom*” with rules for the class, e.g., be prepared, always give your best effort, dress properly, be quiet when others are speaking, respect others and property, and submit work on time) which was made without the input of the students. The additional instruction was necessary to respect and get them more committed to the guidelines.

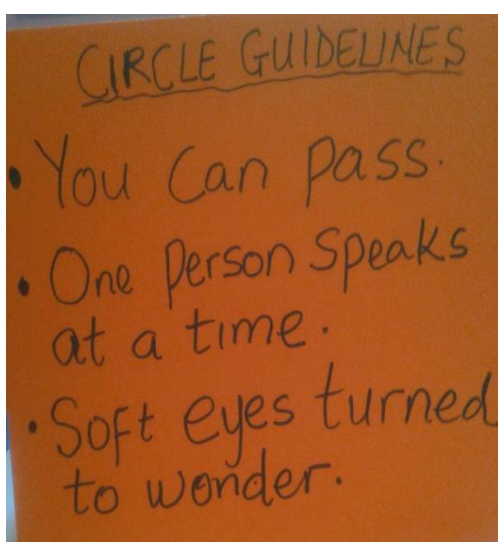


Figure 4.4: Samples of the Circle and Class Guidelines

There were unpleasant reactions like strange looks and reluctance to respond to the setting of guidelines and the use of the talking piece which made me decide to clarify the importance. I told Mr. Patrick that:

The essence of the guideline, “like soft eyes turned to wonder” is for participants to learn that when somebody is talking, there is reason why that person is saying something, whether it is right or wrong. This emphasizes the need to show empathy when anyone says something wrong because there could be a reason for a response such as laughing. That's why I am thinking this LC could help, give them re-orientation about the way to think and feel and just be themselves.

Setting guidelines is a good way to deal with emotional issues that might arise in the circle so that everyone will feel free and safe. Despite the strange and unpleasant reactions of the teacher and students about this new and different approach to teaching, I still emphasized what I know and offered to teach the students about the LC again for them to have a deeper understanding but the only constraint I had was time. The class schedule was so tight that I had only limited time to explain to the students. How I wish I had a more convenient amount of time but I was able to start somewhere and presented another PowerPoint as the backup to the initial one to re-emphasize the relevance of the LC and its components

The initial excitement I saw in the students when Mr. Patrick was facilitating the check-in earlier faded for many of the students as I was introducing the LC basics. I could tell by their expressions that they were either not getting my explanation or not interested. Some of them were looking down, others were laughing and there were side talks. It took a lot of courage for me to integrate the LC into this traditional science class in high school; it is tough. I was feeling resistance; it felt like I was spending a long time on the introduction, but I did not give up, I continued. I told them that the tradition in an RJ LC is usually a check in/up/out designed mainly for social interaction and emotional expression in the class through reflection. The check-in is for opening the circle, the check-up is at the middle to check for any concern about the main activity

and the check-out is at the to ask what to take home from the circle (see appendix 2). Before starting to the curriculum discussion, I carried out a balloon activity, passing them a balloon each and asking them to inflate it. As soon as they inflated it I noticed that happy birthday was written on the balloon, I immediately felt bad (I wanted it to be plain. What a mistake! I blamed myself) but there was nothing I could do as I had already given them out, so I let it be and watched for reactions.

Many of them were excited about the activity, not knowing the inscription was a mistake. To them it was fun, as they were carried away playing. To me I felt the class became boisterous, loud and noisy as some of them were throwing balloons to each other. This made me uncomfortable and I noticed that other teachers with me were also displeased at the disorganization. Oh! It did not turn out as planned (I thought, I could demonstrate with balloons how to breathe life into the curriculum by reflecting on the topic of discussion which was the next on agenda). I learned a lesson here that what worked for an adult class in a higher institution may not work with youth in high school. The balloons were collected and kept in a corner for the class to resume work. I then explained to them that the activity was to demonstrate how their participation, talking and sharing life experience (story) can make a difference and add meaning to the curriculum content, for them to get deeper understanding, as the deflated balloon was inflated. After the preamble, I moved to the curriculum discussion “the extreme weather.”

To introduce the topic, I asked them to; write a 5 minute description of an extreme weather event. They were reluctant to take some paper but Mr. Patrick assisted me to pass the sheets of paper to them for writing. The responses gave me immediate feedback about their level of understanding, which is one of the reasons I prefer this /technique. At this juncture, I invited Stanley to teach the first two types of extreme weather, thunderstorms and tornadoes, floods and

droughts with the aid of diagrams and videos. When he was done I took over, grouping the students according to the remaining types of weather (*Hurricanes, Typhoons, and Tropical Cyclones, Blizzards, Extreme Heat and Cold, El Niño and Le Niña*) to prepare and talk about for the next class.

Before the final close of the class that day, I conducted the check-out with the guiding question: “What is the one thing that you can take from the class today?” Then I passed the talking piece round the circle. The majority passed the talking piece on, including the teachers. Only a few students responded and the feedback was both good and bad, there was laughter, and one student said, “Tornados are dangerous” (FN p. 19). I understood that the teacher in the case study does not use circle for his class and the students don’t know it either, but I expected them to be open to the explanation I was making along with the introduction. I was touched by the negative reactions; what I thought would be embraced by many did not go as expected. This was similar to Mr. Patrick’s experience but I did not give up. However, I remember reading that “the problem of student resistance to critical pedagogy like the one I am introducing is the most fascinating interference and the one faced most often by the teacher experimenting with critical-democratic methods” (McLaren & Leonard, 1993, p.28). This is basically the result of certain methods or traditions they have been so used to; they find it difficult to change. Although discouraged, I summoned the courage to finish what I began as planned. Then I closed the session with appreciation for their participation, told them that I understand that the practice was new but assured them that the experience can always get better gradually as we progress. To my surprise, the closing remark I made was greeted with a round of applause by the students. This was insightful to me, despite some of the displeasure expressed during the LC activities.

At the end of the class I met Mr. Patrick (Stanley was also there) but I observed they

were displeased and appeared disappointed so I apologized especially for the balloon activity introduced with the aim of demonstrating how to breathe life into the curriculum content, which turned out to be a source of distraction for them, making the class a bit rowdy and noisy with side talks. I told him that I didn't mean to disorganize the class but I was only trying to explore to find the right activity that will work best with high school students. Mr. Patrick said: "I understand but then told me that we need to find time to prepare for the next class. He said: "I am not sure if the students got anything. There was poor classroom management and that needs to be addressed" (FN p.19). However, knowing that the poor classroom management was caused by many reasons after introducing the LC, I assured him that since all the necessary aspects of circle process have been introduced, the subsequent classes would run more smoothly. When reflecting on this experience, for me it is as though I have found an approach that I can use in to improve my traditional method of teaching, to enable social interaction and emotional expression of thoughts and feelings that are commonly reported as absent in science classes (Lyons, 2006). However, the greatest challenge so far can be attributed to lack of knowledge, because during the interview I found out that many do not know what to do. The participants therefore need to understand the basics of an RJ LC for it to be successful. This study makes me realise that passing the knowledge of RJE along to others demands understanding, patience and wisdom. Trying new ways of doing things can be problematic but there will always be a way to improve the experience.

Surprisingly, the next day, Mr. Patrick invited me through email with a subject titled "Dynamic Learning Circle (DLC)" and the writing was "I am about to start weather with my basic science group. If you're interested participating in a circle with these guys, please let me know? I have them period 1 but I think it's a good group to try circles." I attended with excited

and fresh hope. There were 10 students and three adults in attendance and the normal circle procedures were followed, facilitated by Mr. Patrick. Everything went well. The first round was used to ask the students to write about the reason there are four seasons and the second round was for them to share an extreme weather experience. The response from the students was encouraging and significant ideas emerged from the sharing, such that he rated the participation 90% (A100). For some reason, or the other he was able to do again what he stopped doing another because of students' failure to talk (FN p. 13). I began to wonder if different levels of classes or class size have an influence on the outcome of the LC. Regardless, Mr. Patrick's attempt proved that the students can talk if provision is made for necessary support. I was really impressed by the invitation and the new term that emerged "DLC": it registered a message when I least expected it. The displeasure and his remark about poor classroom management in the class the day before did not stop him from inviting me. I cannot quantify the healing this single act brought to me, despite all that happened in the previous class. I was almost giving up, but he proved to me that "we are broken within the context of relationships; and we are also healed within the scope of relationships" (Hilda Nadjiwan, 2008, cited in Vaandering, 2009, p. 285). The initiative taken by Mr. Patrick was a surprise and great support for my belief that a LC can be introduced into a traditional classroom successfully. This was actually a relational lesson that increased my momentum as I continued in this exploratory study.

4.5 The Learning Circle: Introduction and Complications

The normal practice in this regular class was for students to walk in, sit and listen to the teacher who usually stands in front teaching either from the course handout or worksheet. Most times, the teacher dominates the discussion, adding fun or a demonstration depending on the topic of discussion, but in the LC that was introduced, the students sit with the teacher in a circle

to discuss a curriculum topic or project, to reflect on their thoughts and feelings on or before the end of each class/topic using open-ended questions (Lewington, 2016). This is a practice done to promote critical thinking, self-reflection and problem solving by students. [The LC was also encouraged during the study].

The next time I taught was the afternoon of the invitation I got from Mr. Patrick. I prepared to co-teach, drafted an agenda and showed it to Mr. Patrick. He went through it carefully and emphasized the need to do things differently in terms of time and class management; he wanted the topic completed that day. I could sense his concern about timing and schedule, so I assured him that I was not going to waste time at all. He then came up to address the students on the need to follow the class rules and maintain decorum. I also support the idea; it is an important thing to do so to create a safe environment for all. RJE is not against discipline, as some think, but it must be done with respect and without violence and abuse. When he was done, I started the check-in with a mindfulness moment by playing a short piece of solemn music (less than 2 minutes) as they were settling down for the last period of the day that afternoon. This looked different but it was for a purpose of relaxation which I explained to them. The circle/class guidelines were read. The class guidelines were drawn from their previous writing on what they need from others to be their best. The remaining topic was shared between Stanley and me, taught using the class notes that Mr. Patrick prepared. I explained the following types of extreme weather namely Hurricanes, Typhoons, and Tropical Cyclones, Blizzards, Extreme Heat and Cold and Stanley completed the rest, El Niño and Le Niña. We made the teaching participatory by asking questions and some responded. I played a short video to share a live extreme weather experience that I had in 2017. I went shopping without knowing that a wind storm warning was

forecast. It was an experience I cannot forget, because I came to Canada in 2014. It made me value the importance of the weather forecast more than ever.

After sharing the life experience of weather, I joined the circle for check-up and reflection. We had three rounds, a question for each and there were responses accordingly. See table 4.1 below:

S/N	Question	Response
1	Share any life experience about extreme weather.	Some e extreme weather life experience include a hurricane experience 2years ago, power line catching fire, power outage, no buses etc.
2	What can you say about what you have heard from others?	Some said extreme weather is dangerous, it causes damage, and is inconvenient.
3	How will you protect yourself during extreme weather?	The responses include get shelter, stay at home, if power goes out, you have to unplug, stay away from power lines, stay warm, buy enough food for home, be prepared and if it is very bad call 911

Table 4.1: Questions and Responses for the LC Check-Up and Reflection.

When I pondered on the responses, although not all the students talked, the few that did made sense, showing that teaching and learning is organic and dynamic as life experiences were added to the existing curriculum. I closed the LC by thanking them for their responses and participation. They gave me another round of applause, like on the other day. Interesting! I think some of them are getting the new idea that I am introducing. I left the seat with a smile for Mr. Patrick to continue and he re-emphasized the six storms (extreme weather) discussed. He grouped them and asked them to highlight important points they will later share after studying either in a group or individually. The talking piece was still going round when the bell was rang for the students to leave and the class was over, so we could not finish the circle.

I observed that this class was more organized and the rate of participation improved. The way the students were responding as they passed the talking piece was insightful. It provided

more opportunity to share compared to when they have been asked at random, when students may not have wanted to raise their hands. Still, in comparison, I can see that a LC gives room for active listening, that is, participants listen attentively to the person talking. The time of speaking for one can be a time for processing information for the other. There is no judgment or competition but everyone complements each other. Conscious effort is made for students to talk. Also, sharing in the circle adds more action into the class than the transmissive approach, where the teacher usually dominates the talking and the students are passive listeners. It will be interesting to explore more ways of improving students' participation through the LC but after the weather topic, the LC, was not used so much again. Things became complicated because neither Mr. Patrick nor Stanley knew how to use LC for the next module which is mainly mathematical calculation and as the researcher I do not know much as about this aspect of mathematics. To model how a circle can be used to teach calculations only work if I have the idea. This was a concern. In fact in a discussion with Mr. Patrick, he asked: "Where can circle be appropriate in the next topic 'motion'. I am thinking that it might work with a topic like weather and ecology but may not be applicable to some topic such as calculations?" (FN p. 29). We reasoned together and concluded that a circle can be used for an introduction, a knowledge check, reviews, questions and feedback on what the students have learned on any topic. We agreed to meet before class to see where a circle could fit (FN p.27, 29). This reveals the need for knowledge and skill for the practice of the LC as I feel the story would have been different if I had been an expert in physics calculation.

Introducing a LC is a bit progressive in this case study with Mr. Patrick and his science class. Here is a teacher that stopped using circle after one attempt in his physics class last year because he failed. When sharing this experience with me, he said: "I was so nervous about it, and

to make things worse, when I passed the talking piece for the students to talk, all of them passed it along without talking. So since that experience, I stopped using it and only embraced the aspect of being human and being respectful to all” (FN p.13). This experience made him give up on using circle for teaching but he still embraces the philosophy by being humane and respectful to all. Therefore, for him to have allowed a LC in his class is commendable. This shows his openness to experimenting with new ways of teaching and a desire to develop knowledge and skills. However in this study, we had conflict with timing, curriculum and the nature of the subjects and as a result the LC was not used for all topics. There is pressure of work which also affected the use of a LC, because the curriculum must be covered (maybe thinking that LC will eat into the teaching time), so Mr. Patrick is always concerned, about time. Stanley once told me: “Mr. Patrick wanted me to cover a lot of material because he said we are behind schedule” (FN. p. 36, B112-114). This timing usually put pressure on me whenever I was facilitating a circle, but this would not have been the case if I were to be the one who decides timing. Everything would have been put under consideration.

Apart from timing, the conflict between the curriculum and the LC is another problem. When he was responding to my question whether he would continue to use the LC to teach the curriculum or not, he said: “Some curriculum really lends itself to discussion, topics like weather and ecology. I will equally use a circle throughout because they know and really have the idea of what to say.” (A8).

Furthermore, he explained that the LC is new to the students, therefore, “it’s really hard to share, and it’s difficult to share ideas, they are afraid to share insights. For example, if I get students to come and demonstrate physically the movement of motion, they embrace that idea

because they are connected, but I don't know if I will use a circle for physics next year.” It is clear then that he prefers using the demonstration method for teaching physics instead of the LC.

The student participants were not left behind in sharing their experiences. They embraced the introduction of the LC in various ways. I had little contact with them during class observation but the individual interviews were revealing. They afforded me the opportunity of hearing the students' perception, thinking and feelings. The three high school science student participants were a good match for this study under the following insightful themes which include hearing each other, the circle gives opportunity and the LC and challenges.

a. Hearing each other!

The experience of the students was explained by discussing the things that they liked best about the LC:

Elizabeth: “I do like the general arrangement part of it because you could hear the people talking which is nice; it's a little bit more interactive. So, the best thing about it (trying to clarify), it brings us close to each other” (C10, 42).

Justine: “Well, it is good, we've done it in elementary school before, we haven't done it here, I think it's good so we can hear each other's' opinions, to see if they are understanding or not. I think the best thing is to hear one's opinion to see how it's working on everyone's input on me”... (D6)

Becky: “Um... I'm more indifferent about it than anything else, um... I mean either/or, it's good in some aspect ...The best thing for me is actually “being able to hear the teacher” because I used to sit at the back of the class like right around this area over here (trying to show the area)

and it's fairly difficult to do that (i.e. to hear the teacher) in a row setting but otherwise..." (E9 & 85).

Although the students have different reactions concerning the LC, the best things about their responses clearly show that the LC arrangement helps them to hear others clearly than when sitting in rows. In fact one of the student that was indifferent about the LC also agreed of "being able to hear teacher." This is a way to prove the power of the LC, so the question we must ask ourselves is what happens if a student cannot hear the teacher? Apart from hearing well in the circle, the level of interaction increases and it brings students close to each other (connection). Also, the opinions of others are heard as input to one's ideas (confirming that two are better than one). Finally, when comparing the circle with previous learning experiences Becky said: "It's a lot easier to listen in a circle" (E45) and Elizabeth who had no prior circle experience said: "It's seems to be more interaction stuff; it's more open to participate... Uhm...personally I do learn properly when the teacher talks *with* us as opposed to *at* us, I could process stuff better" (C17, 20). The LC is quite different from other learning experiences of the student participants and the ideas shared are enough to encourage its implementation for the good of all.

b. Circle gives opportunity

The circle arrangement made more sense to the students compared to the traditional row setting for many reasons. .

Elizabeth: "The LC... It's kind of a little bit nicer, it's a lot like less imposing, you can just volunteer, like you can choose what you say, you can hear what the teacher is saying, it a lot like being near your friends which is nice and it's easier to turn around, so, I do like it better... you

don't have to turn around just like this (demonstrating), it's like turn your head which is good.” (C71, 75, & 78).

Becky: “um....I'm not sure because the traditional way feels here more formal but this sitting (circle) feels easier to learn, I guess the circle is fine”(E93).

Justine: “The LC. Uhm., I enjoy it more. It gives me a chance to process things and it gives me a chance to actually talk to my teacher and classmates. I get to know their opinion on like topics or if they don't know something, oh you say like I know that other people don't know it either... Then if you are sitting in a line (row), and we only raise our hands if we knew the question, we don't actually get chance to learn anything like as well” (D53, 55 & 57).

The physical circle is preferred for taking science for these students compared to the traditional method because of the various opportunities it gives. According to the students, the LC practice is invitational not enforced, allows choice and freedom of self-expression. The circle sitting is more convenient for discussing among friends and others without having to turn the neck in an effort to see those behind. More importantly, students are able to process of information.

c. The LC and challenges

This analysis would not be complete without mentioning the hardest thing about the LC. When the students were asked about things they dislike about it, their responses were as follows:

Elizabeth: “I don't know there is nothing really much I don't like” (C12)

Justine: “I think the hardest thing may be if like you don't like to speak in front of people and you have that sort of fear or shy to speak” (D6).

Becky: “Um... I'm more indifferent about it than anything else, um... I mean either/or, it's good in some aspect but it's still childish in lots of ways like I have not sat in circles since I was in second grade,...passing talking piece and for been told what to do, ...the nature of circle...nature of compulsion” (E9,11, 27, & 35).

The important thing to reflect on concerning the hardest thing about a LC for a student is fear/shyness to speak in front of others. For another it's a feeling of indifference, thinking it is a project and that that it is childish, because being told what to do is like making it compulsory. All the points are critical and called my attention to what knowledge was lacking about the LC which needs to be addressed. The RJ philosophy is clear about promoting equality, equity and sharing of power without dominating or controlling others. Participation in LC is voluntary and invitational. So, during the interview when I tried to help the students understand the process and why we do what we do in the circle (see the next chapter), I also tried to address Becky's concern about it feeling childish. The main aim, I explained, is to encourage social interaction, connect people from self to others, and share the emotional expression of thoughts and feelings through critical reflection when learning curriculum contents.

The following study table is drawn to give an overview description about the period when the LC was used in the science class and when it was not.

Week	Day/Time	Topic	Class Description Circle /No circle	Remark
1	Feb 5/Mon/Day 5 (8.55-9.55)		Mid-term Exam conclusion	Arrangement of class desks into circle –Bukola & Mr. Patrick
	6/Tues/Day 6 (11.05-12.05)	Extreme weather	Circle (check- in/up/out).Mr. Patrick, Bukola &Stanley	17 students present, mixed reactions, only a few responded and the class was a bit disorganized
	7/Wed/Day 7	Extreme	Circle	The class was more orderly

	(2-3)	weather		and responses improved.
	9/Fri/Day 2 (10-11)	Review	No circle	Review of mid-term exam questions, 23 students present.
2	Feb 12/ Mon/Day 3 (1-2)	Review completed	Circle (only check-up) Mr. Patrick	Teaching was mostly transmission and boring. 22 students present.
	13/Tues/Day 4 (3-4)		Mr. Patrick, Stanley & Bukola	Planning
	14/Wed/Day 5 (8.55-9.55)	Motion (Significant figure)	A quick check-in Bukola	27 students present
	15/Thurs/day 6 (11.02-12.05)		No class	Memorial service –Ocean Ranger, 1982 disaster that claimed 84 lives including 5 PUHS graduates
3	Feb 20/Tues/day 7	2-3	Check-in Mr. Patrick	The class attended a short chemistry practical conducted by university students; check-up by going round during Physics calculation and 22 students were present.
	22/Thurs/Day 2	10-11	No Circle	Teaching was transmission & demonstration. 18 students present,
	23/Fri/Day 3	1-2	No circle	I made definitions' PPT for use of safe time. 19 students present. I took tour round the school to the library, gym, cafeteria, drama room
4	Feb 26/Mon/Day 4	12.05-2.04	Individual interview	Elizabeth, Stanley & Mr. Patrick were interviewed.
4	Feb. 27/Tues/Day 5	8.55-9.55	No School	Weather school closure
	28/Wed/Day6	11.05-12.05	Last circle check-in /interview/ focus group	25 students were present. Final PPT presentation to emphasize LC basics. Justine and Becky were interviewed individually and Elizabeth later joined the two for focus group.

Table 4.2: Description of Study Schedule

There is something significant about the table above, apart from the fact that it gives the general overview of what happened in the classroom. It is interesting that the study also captured the interactions that occurred outside the classroom environment. The ‘Memorial service –Ocean Ranger’, the 1982 disaster that claimed 84 lives including 5 PUHS graduates marked a whole school relational experience for me. I cannot imagine how everyone in attendance forgot their differences by entering the church to remember the deceased, of 36 years ago. I remembered shedding tears (after much effort to control my emotion) when I sat beside Mr. Patrick as I listened to the account of the incident. The event made the disaster so real (similar to the paper clip project carried out for the 6 million Jews who were the victims of the Holocaust) and I sincerely felt for the families and friends of those I do not know. Sitting in the Church with people from different backgrounds reminded me of where my story of relationship “single and satisfied” that I shared in chapter began. This was a remarkable and memorable experience which made me see relationship differently and the commitment of the ‘PUHS’ community including the staff, students and parents. This scenario reminds me that learning is not limited to the classroom.

At another time, Mr. Patrick, the students and I had to leave class for the laboratory to watch a chemistry practicum conducted for a university study. The room that all of us went in, close to 20 people, will surprise you. The practicum had to be carried out in a dark enclosure and with this understanding; we all managed to fit into the small room learning together, teacher and student, no different. I could not see the practical well so I asked a student that recorded the video to send it to me and she did. What a lesson of teacher and students learning together! Before leaving this section, I would like to also mention the tour I made around the school as

part of my exploration. I did not want my movement during the study to be limited to the main office, Science 1206 class, the staff lounge and the library, so I moved round to see the gym, cafeteria and drama room. I saw many motivational and relational quotations everywhere I went but this particular one in the cafeteria caught my attention and I took a picture to remember it (FN. p. 40). It was:

“In your careers, you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say hello”- Joann C. Jones

What a lesson to ruminate on, that ‘Everyone I met is significant!’ The people around are as important as I am, to be respected, honoured, shown mutual-concern and valued with dignity. The LC introduction and complications opened my eyes as a beginner in the field to things that only reading cannot accomplish. It made the word “change” to stand out afresh on my mind and I agree that change does not just happen. However, the challenges encountered in the study are not to stop the practice but they are stepping stones that open doors to new inventions and transformation.

4.6 The Picture of a Class without the Learning Circle

Before commencing on the new module on ‘motion’, the physics aspect of the science subject, a period and a half was used to review the mid-term examinations. The transmission method was used; students sat in rows and the class was not participatory. The teacher was the only one talking, writing on the board, asking if the students had questions. There were none and many students were engaged in other things. Some asked permission to go out, either for a snack or to use the washroom. Others were talking, playing with phones, and a few were looking at the board. When he turned back and saw those students playing with their phones then made a

comment: “I know the exercise looked a little boring but it is necessary for you to note” and told me also after the class he said that it was boring (FN. p. 25, 26). He was so exhausted with doing all the talking. I was thinking he could have used the circle to engage the students, maybe I would have told him to divide the students to smaller group for the revision then ask them to come up with unresolved questions for general class discussion but I was a bit careful not to be too forward. The transmissive method of teaching is neither the best for the teacher or for the students. He later gave permission for discussion and they were glad to do so. The discussion made a lot of difference, breaking the long silence of the student. This was instructive that teachers need to be sensitive to the needs of the students and try other ways of teaching that will keep the students engaged.

We eventually had the meeting that Mr. Patrick called for after the first class of introduction of the LC. At the meeting we deliberated on how our different missions as intern and researcher could be incorporated into the teaching of the new module on motion starting in the next class. Since we were all aware of the topic beforehand, he asked for our plans. We both had different plans, Stanley wanted to learn the methodology for teaching the curriculum and I wanted see how a LC would affect a classroom teacher and students. I showed them my plan, which was to open the class with a check-in focusing on significant figure. I ask them to pick a figure (1-10) that best describes their preparedness for the class. Then I cross-check the answers they have provided on the worksheet which they already have on the topic as a way of checking their understanding. However, Mr. Patrick said: “Based on their inability to answer the question I asked them in the previous class, it is better to teach them the basics before such cross-checking can work” (FN. p. 32). I agreed with his opinion and we moved on to Stanley who said he would continue from where he stopped on the topic in the last class and Mr. Patrick told him: “There is

a need for you to show some examples as explanation for the basics before starting the worksheet” (FN. p. 32). Stanley later told us he will also introduce certain games (grouping) for Physics calculation on the worksheet and I suggested that a circle can be used for an activity on distance and time, as a check-in/out. The planning was enlightening as we were able to learn from one another what will work for the class. Although physics is not my area of expertise, I am convinced that it can be used for introducing the topic, follow up, feedback, and review. It was difficult to convince them. I know that a circle can be used for physics calculations but they have their preferences. I am still exploring, I will watch for other opportunity to still use the LC for calculations- Physics and Mathematics. It is all a matter of knowledge and skill.

Despite the concrete plans made to continue to integrate the LC for the new topic, motion (the physics aspect of the science), not much could be done because this was not my area of expertise, so I became an observer, patiently watching for an opportunity to intervene while thinking of how to discuss with experts in the field for advice. During this period the preferred methods were mainly transmission and demonstration with an occasional check-in/up. I observed gender imbalance in the use of fun and the demonstration method. Mr. Patrick usually makes use of males more than females, disadvantaging the girls. I think this should have been a thing of concern that should have made him try a pedagogy that is gender friendly. There is something special about the circle in a LC. It can easily complement other methodologies with the use of the framework question for reflection to accommodate the sharing real life examples to support curriculum content. There was such a scenario within the circle arrangement when Mr. Patrick asked a male student to step forward a in certain direction during the discussion on scalar and vector, and others were asked how they would locate the young/boy. This brought many suggestions from the students because it was a real life example. After this, another male student

was asked to smell his sock in order to explain the difference between qualitative and quantitative. That class was the liveliest class that I experienced because the students' opinion was invited and it was really engaging, with different ideas relating to their context apart from those in the textbook emerging. Also, I observed a change in the classroom atmosphere. As more students participated, there was active listening and the level of interaction between the teacher and the students increased. Although the teacher did not see all that took place as a LC, I called it circle demonstration activity, or an energizer in the language of the restorative justice circle, because it took place in the circle. It would have taken the same format if the teacher had addressed it as a LC because the class would have been more organized to give all chance instead of the few that actively participated. This way, the teacher was working *with* students by involving them in the demonstration to get them talking and it worked like magic. I made a comment on this experience and I noted the response that I got from the science teacher, Mr. Patrick.

Me: It made it to be real, describing qualitative and quantitative, with that experience, they should be able to remember without memorizing, I love it.

Teacher: Yeah, making it real, “like that wasn't a physical circle, but I think it had the spirit.”



Figure 4.5: Picture of Teacher Teaching with Students Seated in the Circle

The spirit of the circle in a traditional setting where the demonstration took place was insightful. The spirit of the circle indeed, that reminds me of Black Eld's quote cited in Chapter 1. There is a power that connects in the circle. The circle sitting arrangement has its impact in a traditional classroom. I think this is evidence that the LC can be used for any part of the curriculum; it is a matter of skill and experience.

4.7 Dynamic Learning Circle: Teacher and Student in Equal Partnership

This is a challenging aspect of RJ for many teachers. It has to do with the idea of sharing power, control and responsibility. This is an aspect that I find challenging in this study for both teachers and students. Some teachers find it difficult to let go of power and control and the students have been so conditioned to be teacher dependent. We talk so much about students taking ownership and an active role in their own education. This cannot happen until and unless we as their teachers to give the students more of this responsibility through training and support. Hopkins (2011) offers ways of doing this in her book, *'Restorative Classroom'*, which treats the LC in high school differently from the "Circle Time" in the elementary grades (p. 50). This study reveals that the teachers, including me and the students are moving towards this experience. The teaching philosophy of Mr. Patrick reflects it. He said:

I believe students should be taking responsibility for their own success and failures. As teachers, we have to facilitate this transition of students being dependent on the teacher for academic results and behaviours to independent and intrinsically motivated learners. In my experience this is a challenging goal but an essential one. (See Appendix 3)

As a researcher, I thought I knew what this meant in terms of relationship, respect and responsibility but it was not until I was engaged in a discussion with my supervisor that I

discovered I was missing it. She directed my attention to the relationship matrix by explaining what and how to work *with* students compared to working *for/to* and not working at all. She also explained how the use of RJ framework question can help me to work with others, including the students (see details in chapter five).

The students seem to have the idea of equal partnership which they expressed during the interview. For instance, Elizabeth when comparing the experience of a teacher talking with that of LC that encourages, teachers and students talking and sharing ideas, she said: “Ahm... personally I do learn properly when the teacher talks *with* us as opposed to *at* us, I could process stuff better instead of talking *at* us” (C20). She used a relationship term “with” us which describes an equal partnership in the relationship matrix as discussed by Vaandering (2014) and Wadhwa (2016). Students having time to process information is another way students are able to identify with equal partnership in the class. Justine said: “I [think] here (the LC) we get to process the information more and then do the questions” (D50). I agree as part of covering the curriculum. I also noticed something peculiar with all the three student participants. They had the desire to learn and talk compared to other students for whom the students show concern. They were so open during the focus group; it sounded like they were getting the main idea of LC. The reasons for their participation were revealing. It went beyond the present into the future during the focus group discussion (F12-14):

Becky: “The main reason why I have interest is to have support for you because I know how it feels not to get much response and I actually have general interest about how could this affect our learning experience”.

Justine: “Yeah, it's really interesting especially since it could affect the future of our learning and it has to start from somewhere with some students and if you don't get the input of the students it will really matter because you don't know what they are thinking”

Becky: “Making history for us, I think [it's] better”.

When I was pondering the level of discussion shared above, I see the power of connection in the LC, a connecting tool, as Hopkins (2011) rightly puts it. The way these students were able to express themselves freely, demonstrates that having teachers and students in an equal partnership is a possibility. It is important for teachers to know what the students are thinking and feeling in order to be of help. I wish to connect with others, teachers, students, curriculum and pedagogy but this is not the same with everyone. This was the same connection I was expecting from all the grade 10 students, but for one reason or the other it was difficult to connect with them all. I thought it was our cultural differences. I cannot imagine how my students in Nigeria would have embraced pedagogy that liberates students when they have been invited to share their ideas and opinions. I am sure the story would have been different because we are used to a community lifestyle that appreciates relationships and respect so much. I remember how much we related with a white lady who came on vacation to my school in the '80s. The relationship we built during her short stay lives on. I can still remember her and her song: “Life can change at any time, it's not like a bed of roses ...everything is for a while oh my friend.” Therefore, I am glad to have a connecting tool that can help me make that equal partnership happen with my students but this is really challenging when the students are not ready.

This brought to mind an incident that happened on the last day of my study. I was trying to share the idea of how RJ framework questions could guide students in their reflection. I handed a copy to students and two of them sitting outside the circle at the back threw it away almost immediately just because they were not interested (FN p. 44). I was disappointed but controlled my emotion knowing it is one of those things to expect from those who feel they are already okay with what they have. Relationship is never a thing of concern to them; they don't seem to care about how actions may affect others. This reminds me of chaos theory, cited in Circle Forward (Boyes-Watson & Kay, 2014) to prove the interconnectedness of the world.

When a butterfly flaps its wings in south America, the winds changes in north America, we may not always be aware of the impact of our actions on our environment but we must eventually realize that our actions have consequences. (p. 11).

It will be great if people can understand the theory of interconnectedness and how it works. Many people including students have been so conditioned to a certain tradition that to change is a problem. For instance, the students develop “authority dependence” in the traditional classroom in a way that is matched by the authority dependence of the teacher who follows the traditional syllabus and resists democratic transformation (McLaren & Leonard, 1993). This way, the students are made to become passive listeners, relying on teachers to tell them what to do and what things mean, so any attempt to change this system of education by making them co-develop the class as equal partners makes the student doubt that this is ‘real education’ (p. 29). The method they are used to is termed real education. Talking about equal partnership is an idea that many teachers and students are struggling with and it is not as though I am an expert too. It is a work in progress. The study is just the beginning of the journey for me so I am not expecting any magic to happen. The change is gradual, a step at a time which demands passion, patience

and adjustment. I have a part to play and it is therefore my responsibility to let go the power of being the authority figure by embracing cooperative, collaborative and problem-solving skills in students. By so doing, I should create as many opportunities as possible for them to achieve this. Hopkins (2011) has written extensively on how to navigate through this new way of teaching.

4.8 Shifts in Thoughts and Feelings about the Learning Circle

There are certain shifts in thoughts and feelings about how teaching and learning is done and the appropriate settings for this. Despite the professional training received a year before this study, Mr. Patrick was initially sceptical having the problem of time constraints and physical setting of the classroom but now he confessed that,

Ehhh.. this has opened my mind a little bit, I will probably consider it because it does fit my personality because I do believe in students and myself working together, not a class where there are fusses going on. So I do think it fits me, so I am going to continue trying it. I can't say it's going to be consistent every day but I think in my basic course, and in my weather and ecology in Science, I will probably do it periodically. (A37)

There is something unique about the LC which is unknown to many that I want to mention here and this is the reason it should not be limited to a certain subject/topic. The LC is dynamic, not static or fixed, but open to changes that are not predetermined. Although, the teacher or facilitator may go to class with a lesson plan, most times new ideas, different from the original plan, emerge during the course of discussions and interactions. This is the reason why I use the word 'dynamic' to describe the LC, referring to teaching and learning as an organic process with various possibilities. The teacher intern who was experiencing a circle for the first time said something worth noting when describing his experience of the LC compared with the traditional method. "I think with the traditional setting the teacher is doing all the talking, the teacher is

telling what everything is, doing problems for them but the major shift with the LC is that the kids get to be more involved with the lesson. With the traditional setting you are not sure if the students know the content or not, but with the LC you really get to know if the students know the content or not” (B80). The sole fact that students get to be more involved with the lesson which will eventually result in knowing whether they understand or not, requires a rethinking about the way we do teaching. As Wadhwa (2016) identifies, learning ought to be a joint effort of the teacher and the students.

The interview revealed more about the student participants’ personalities which is very important for my practice. Students are never the same in thinking, feeling and interaction. I conducted interviews with the three students. The following Table 4 demonstrates the student participants’ initial and later reactions to the introduction of the LC into their science classroom.

Name	Initial	Later
Elizabeth	Sceptical but didn’t hate it/Nervous not knowing how it will work out.	Better/liked it
Justine	Memorable experience with reference to elementary/ cool.	Better than sitting in row/cool
Becky	A little strange to be put in circle/a bit uncomfortable because it was new.	Pretty positive, different from that of primary grade/now comfortable

Table 4.3: Student Participants’ Reactions to the Introduction of the LC

The different reactions are as positive as can be expected of any new thing introduced to an existing system. No doubt there are genuine reasons for all the emotions expressed. Justine and Becky did circles in primary/elementary school, but Elizabeth was experiencing circle practice for the first time in her school life. When the student participants were asked individually about their initial thoughts when the LC started, they responded:

Elizabeth: “Hum, I was a little freaked out because I wasn't used to it, I was sceptical, I didn't hate it. I do kind of prefer that kind of arrangement to that of rows” (C29).

Justine: “It was cool; I enjoyed it a lot more” (D34).

Becky: “Hum, I saw it was a little strange... [Laughing]... That auhm like well people still do this, like I said, ah...ah...no offence; like, we'll be put in a circle and told to be quiet like statues. I totally understand be quiet, respect others but I just feel like a child” (E52& 56).

I discovered here that Justine was more excited about the LC than Becky, who also had a similar circle experience in primary school. Justine recalls a memorable experience in her elementary grades that left a lasting impact that she brought into the study, making her different from other participants. She tried to describe the circle experience, saying: “We did it in elementary, in my grade 6 and grade 3. We had a talking piece and we went around the class. We never had classes like this; they are like before/after lunch” (D22). The experience was not the same with Becky who felt it was childish because she had it last in primary school when she was a child [thinking it was meant to be for children and not grown-ups like her already in high school]. I understand her feeling but she needs to know that the LC is more than just a circle. Hopkins (2011) notes that it is not just “circle time”, which implies that it is not just a child's plan, as Becky was thinking. Unlike the circle time, the LC provides a “fantastic way to develop the leadership skills of young people and other skills they will need to work better on academic topics” (p.50). There is work for all to do; therefore the responsibility is always shared between the teacher and the students and not only the teacher. However, she advised:

In secondary (high) schools, students may prefer that you call these occasions ‘circle meeting or sessions’ so as to get away from associations of ‘carpet time’ or ‘circle

time' in their primary elementary) schools, during which they would sit in circles and maybe pass a soft toy around as a talking piece. (p.50)

This idea supports use of a 'dynamic LC' that emerged as a result of this present study for teaching high school students and beyond. We need to bear in mind that it has to be done in a way that is respectful and inclusive, developing the students' sense of accountability and responsibility.

4.9 Insightful Ending

The purpose of focus group was mainly to clarify all that had been discussed during individual interviews with the student participants; I used the same interview questions to gather data that could help to inform my study, during interaction, bearing in mind that: "People often need to listen to others' opinions and understandings to form their own" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 114). This interaction often leads to a richer understanding of what is being studied. During the focus group some other interesting themes emerged in support of pedagogy for example, that the RJ LC will encourage teachers or educators as adults to show respect for the voices of students. I think it will be good to share a conversation that may make some people challenge our present practice among teenagers in high school.

Becky: "Do you know who keeps the circle when you are gone or we are gonna be in the rows again? (F16)"

Bukola: "No, I don't. It all depends on the teacher, if the teacher feels it's something that is good, if the students like it, yes it will continue. Though, I've come to encourage it, but I can't enforce it. I am not enforcing it, you know, just studying it to see how it works. At least so far for the

month I've been here, I've been able to hear from the teacher, I've been able to hear from you. I think it's a good thing to continue. I would love it to continue (F17)”

Justine: “I think in my own opinion, not a lot of people try to get the input, especially with the younger kids, they don't think they understand, they don't know what they are talking about until they are older but it's cool to actually get their point of view, they do know stuff, they [adults] just need to learn to give them a chance (F18)”

Also, here is another insightful question was asked by the same student which kept me thinking about my practice as a teacher and how it affects others especially my students.

Becky: “Question, is this only for science classes or you gonna do it for other classes? (F20)”

Janet: “That's a good question (F21)”.

One surprising thing about these questions was that the two were raised by a student who seemed to be indifferent about the LC initially. I infer that the questions must have been driven by the impact of the study on her in some way.

Furthermore, based on my interaction with the students during the interviews and the focus group in particular, in addition to regular academic activities in schools like the research indicated, high school students are more likely to welcome a pedagogy that will give attention to their social and emotional concerns (Riesenberg, 2012; Bintliff, 2011; Wadhwa; 2015). I will also expound more on the following themes as relating to the students in the next chapter. These include the students' attitude to research participation, the voices of high school students (teenagers) relating things they want to communicate to adults who care to know, identifying and accommodating students' needs such as using a new learning style and handling learning disabilities and mental health issues.

4.10 Students Don't Talk

This was the impression I was given about the students before the study, as discussed in chapter 3 during my familiarization visit. To some extent this is true; students don't talk. They try hard to steer away from things that will get them into talking, especially in the classroom, I think because of the way it is structured. But on the other hand, students talk. I was surprised by how much the students discussed issues freely with me during the focus group discussion. It occurred to me that students can actually talk if the environment permits it. They are open to learning and they are worried about others' unwillingness to talk and interact in class. It seems that something should be done to change it. This has become a thing of concern to many. For example my peer in the graduate program was sharing that the school system does much to teach listening and writing but not so much to train students to talk, participating in classroom discussions.

I was curious to find out when the issue of students not wanting to talk starts, so I asked my children in grade 5 and 7 (elementary and junior high respectively). I was shocked at the answer I got. They said they hardly ask questions because if they do it will look as if they are interrupting and the teacher will not like it. The school system which impedes learning actually made the students feel/ behave that way. Schooling, no doubt, "bestows on educators oppressive power and authority while students are given almost none, resulting in a systemically violent culture which impedes learning by being unresponsive to students and the diversity among students" (Epp & Watkinson, 1997, p. 4, 6). I wonder what our school system is doing to our children, the students! What do we call this if not oppression? Why should students be afraid of asking a question? Is this not destroying students' curiosity and inquisitiveness? If the students are not free to ask their teacher questions in the classroom, whom then will they ask? I think we

are missing something critical here that needs to be addressed in order to end all actions that jeopardize the teaching we are doing. Any practice that prevents students from talking and expressing themselves calls for a re-think. System violence is all over our schools today I think that it is an important thing to stop what will prevent students from learning.

In the making of a good teacher, an important quality critical to this discourse is described by Jenkins (2016), a leadership coach and English professor, as being a “professional without being aloof” (p. 1). Although this focuses on higher education, it is also relevant to the present discussion that has to do with an equal partnership between teacher and students. This usually involves setting some boundaries but it should not be at the expense of the students. Teachers are encouraged to effortlessly walk that line between being an authority figure and being someone students can talk to” (Jenkins, 2016). The focus group revealed reasons for students not talking. Similarly, I decided to ask the student participants why students do not like to participate in research. The response is documented in the following dialogue:

Justine: “I guess because they don’t have interest. For privacy and everything about teenager is different (F4, 10)”

Becky: “They find it boring, they don't see any purpose in going into it, they are not skipping a class, and they are not getting paid (F5)”

Elizabeth: “People may not do it because of anxiety. It depends on their personality. Everyone has a different personality” (F9, 11).

The rate at which the student participants discussed issues with me freely was amazing. I learned so much from them. How I wish they were this free with me during my class observation. I think my purpose to hear from students was accomplished. They asked if the LC would continue after my departure and also if it will be introduced to other classes. They talked

about prescribing it for their English class. I have taken time to report the feelings and thoughts about the LC earlier, but some other interesting themes emerged which I want to share, these are things the teenagers (high school students) want adults or teachers to know about them. When talking about feelings and thoughts about the circle, this conversation ((F47-55) was touching and I think it challenges us as adults to look into the ways we do thing with these young ones.

Becky: “At first, I thought it was a little childish as I said before, uhm... because like most of us haven't done it since elementary school, like sitting in the circle and sharing our feelings and thoughts”.

Justine: “Yeah, they stopped doing it at a certain age. At a certain age they don't care about our opinions, they don't care how we feel; they are just like you've got to learn this, make sure you remember it”.

Becky: “Like from the fifth grade”.

Elizabeth: “I’ve tried to say this earlier; no one cares about teenagers’ feelings [this is not even the case with younger kids]. They only care about our feelings once [we] reach [adult] age. It’s like we (teenagers) are desensitized (without feeling).”

Jennifer: “Yea...even now, all of us know politics, like whenever you say something about politics, they say you are too young, you don’t understand, you don’t have idea. If anything, it’s just like we are the most affected”.

Elizabeth: “Absolutely, we are the most affected by these changes because we are growing up in this age. We are going through a lot of intimidation without thinking of changes applied

Justine: “They don’t want to hear what we have to say”.

Becky: “And speaking of those darn teenagers, being rebellious” (54)

Justine: “But again, we are just a small group, those stereotypes are bad. Most adults look down on teenagers, we don’t understand why. Obviously you have seen our class (referring to me). There are a few people who get in trouble, who don’t pay attention, but most of us aren’t like that, yet they don’t give us a chance. Like this is something in the gym. Even in gym, not here but down at the YMCA you cannot get a membership, it goes from age 10 and then you are not given one till you are 18 without the parent’s approval. There are no classes for teenagers at all”.

After listening and pondering on these conversations, I can see that a lot is going on in the lives of these teenagers which is bottled up. They want their parents, teachers and every adult in their lives to know but none pay attention or show concern. Everyone seems to be busy with other things. The teachers are more concerned about curriculum content than the students, forgetting that the curriculum was made for the students and not the students for the curriculum. Hence, the interest of the students ought to be the priority. Quality time ought to be created to hear from them and the LC is specifically made to bridge this gap in order to connect the teacher and students. They desire the opportunity for emotional expression. I asked a question.,

Bukola: “Do you think it is important to add emotion into teaching in science class, especially maybe thinking, the way you think because you were talking about nobody caring about your feelings, ...about your thinking, do you think it's an ideal thing to introduce something like this that could give a chance to show how you think and feel so that it is not just that they are imposing things on you?” (F66) They all chorused, “Yeah!!!” (F67). Then the dialogue continued as follows (F 68-74):

Elizabeth: “(Expressing ourselves) shouldn’t be forced, because a lot of people don't want to share what they remember, it will feel forced.”

Others: “Yeah”

Becky: “But there is something like sharing. On teachers then, is like we are often getting information literally through adults, it’s like learn this, learn this...”

Elizabeth: “They just talk *at* us rather than *with* us”

Becky: “Yes exactly”.

Justine: “Yes, that’s what I was thinking in mind as teachers are just pushing information at us and expects us to know it and if we don't know it, they get mad at us; our parents get mad at us saying you need to study this, you need to memorize this, and it’s all memorization”.

They also want the school system to identify and meet their learning/special needs such as differential learning and learning disabilities, by making provision for visual and auditory receptor learners, and mental health issues (F 75, 77-78).

Elizabeth: “They have to take into account learning disability. Like in general, visual auditory learners, like in general take into account all that, there is no one teaching style that works perfectly for all but they have to talk to kids to figure the best”.

Justine: ”Yeah, I really think that's a big thing too because I don't think they talk about talk mental illness and sometimes if you have anxiety like social anxiety, having to go to speak before the class is so terrifying, you can't do it but then you can't get out of it you just have to do it. And what happens if you say you have depression and you don't want to come to school that day, you can barely get out of bed that day, yet you are expected to come in and do all these things, memorize everything, that you can barely even get a shower and get out of bed, they don't want to take that into account either. I'm not really sure”.

These dialogues are instructive for teachers and educators. Teaching is not just about curriculum content. If provision is made for social interaction and emotional expression, a lot of ideas and topics of interest to students will be constructed or emerge which will affect the

learning outcome of the curriculum. The experiences shared here made it feel as if the students are enduring schooling rather than enjoying it. This calls for a re-think about our approaches to teaching guiding against imbalances and all forms of intimidation that tend to silence students and trying new ways of doing teaching.

4.12 Impact of the Learning Circle on Research Participants

This section describes a shift from the original research questions, which was to explore the “impact of the LC on teaching and learning outcome.” As I got involved in the study, I discovered that exploring teaching and learning outcomes would need more time. Be that as it may, the present study did uncover some remarkable impact of LC on the participants as expressed by them and shown in Table 4.4. Thus a question that was more suited to this study became: What is the impact of introducing the LC on the teacher and students?

Participants	Impact of LC	Researcher's Reflection
Mr. Patrick	<p>...This (study) has opened my mind a little bit; I will probably consider it because it does fit my personality...so I am going to continue to trying it (A37). To confirm the impact, he single-handedly organized a LC in his physics basic class for a topic on weather and invited me to attend.</p> <p>I was impressed by the subject and content of the email sent to me, “Science...and <i>Dynamic LC</i>” (See Appendix 4).</p> <p>I attended the class and it was a success such that during the interview with him, he rated the outcome 90% engagement. He said more people participated and believes that it does develop that relationship and as the ideas are learned, I think it will help it more (A97, 100).</p>	He is circle trained but had not been using it the before the study. He is now giving it a thought to the point of organizing it in another class on his own. The phrase Dynamic LC (DLC) was initiated by Mr. Patrick after the first day of tough experience. The emerged theme resonates with me it breathes life into my study which is something to think about.
Stanley	Before I started, I was actually nervous because I didn't know how to teach in that sort of way, but now I am getting used to it, I am more comfortable with it (B89).	He is not circle trained at all but the study is an eye opener for him to consider other ways of teaching.
Elizabeth	It's a good arrangement, like it's a good set up (C44). It brings us close to each other.	A student without prior circle experience sees LC as a good set up.

Justine	I am participating a lot more now than I was before because you know when you ask questions, everyone has to answer (D47).	A student who is passionate because of prior circle experience is improving.
Becky	You could hear the teacher so much better for me personally (E87).	There is a place for an indifferent critical student in LC.

Table 4.4: Some Remarkable Impact of LC on Participants

I am impressed with the outcome of the narrative case study as I reflect on how it has affected the participants including me. Though this may appear little but to me, a young researcher, it is important. The exploratory and explanatory study has transformed the way I see and view the LC. The challenges were a learning experience that led me to seek support from experts in the field and find useful resources that boost my confidence in the topic.

4.13 Suggestion for Involvement in the Learning Circle

Introducing LC into a traditional science class for me is a dream comes true. It was therefore important to hear from the participants what needs to be done differently. The recommendation from the teacher and student participants are analysed as follows:

Mr. Patrick, one of the key participants, suggested the need to start learning the knowledge and skill from early grades. His response revealed that:

“Ah... for more people to get involved, I think specifically at the early grades so the whole idea of developing relationships using a circle to expect everyone involved, that process needs to be learned once that is known, I think it will be smoother and been comfortable with actually sharing your opinion... It's about sharing of ideas and through this process of sharing, you come to do talking and I think that still takes time, you need to learn it from lower grades (A100).”

Stanley said something similar about knowledge and skill development but for teachers:

“That what's come down with your experience, the more you do it the more comfortable you will be able to schedule your plans” (B124).

I agreed with the suggestion raised by Mr. Patrick that students should learn it earlier but what happens if the students know it and the teacher doesn't, there will be no follow through. Knowing how RJ learning circle works is a key factor in the implementation and sustainability. The LC requires basic training by everyone in order to feel safe. Little/ lack of basic knowledge of how a circle works seems to be the cause of the restrictions observed and experienced during the study. The strength of a building lies in its foundation. There cannot be a LC when the basic knowledge about its framework is unknown. Many of the issues raised in this study were products of little or no background knowledge of participants and non-participants. In conclusion, once the foundation, the basic ideas involved in the process is laid every other thing will definitely fall in line because ignorance about LC would have been overcome. Finally, in my own opinion, the earlier the learning, the better for everyone involved. The RJ practice should not be limited to any grade; it should be considered for all students k-12.

The use of the RJ question framework is another useful instrument that made sense to all the participants at this level. The questions are very good for critical thinking and reflection. The teacher requested a copy after the interview, asking: “Can I hold to this?” and I can also attest to its usefulness throughout, especially towards the end of the study.

Timing and flexibility was another idea suggested by Stanley. He said:

“So maybe, cut the time down with opening and closing circle because Mr Patrick told me that at the end of the day we've got to get the curriculum covered before the end of the

term so if we cut the circle shorter at the beginning and the end then we'll cover the curriculum more appropriately. You know what I mean?" (B114).

Yes, I do understand what he meant but the idea of cutting down the circle time is critical. What happens if the time is cut down? Who will be affected? Or, whose interest is being served, the teacher's or the students'? I think this is where knowledge and skill come to play. This is why the LC is dynamic. The facilitator should be flexible enough to balance things and take other factors like timing and curriculum into consideration when planning for class as we usually do in this study. Although it is not compulsory for the circle to be held every day but it important see and understand that the learning circle is about curriculum. It all depends on the creativity of the teacher or facilitator to know when to integrate the circle.

The students are not left out; the following are suggestions from students as a way of supporting students' voice in research. Concerning the circle arrangement, Elizabeth suggested: "Maybe less compacted to be able to get to the desk" (C52). This was so because the existing structure made provision for a row sitting arrangement, not circles. There are many ways to go about this, for convenience the students can be moved to a spacious place to hold a circle. Once there is a will there will be a way to enjoy the LC experience. Another issue crucial and critical raised by Becky is the need for prior introduction of the LC (E91). Acquiring the basic knowledge of the LC is important for its success (Vaandering, 2013). This can also be linked to the discussion of Justine in the quote below, emphasizing the need for practice (preparation) before class, which will invariably enhance the processing of information She said:

"I guess we get more time to practice the questions and do them ourselves there is a way like what we did before is we sit down for maybe like two to three classes and learn it

and then we have like a class to do the work and if we don't understand, I guess here we get to process the information more and then do the questions” (D50).

As adequate preparation is needed for success in life, both teacher and students need to properly prepare for the integration of the LC into a traditional classroom. Every participant has a vital role or responsibility to play. For example, the teacher will prepare the lesson plan and the agenda to guide the class from the beginning to the end while the students read/study the assigned text before class for meaningful discussion or contributions to take place.

4.14 Conclusion

Exploration opens doors to the unknown. This study would not have been actualized without getting a research site in a school with some knowledge of RJ. I have been privileged to practice what I believe is good for teachers and students for working together as learner partners for memorable academic experiences. There are methods that teachers have preference for, with reasons best known to them, but many of these methods may not be to the advantage of learners, especially when the learner is denied an audience.

To answer some of my questions, the findings revealed that the teacher was not using LC before the study for the following reasons: time constraints, class arranging from square setting to circle, students don't talk, initial failure experienced in a physics class. After introducing the LC in the science class successfully the teacher participant had a change of mind to consider it for his knowledge-based science topics rather than calculation-based topics. Also, I discovered that apart from the fact that student's don't talk, other reasons for low recruitment may have been based on benefits or incentives, that is they are not going to be paid for their time nor skip class. Despite all these reasons, the students who willingly volunteered wanted the LC introduced in

their other classes as well because they experienced that the level of interaction with the teacher improved and they had more time to process information when sharing reflections.

The RJE LC is a practice that is specially designed to fill the gap by connecting the teacher and students for academic, social and emotional expression. The research problem statement and questions help to provide reasons why it is possible for someone who is RJ circle trained not to be practising it. I now see the reality on the ground that will guide my practice and that of many others who seek a deeper understanding of RJE, including the 3Rs, relationship, respect, and responsibility, by engaging with the LC. The findings are stories of all that happened in relation to the study, the next chapter discusses their relevance and importance for education today

Chapter 5: Discussion

In order to deepen our understanding of the Learning Circle (LC) as a pedagogical approach, I will use the participants' stories and the themes that emerged from the data analysis to discuss the problem statement which initiated this research (to understand why the LC is not being used by teachers) and answer the questions raised in my study, which are:

1. How do teacher/students perceive restorative justice learning circles?
2. What is teacher and students' perception of "teacher and students in equal partnership" before and after participating in the learning circle?
3. What is the impact of [introducing the LC on the teacher and students]?
4. What evidence emerges that indicates high school students experience a paradigm shift with the use of learning circle for science (1206) class?

To clarify basic concepts needed for successful integration of the LC into the traditional science classroom and to address common misconceptions, discussion will now occur under following sub-headings;

- the picture, pattern and power of the LC,
- participants' perceptions and perspectives,
- knowledge and skill about LC missing,
- facing the peculiarity and challenges of science class,
- the LC for student engagement, and
- a summary to motivate teachers and educators to attempt new ways of teaching for better learning outcome.

5.1 The Picture, Pattern and Power of the LC

The picture, pattern and power of the LC are concepts employed to briefly describe the dynamics of the Learning Circle as an approach that potentially results in equal partnership between the teacher and the students. The *picture* refers to what comes to mind about the LC the visual image and the structure which include the physical circle, talking piece, the guidelines and the activities. The teacher or facilitator and the students sit in a circle (1) to bring them to the same level for interaction and (2) to exchange ideas on a particular topic without intimidation. The *pattern* is about what is done in the circle. For instance, the circle usually starts with the check-in, followed by discussion, then activity/energizer/mindfulness moment and reflection with the use of guidelines and a talking piece. The next is the *power* of the LC; there are many possibilities in LC. First, it can easily complement existing methods of teaching; second, in science class, it can add life to the curriculum content through interactive and engaging discussion; third, it invites and allows equal partnership where everyone has chance to talk expressing thoughts and feelings. Students are more likely to learn when social and emotional aspect of life is added to academics (curriculum) and finally; it provides opportunity for processing of information which leads to deep learning. The picture, pattern and power of LC form the basic guide for the introduction of the LC.



Figure 5.1: Picture of the Learning Circle Facilitation

5.2 Participants' Perceptions and Perspectives

The way we see and view our world as teachers, educators and researchers is significant to our practice. I will discuss briefly how perception and perspective are important concepts and affect the way we do things. According to the Oxford dictionaries (2018), perception is the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses. It is a way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something; a mental impression. Perspective is a particular attitude toward or way of regarding something; a point of view. The way we view things comes from our perceptions (how we see things). As a researcher I try to go beyond my own perspectives to understand others' perspectives with the idea of experiencing reality as others experience it. Perspectives "help us to make sense of our world, and they come from our beliefs and values. They go a long way to impact our decisions and actions" (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p.16). Beliefs and values are also known as philosophy, which is a body of knowledge or experience. For instance, I was brought up with standardized education with measuring and normative traditions that limit social interaction and emotional expression between teachers and students. My way of knowing was mainly teacher-dependent so I believed the teacher talks and students' listen. This was challenged when my master's courses required me to reflect in class or online. This was a big shift for me in learning and I did not know how to do this until I came across RJE. This pedagogy changed my perception about teaching and learning to one that encourages students' voices, talking and sharing about experiences to deepen understanding. I see it as a pedagogy that I can introduce into my teaching practices and classroom.

Having the idea that "qualitative research focuses on understanding from the perspective of whoever and whatever is being studied... [and is] based on the assumption that reality is subjective and dependent on context" (McMillian & Wergin, 2002, p.119), I drew upon the

perceptions of my participants during the study to broaden my knowledge and practice. For instance, Mr. Patrick agrees with RJ theory after a professional learning but was initially sceptical about the LC because of time constraints and physical setting of the classroom. He now confessed that this study has “opened his mind a little bit and will probably consider it because it fits his personality and he also believes in students and teacher working together” (A33-37). However, despite his promised to continue trying the LC, he and Stanley still see it as more appropriate for knowledge based science topics like weather and ecology than for calculation based subjects like physics and mathematics. For them the probability of using LC for the teaching curriculum is 50:50. They accepted using the LC for the knowledge based aspect of the Science subject but not the physics or mathematical aspect (A8, 25; B75). Furthermore, they think that LC is more suitable for a specific term of the school session when the load of work is less intensive around September (A29) but I think the LC is applicable for all time pressure or no pressure. It all depends on who is involved; it’s a matter of knowing what to do.

I also looked at student participants’ perspectives of the LC. Despite initial strange feelings, indifference and thinking that it was childish for high school students to sit in a circle, and pass a talking piece as done with elementary students, some of the student participants in this research later experienced a shift in thinking with the use of the LC for the science 1206 class, which eventually changed their perception of the pedagogy. They preferred the LC to the traditional method they have been used to for the following reasons:

- Interaction in the classroom improved among students and between the teacher and students as people talked with each other more than before;
- The seating arrangement eased discussion because students did not have to turn around so much to hear those talking from all angles especially from behind.

- The level of relationship changed between teachers and students because the teacher talked “*with*” the students rather than “*at*” them in equal partnership, thus learning together.
- The reflection and sharing moments make room for processing of information, which enhances deeper understanding.
- Freedom of expression of thought and feelings without fear of judgment or injustice.

The preference shown for the LC by these student participants is significant to for practice and implementation by teachers and educators.

One significant surprise about the study is that my own deepening of learning as a researcher about equal partnership shifted. I used to think that I know what equal partnership is with the respect of sharing space, time and power with students. To me it all about relationship, being good, caring and friendly to students but, I discovered it is more than that when it comes to teaching the curriculum. The shift in my perception as a researcher has in a way changed my thinking about the research question to also include myself turning it to an action research. During the course of this case study where I co-taught and had the privilege of checking on the students while on task to give support but I realised that some of the student prefer to copy each other. Whenever I ask if they need help, the response was usually “No, thank you.” At other times, I ended up doing the calculation for some of them thinking that was how to be in equal partnership. This became a concern and I decided to raise the issue before my supervisor who told me it all depends on how I ask the question. It was in this meeting I knew I was not in equal partnership by telling the students the answer or working the Physics calculations for them. It is the equal partnership describes the power or dynamics of the LC, which makes the teacher to hold the students accountable for their work rather than telling or doing it for them. In other

words, the equal partnership defines the responsibility of the teacher and the students. This encounter was transformative, a turn around that influenced the rest of my study.

Unlike before, I now see ‘equal partnership’ as the main emphasis of the LC that teachers need to understand. It seeks to hold students accountable for their learning thus making the research turn out to an action research. There is a shift in the way I ask question from ‘why’ to ‘what’ using the RJ framework questions when holding discussion or conversation in and out of the circle and I found it more engaging as I get more response from students. In equal partnership, the teacher has a part to play so also is the student. The teacher as a leader uses his leadership position to work with the students by providing the needed support for a specific expectation or task and on the other hand, the student actively take ownership for their learning rather than depending on the teacher. This also provides an avenue for the making of leaders for the future generation. For emphasis, I will like to draw from the speech of, the director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada during the 2018 Memorial University Convocation in May, that “A good leader makes leaders not followers”- Blackstock, C. Therefore, the teacher as a good leader ought to empower the students to become leaders as practiced in the Learning Circle, not a follower. This pedagogy demands the continuous professional development of the teacher to improve knowledge and skills for practice.

5.3 Knowledge and Skill about LC is Missing

I spent significant time trying to clarify questions and responses during the interview with almost all the participants, except Justine who had previous circle experience that impacted her such that she wanted the experience again. The pedagogy is new that I do felt a lack in basic knowledge that needs to be addressed so that the foundation is properly laid. The success of the LC depends on teachers’ knowledge and skills.

Apart from the Professional learning and RJE course, the idea of using the LC in a traditional science classroom was inspired by the work of authors including Wadhwa (2016); Riestenberg (2012) and Hatcher et al (2009) who specifically mentioned circles for teaching science but not in detailed way. So, I have combined this work with practical samples presented by Hopkins (2011) and Boyes-Watson & Pranis (2014) for teachers. While there are a lot of experts to consult and good resources (texts, audios, videos, DVDs etc.) about the LC, it seems many teachers are not using them.

Stephen, who learned about the method through this research, said something important to think about:

I think with the traditional setting the teacher is doing all the talking, the teacher is telling what everything is, doing problems for them but the major shift with the learning circle is that the kids get to be more involved with the lesson. With the traditional setting you are not sure if the students know the content or not, but with the LC you really get to know if the student know the content or not. (B80)

“Getting to know if students’ know the content” is one major reason why the LC is a pedagogical approach that should not be limited to only a few subjects or topics. The LC is a growing field in education that promotes equal partnership between teacher and students. It is designed to support cooperative and collaborative learning. This is a way of doing education that challenges what most teachers and students are used to. Therefore, it demands that teachers give away power and control over the students which is a struggle for many teachers and students because of lack of knowledge.

5.4 Facing the Peculiarity and Challenges of Science Class

This section is based on the knowledge gained here in Canada from a course titled “Contemporary Issues in Science Education” (Ed 6653) as well as my science background from Nigeria. So I understand the nature of science as a subject, its challenges and the need for an engaging pedagogy. Teaching philosophy and methodology in the sciences have been a long time issue, and the work of John Dewey written over a century ago published by the *American Association for the Advancement of Science*, confirmed that “science teaching has been so frequently presented just as so much ready-made knowledge, so much subject- matter of fact and law, rather than as the effective method of inquiry into any subject matter” (Dewey, 1910, p. 124). The situation is not much better today, as it’s still textbook focused plus worksheet with little demonstration and experimentation (laboratory work) without inquiry.

Despite the short period of time the study was done, what stood out for me were the impacts and shifts participants reported in their perceptions about the LC and the difference they experienced in using this method. The traditional approach results in many students memorizing as Mr. Patrick also confirmed during my observation and the interview. Dewey (1910) further explains that “communication of science as a subject-matter has so far outrun in education the construction of a scientific habit of mind that to some extent the natural common sense of mankind has been interfered with to its detriment” (p. 127). I think this is the same reason why some teachers find it difficult to change their approach compared to those that are open to discussion, as encouraged by RJ LCs that encourage active participation in the making of knowledge rather than ready-made knowledge. The way we learn and teach science has been a concern to me like many others (Lyons, 2006; Hatcher et al, 2009) and that is why I embrace the

use of the LC as elaborated by Hopkins (2011) and Boyles-Watson & Pranis (2014) to make a difference,

More recent research also shows the need for a change in approach and re-conceptualization. The serious disengagement problem that schools face today— the conservative, unimaginative, and almost timid approach to science education as a result of unwillingness “to think outside the box”— calls for re-thinking the form of education provided in its schools and drafting new and bold changes in school policy (Turner, 2008, p. 17). This study is a step toward thinking outside the box by embracing a pedagogy that changes from the traditional one-way teaching method to that of two-way method that promotes student engagement. I propose this could be at least a potential solution to common disengagement reported in schools. The first national report of the Canadian Education Association (CEA) in 2009 has been of tremendous help in the way I view the different types of student engagement, which include participation, sense of belonging, attendance and intellectual engagement and how these can be improved by using the dynamic LC.

5.5 The Learning Circle for Student Engagement

Willms, Friesen, & Milton (2009) carried out a study on student engagement across Canada involving 32,322 students from 93 schools (Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Nova Scotia). 4972 students were from grade 10 as were in this study. I am adopting the research finding (Willms et al, 2009, p. 23) in the table below which showed the percentages of engaged students in the language arts and mathematics (the only two subject areas studied), by type of engagement and type of school.

	Types of Engagement			
	Participation	Sense of Belonging	Attendance	Intellectual
Elementary	79%	74%	91%	62%
Middle	73%	70%	81%	44%
Middle-Secondary	69%	66%	63%	35%
Secondary	61%	71%	58%	30%

Table 5.1: Percentages of Engaged Students in the Language Arts and Mathematics

Understanding the meaning of student engagement is important when seeking to make a difference in classroom experience. Student engagement, therefore, is the “extent to which students identify with and value schooling outcomes, have a sense of belonging at school, participate in academic and non-academic activities, strive to meet the formal requirements of schooling, and make a serious personal investment in learning” (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009, p. 43). As shown on the table, “although many students are engaged at school, overall levels of engagement are quite low” (P. 17) especially in the secondary (high) school. This justifies the need for the current study that seeks the experience of equal partnership through the use of the LC that can work to improve all types of student engagement, including intellectual engagement where the lowest percentage of engagement was recorded for all grade levels, K-12. The finding about secondary (high) school is relevant to this study. This low percentage proves that something is fundamentally wrong. It is one thing to be in school, it is another to be fully engaged. For the secondary school, it is interesting to note the 71% for sense of belonging, but the lowest (30%) in intellectual engagement. Let’s take a closer look at intellectual engagement. It is “a serious emotional and cognitive investment in learning, using higher-order thinking skills

(such as analysis and evaluation) to increase understanding, solve complex problems, or construct new knowledge” (p. 43). Hence, the authors suggest that students are more likely to be intellectually engaged when classroom and school learning climates reflect the following:

- effective use of learning time
- positive teacher/student relations and disciplinary climates
- high expectations for success
- appropriate instructional challenge.

A classroom practice that will make a difference by engaging students socially, academically and intellectually needs to be “designed intentionally for today’s world, make it mean something, use assessment to improve learning and guide teaching, and build relationships” (p. 33-37). These recommendations resonate for me and I want to recommend RJ Learning Circle, a pedagogical approach intentionally designed, which is dynamic to ensure that students take responsibility and ownership for their learning, with the support of the teacher through equal partnership, to achieve success for the present and beyond, after school life.

Wadhwa (2016) took time to explain what equal partnership means in her book *“Turning the paradigm on its side: Youth and adult in Equal partnership power Dynamics in a Student Apprenticeship Model of Restorative Justice,”* which I mentioned in chapters 1 & 2 already. It is to “foster leadership skills in the students in an effort to trouble the traditionally hierarchical relationship between teacher and students in which teachers have *power over*, as opposed to *power with*, students” (Wadhwa, 2016, p. 116). This implies that teacher and students can experience equal partnership in relation to power dynamics. To clarify the “how” of equal partnership, Hopkins (2011) discusses extensively that teachers can understand what to do by “letting to go the pressure to be the authority figure” (P. 182), which are responses to some of the

complications raised by some of the participants in this study. According to her, to let go by “sharing power, control and responsibility” (P.185), the teacher will have to do the following:

- a. Develop the qualities of humility and curiosity
- b. Experiment and get feedback
- c. Change from transmitter of information to learning coach.

Right knowledge is the antidote to failure experienced in practice. There are resources available for those who are willing to be successful in the practice. This made a lot of sense to me and it is in line with my thoughts of engaging with the LC. Therefore, I decided to incorporate this idea into my study. This knowledge is a learning process for me and has shifted my total dependence on my instructors and supervisor for every direction to taking ownership for my learning by collaborating. I now have more confidence and my sense of belonging with other graduate students has improved. The dynamics of the LC is that it made equal partnership possible if the pattern is properly followed. Teachers and students in equal partnership is a work in progress for me as I need to break away from my traditional paradigm of control and telling to that of sharing. Equality removes all kinds of difference in terms of age, race, size, social status, nationality, and so on, knowing that the difference is not meant to push us apart but rather to strengthen us. The difference shows our uniqueness. It is important to know that everyone is unique in one way or the other. Furthermore, equality eliminates all forms of implicit or explicit discrimination, dehumanization, biases, violence and injustice.

In this study, I began transferring the training of teacher and student in equal partnership as experienced in the way my supervisor worked with me by giving me the opportunity to express my feelings and thoughts about different topics. I watch out for this experience as I worked with others in this study, using RJ framework questions, during circles and one-on-one

conversations. The common misconceptions about the RJ Learning Circle usually led to complications and conflicts like those experienced in the study, which are addressed in the following sections of discussion.

Furthermore, the LC as a practice of RJE is like democratic citizenship education which expands the conversation to include both what is explicitly and what is implicitly taught within schools” (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2015, p.120). The LC pedagogy allows students to be taught more than the content listed in the curriculum which is explicit; the implicit (hidden curriculum), which focuses on how to relate, behave and what to expect in life, is also included (Davis et al, 2015). This allows the students balance between academic and social-emotional expectations of life during and after school. The process is dynamic and flexible for users to decide and choose all that applies to participants. Learning is not determined by it, but it is dependent on it.

5.6 Attempting New Way of Teaching: Transformation Experiences

The transformation experience started from the very beginning of this study. The possibility of introducing the LC into a science class was an amazing experience I love to share. The thought of reorganizing a traditional class with row seating arrangement into a circle can be scary in a large class, like the one I studied, which had desks for 34 students. In fact, when I discussed the idea of rearranging the class with Mr. Patrick, he told me it has been a challenge to him, but I eventually figured it out and encouraged him that we should give it a try. Behold, we did and the story changed. The classroom was transformed; twenty desks fit into the circle and the remaining was arranged behind for those who were less willing to sit the circle. This was an exciting moment for the two of us, as discussed in chapter 4. The attempt was so gratifying that I decided I should not be afraid of trying new things. This was the same spirit that followed me

through the study. There were challenges no doubt but with the “I can” attitude I was able to progress. The transformation is not limited to the circle seating arrangement. Growing up, I have sat in circles for play, fellowship, meetings and other gatherings but I never read any meaning into it. It is the knowledge of RJE that brought my awareness to the real impact of the circle; it has transformed my ways of being, language, and thinking about teaching and learning. To crown this discussion and for clarity, I will summarize some RJE practice concepts and suggestions which include the participants and my stories:

a. Relationship, respect, and responsibility

Relationship, respect, and responsibility are 3Rs for describing the practice of RJE. The three words drawn from the philosophy that “humans are worthy and interconnected” to be respected, honoured, and shown mutual concern stood out in my study (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). The relationship is a show of respect and acceptance of all without intimidation, discrimination and any act of injustice. Respect is reciprocal and “for significant shift to take place the adult in charge must live up to what he/she teaches. This is true for all RJE leaders and ideologies” (Omoriegie, 2018). In a relationship, the teacher is expected to live an exemplary life that respects the views of the students and vice versa. I have come to understand that there are different levels of relationship. For example, I used to think that a relationship is all about care, respect and being friendly, like I experienced in PUHS with Ms. Bishop, Mr. Patrick and his classroom, but I later discovered that it is more than that. A relationship comes with responsibility, and everyone involved has a role to play for it to work (Hopkins, 2009). This is why the teacher is not expected to dominate and be in control while the student is made teacher-dependent.

Students' dependence on teachers result in many acts like memorization, copying, examination malpractice, plagiarism, failure and drop out if it continues. The act of memorization according to Mr. Patrick is a carryover from junior high:

But it all comes from junior high and using the skill of memorization and if you don't go for understanding, it becomes too much information and like all this stuff they do know but put it away and just look at the board and just try to memorize every little bit of information put down. (A65)

This is a real description of a problem that needs to be addressed. Mr. Patrick described the problem but what is still preventing him from changing this pattern? I think this fact should have moved him to do teaching differently rather than being content to keep the ineffective method of memorization, a carry-over from junior high. What, then, is the way forward? There is always a way out for all who care to make a difference. There are various reasons why the students do not talk, which may be social, emotional and mental, such as peer influence, fear of making mistakes, and being judged by others. The LC is designed to address such, if teachers will make time for the knowledge and develop the skill by shifting from the traditional way of doing things to accommodate this new horizontal paradigm that encourages students to think, talk, and take ownership for their learning as discussed earlier in this chapter.

How to hold the students accountable for their learning is an aspect of responsibility in a relationship that many cannot figure out. I also had that challenge, but my supervisor helped me. She discovered that I did not understand how to make progress because of the type of questions I was asking the students. For example, 'Do you understand?' 'Do you have any questions?' 'Can I help you?' (Please my reader, what answer did you expect from these questions? Of course, the

answer was usually NO!). The RJE offers a better way of holding the students accountable through equal partnership as the next section describes.

b. Equal partnership

I learned from my supervisor that knowing the principle of transmission, transaction and transformation for teaching and learning without the students taking ownership for their learning is not equal partnership. This was an eye opener to me because I used to think that once a teacher teaches and allows discussion or question back and forth, it is also termed as equal partnership. I learned, however, that any strategy that allows the teacher to tell the student what to do is not equal partnership. For example, if a student raises a question and the teacher answers without allowing the student's commitment or contribution, it is traditional. The way the questions are framed will determine whether the students will respond or not. I now see why the students are not responding to some of the questions used for checking in like, for example, do you understand? If any question is bothering you, you can ask while passing the talking piece. Rather than asking closed ended questions like these, the better way of doing it is to ask the students open-ended questions as the RJE framework suggests, which include:

- What happened?
- What were/are you thinking?
- What were/are you feeling?
- What's been the hardest thing for you?
- Who has been impacted? How?
- What do you need (to do) to go on?

These kinds of questions are thought provoking and allow the students to think critically before answering. It is the responsibility of the teacher to work with the students by allowing them to

make the effort to solve problems (like physics calculations) while necessary support is provided. Citing the relationship matrix (Vaandering, 2013), I can see that most of what has been going on in the class is either doing things “*for*” or “*to*” the students, which is never an equal partnership (because too much support is given or not enough support). As discussed in the findings, Mr. Patrick also agreed that the LC can help to develop the equal partnership as the idea is learned and the students to seek for such experience of teacher talking “*with*” them as against talking “*at*” them.

The use of the circle, or open-ended question, can bring about equal partnership. The circle allows everyone to be heard. It is not enough to call students outside to be told what to do. Different perspectives are shared in the circle rather than attending to the students individually. A lot can be accomplished when students are either in a large circle or smaller ones. The students learn from one another, rather than a single person teaching. Studies reveal there is “an incredible power of collective process, with the realization that it is possible for a group of people to be more intelligent than the most intelligent person in the group” (Davis et al, 2015, P.133). This also confirms the proverb that “two are better than one” Therefore, no one is an island of knowledge.

a) *Recognizing the importance of students’ voice*

Since there is little provision for pedagogies, like RJ LC, it is the teacher who will create it and make room for students’ voices as much as possible. The pressure of work can be so intense that if care is not taken the teaching will be done without any consideration for the students’ voice. The moment I learned that students do not talk, I thought I had the LC which would make a difference, only to discover that the system has so much affected them that a month’s case study was too short to make a complete change. Many of the students in the class I

studied were more comfortable listening than talking during discussion. I knew that something was fundamentally wrong, so I decided to ask my own children, who were in lower grades, about their class experience as discussed earlier in chapter 4. They do not usually talk nor ask questions in the class so as not to interrupt the teacher from completing the teaching. There is no chance to ask questions at that lower grade, so they keep whatever comes to mind because of the fear of the teacher who might be mad at them. It is this mentality that the students transfer to higher grades; they have been so conditioned to not talking that they see a talking pedagogy as being strange, irrespective of its significance. This was exactly the argument of Ken Robinson on changing education paradigms (Ken, 2010); he mentioned how the divergent thinking skills of children decrease with age...as a follow up of a passionate question “Do schools kill creativity?” ((TED talk, 2007). This is a question we need to ask ourselves as teachers. I am concerned that teaching ought not to continue this way. This has to be fixed! The focus group students in the current research asking if the LC would continue after the study and asking why it was not done in the other classes (like literature). This is in-line with the results from *Imagine a School..., Design For Learning* cited in *What did you do in school today?* (Willms, 2009, p.36) [Which] repeatedly show the following:

- Students want stronger relationships with their teachers, with each other, and with their communities – locally, provincially, nationally and globally. They want their teachers to know them as people.
- Students want their teachers to know how they learn. They want their teachers to take into account what they understand and what they misunderstand, and to use this knowledge as a starting place to guide their continued learning.

- Students want their teachers to establish learning environments that build interdependent relationships and that promote and create a strong culture of learning.

These are strong messages to reflect on. This takes me back to the passive high school students, although there may be some other reasons for their low level of engagement the system has a role to play and the teacher will need to check up if they are honouring or measuring and the message they are sending by silencing the students. What are we doing when our teaching method or pedagogy does allow interaction with our students in class? We should always bear in mind that it is one thing to have a good pedagogy; it is another for it to suit the needs of the students.

c. The way out on timing

Time management is an important thing to think about in running a classroom effectively. Everything done in the class is a matter of time, therefore, proper preparation by getting the lesson plan and instructional materials ready before class is essential. The practice of the LC also works on the same principle of time management of adequate preparation. The LC does not waste time as some think; the success depends on the teacher knowing what to do and planning. To save time: first, the teacher as the facilitator needs to get the lesson plan, including the guidelines and the talking piece, ready. It is not proper to just hand pick an object as talking piece while the lesson is on without prior preparation. For instance, there was a scenario when Mr. Patrick passed the marker as a talking piece during a check-up circle that he conducted after the mid-term exams' review, before starting significant figure. He asked the student "if they have any question about the content of the exams to please ask. If you want to pass you can" (FN p. 30) and there was no response. The experience of the balloon activity has also taught me a lesson

to always check whatever I am planning to use before class. Impromptu circle always tell on the outcome. All instructional materials and activities, like the energizer and mindfulness moment, must be planned to match the topic. Second, the circle can be split into smaller group for effectiveness (Riestenberg, 2012). Third, I learned from my mentor in the field that it is not about the time, but the way we use the time. She said it is better to do quality work by engaging the students actively than teaching a volume of work that distances or cuts off the students. This implies that although the pressure of work may be there because the system is usually loaded with expectations and deadlines, this should not be allowed to affect the students negatively, as is commonly experienced. This is where I found that the pedagogy employed really matters. In making room for students' needs irrespective of curriculum, schedule and timing, a suitable pedagogy like RJE is appropriate, especially for teaching sciences to add social and emotional aspects that are commonly reported missing (Lyons, 2006).

d. Sharing Power, Losing None

The concern of many teachers like me is about giving up power and control over the students. How will the class run smoothly without the teacher exercising control? Does it mean that everyone will just be doing what they like? Of course “No” Restorative justice is not in the support of teachers losing the voice of authority but it allows the teacher to work as partners, sharing power by allowing the students a voice without fear of intimidation and discrimination. Although the teacher as a leader gives up power in order to come down to the level of the students by giving the needed support, he/she is also responsible for holding the students accountable for their work by ensuring they are on task without being forceful. Through relationships an individual is able to move from self to appreciating the worth of others by becoming respectful to the values and beliefs of others and taking responsibility for what needs

to be done (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). RJE is in full support of discipline but it is a positive discipline that hurts no one. When all these are in place, the classroom becomes a safe environment for teaching and learning. This does not just happen; it is a gradual process that grows and improves with practice.

e. Doing discipline

Discipline is an important topic to think about in RJE because humans are involved. On discipline matters, Wadhwa (2016) declares that “the teacher watch out to assert authority when participants reify traditional hierarchies and norms in circles are blatantly disregarded” (p. 132). This describes the teacher as an authoritative figure, not an authoritarian, as discussed in the earlier chapters. He/she asserts authority without abuse of any kind. For example, during the study there were different reactions the first time the students entered science 1206 to find the desks rearranged from a row and column setting into a circle setting. I noticed mixed feeling as they sat to watch what was going on. The students were reluctant to participate but the teacher kept coming up to control and keep the class in order. I realised the place of a teacher as an authority who is expected to ensure discipline and orderliness but the way this is done is important. In RJE, discipline is done in a respectful way not to hurt or cause any damage as found in traditional discipline model.

f. Transformed expressions, word and language

RJE is cautious with use of expressions, words and language in and out of the circle and during conversation. There is RJE language that is expected of practitioner, it is a language of respect for all. This teaches that we should think before talking and whatsoever I as an individual will not want others to say to me, I do not say to them. Always use non-judgmental language. All

forms of derogatory expression, language, words and expression are to be avoided. For instance, the use of '*what happened*' instead of '*why*' will give room for more explanation. I discovered that I am more careful in my choice of words not to hurt the feelings of others. Therefore, I try to control my emotion instead of controlling others. Because of cultural differences, I remember telling the participants to feel free to approach in case of misuse of words.

g. Reflection: processing of information

The reflection moment is one of the major reasons why the student participants preferred the LC compared with the traditional method. This moment of taking turns to speak is very helpful at developing the processing of information, which is a thinking skill- creative and critical. It gives the teacher and students the opportunity to breathe life into the curriculum content through the sharing of life experiences, for example as was done during the topic on weather, a science topic. The discourse on science reveals the need for a “kind of curriculum that could endow school science with meaning and unity, and demonstrate to students the relevance of scientific enterprise to themselves and their world” (Turner, 2008, p. 17). In addition to a good curriculum like the one described by Turner, the moment of reflections during the LC helps to make it become organic when teacher and students create the time to rub minds together on the content or topic.

5.7 Conclusion

All the discussions above are made possible through LC experiences in a science class. When the knowledge is mastered, the experience can be transferred to our day-to-day activities. At this point, I am convinced about the use of the LC as an effective pedagogical approach for engaging students in science class (Wadhwa, 2016; Riestenberg, 2012; Hatcher, 2009). In this

study, I was unable to explore question 3, the impact of the LC on the teaching and learning outcome because of time constraints and other challenges discussed earlier. Therefore, the question was changed to identify the impact of the LC on teachers and students (see table 4.4). The impact of the study on teachers and students within the short period of study is an encouragement for its practice. Mr. Patrick who had not been using the LC because of his initial experience of failure in a physics class was involved in the study but after introducing it in his Science 1206 class, he used his initiative to organize the LC in one of his other Science classes and scored himself 90% for the outcome (A100). He is now planning to use it for some of his science topics (weather and ecology) in the future.

The student participants were also impacted by the study such that they preferred the LC above the traditional method. This study has opened my eyes to realities about LC, better ways of approaching it in high school and things to do differently, as suggested by the participants. There is hope, if the professional learning can be intensified, for both teachers and students. Mr. Patrick noted that he believes that the LC “does develop that relationship [between teacher and students in equal partnership] and as the ideas are learned” (A100). Finally, I do not expect any magic or sporadic change for a practice that is little known but I have the assurance that things can be better for teachers and students to experience equal partnership. This is a work in progress; skills can be learned consistently and developed gradually with practice of the LC.

Chapter 6: Summary, Conclusions, & Limitations of the Research

This study was inspired by my experience of RJE with focus on relationship first and the desire to make a difference by actualising the use of an RJ pedagogical approach, the Learning Circle (LC), in a science class as found in the literature. In this chapter, I reflect on the research, present the significance and implications of the results for teaching and learning, provide recommendations for future research, address the limitations of the study, and offer final conclusion.

6.1 Reflection on Research

The moment I decided on the topic of research, I began to make necessary preparations and networking. I needed a science teacher with the experience of RJE, and I got one but he was not using the LC to teach. This affected my choice of method from a phenomenology study or an ethnography study to a single case study using narration because the LC as a pedagogy was new and teacher had not been used it even though he was RJ trained. Nevertheless with curiosity I came up with the following 4 questions for the case study with emphasis on perception, perspectives, shifts and impacts:

1. How do teachers/students perceive restorative justice LCs?
2. What are teachers and students' perceptions of "teacher and students in equal partnership" before and after participating in the LC?
3. *What is the impact of [introducing the LCs on teacher and student]?*
4. What evidence indicates that high school students experience a paradigm shift with the use of the LCs for a science (1206) class?

Looking at the way the questions were framed, as I said before, I thought I already knew what equal partnership was. However now I know, I knew it in part-the theory-and not the

practice. The study was my first practice after learning RJE; hence it opened my eyes to the reality of equal partnership and has since transformed my discussion about the topic. I realised that exploring a question on teaching and learning outcome would demand more time and/or a different research design (which can be taken up in future research), so question 3 was modified from “What is the impact of the LCs on teaching and learning outcomes?” to “What is the impact of introducing the LCs on teacher and students?” Therefore for clarity, I presented the dynamics of the LC in three different ways, the picture, the pattern and the power of the LC.

The outcome of the study is instructive for practice as discussed in the previous chapter. Although it was not used for the entire period that I stayed for the study, the ones done proved that the LC is relevant to bringing the social and emotional into science class by making it more interactive and engaging for students. Also, apart from gaining some insight on reasons why an RJ trained teacher was not using LC, the students’ voices or responses I got during the LC, class observation, interview and focus group shows that students can talk if the right approach is employed. The impacts recorded in the study reveals that the dynamics of the LC is in its power to transform the way teaching and learning is experienced.

6.2 The Research Significance and Implications

The study actually confirms that “the LCs are an excellent venue for developing student voice, for articulating one's ideas for critical thinking, and for sharing one’s views” (Boyes-Watson & Pranis (2014), p.69). The dynamic LC provides the teacher with the students’ perspectives on a topic and it is a model to guide teachers or educators for teaching science curriculum as a way of allowing social interactions and emotional expressions in the classroom. The study was conducted to bring the RJ LC into science classroom! As qualitative research, this study deepens the findings of previous studies on understanding the dynamics of class discussion

using restorative justice LC that brings teachers and students in “equal partnership” (Wadhwa, 2016; Riestenberg, 2012). In Wadhwa’s work, the circle was used for taking an extracurricular project on forensic, a topic that is not related to science topic in a science class, Riestenberg only mentioned that lesson circle was used for a list of subjects including science and Hatcher et al (2009) described the learning circle as an Indigenous practice effective for studying science but the details not given as done in this study. The study contributes to the growth of the implementation of restorative justice circles in schools, specifically for science classroom. Furthermore, it provides tips for critical reflective thinking for teachers and students, adults and youths. Finally, the district and system leaders, principals, teachers and students in Newfoundland would profit from the research.

6.3 Recommendation for Future Research

Lack of basic knowledge was common among the participants; therefore future research should seek how to provide that basic knowledge for significant impact to be recorded. Once the solid foundation is built in the area of knowledge, it will be great if educators and researchers work on promoting the equal partnership, an experience that will allow memorable moments for both teachers and students. Also, the time for conducting this present study was short, so a longer study of multiple cases is needed in the field. Again, a different result might be recorded if a similar study is done elsewhere and in more than one school or other places with different cultures. Finally, this study is applicable and may be replicated in different contexts or settings class, grade, place, schools in Newfoundland in Canada and beyond.

6.4 Limitations of the Research

The study would not be complete without a discussion of the factors that limited the research in one way or the other. First, cultural difference was a challenge in the study,

especially in the area of language of students and teachers. At times, I struggle a bit to hear and understand some of the words, language and expressions of the teachers and students. I studied British English so I noticed that the participants had difficulty hearing and getting some of my pronunciations and African accent, which might be the reason why some chose not to participate. This feeling also affected my interaction because I became conscious of the tendency of making mistakes so I decided to speak few words. Second, there was conflict, a kind of tension concerning engaging with the LC. The teacher participants believed that the LC is better for knowledge based subjects than physics calculations while I believe it fits all subjects, hence my reason for using the word dynamic (circle is flexible and can be used in different ways as described in Appendix 2). I was careful not to impose my pedagogy, but it was discouraging that I could not use the LC for some aspects of science when I felt it would be possible. I am sure the story would have been different if the approach was initiated by Mr. Patrick. Third, lack of basic RJ LC knowledge and skill was seen as reason why some teachers are not engaging with it. The study would have yielded better results if everyone, especially the students had known about its principles and practice, like Justine who was passionate about the study because of her elementary circle experience. Fourth, timing and load of work (curriculum content) was another limiting factor. Mr. Patrick had a preferred time, that is, September, when the pressure of work is reduced. The short time used for the study was not sufficient for familiarity with the class/school structure, culture, teacher and the students. A longer study would have had more impact on both the teachers and the students.

6.5 Final Conclusion: Dynamic Learning Circle: More than a Circle

The LC is more than just sitting in the circle; it has a purpose. It provides the teacher and students the opportunity to learn while sitting in a circle. It is important to reiterate the

significance of the circle that it not just about sitting in the circle. The circle arrangement is specifically designed to introduce restorative justice practices for participants to understand what it looks like (Hopkins, 2011). The circle is a picture of community, connection and communication. Boyes-Watson and Pranis (2014) clearly note that “There is no single way to integrate Circles within the school community” (p. 3), therefore the pedagogy is a combination of learning strategies, styles, methods, approaches, principles, and practices with the aim of making learning a memorable experience through relationship. For the purpose of this research, the class arrangement of a regular science 1206 was changed from row setting to a circle form to create space for relational ways of being in a classroom. This was done to invite the learners to become a community by learning as a group who will be able to learn as a group as opposed to the usual traditional independent structure that limits interaction in the classroom. An authentic independent-individual approach and a student-center approach to learning have benefits but also short-comings that the circle arrangement, which is democratic interactive-collective learning is trying to work upon for the benefit of learners. Boyes-Watson and Pranis (2014) expand on this when describing the western culture:

“Many of our current practices within the schools reinforce the wall around the core-self and increase our sense of disconnection from our own self and others. Our practices encourage us to assert power over others and to be fearful and distrustful of the wolves that lurk within. We develop habits of closing our hearts and minds to the feelings of others as well as to our own selves.” (p.16)

The LC is designed to bring about reconnecting with healthy core self and others in the school with positive relationships. This kind of experience is only made possible when users are properly grounded in background theories for practice. The LC has been used for other subjects,

but not so much for science and by extension, this study has provided a guide to successfully carry out a LC into science classroom. I found LC to be powerful approach that can bring into view the possibility of equal partnership between the teacher and the students through the practice of reflection. The reflection moment is usually a time to look forward to give room for creative and critical thinking where great ideas and new discoveries do emerge. This is a different experience for me in both my academic and teaching experiences. RJE philosophy has brought significant transformation to the way I think, feel and talk about my teaching and learning. Unlike before, I care more about the view of others on any matter than before. Before now my emphasis has always been on the completion of curriculum without checking with the students. But things are no longer the same. I now see that humans are worthy to be respected, and valued as I perform my role and responsibility. Everything about my teaching, the philosophy, method, and language has changed from having control to one that engages. The LC experience is transforming and transferable beyond the circle. This experience is making me shift concentration from self to being more conscious of students. I can now see that my lesson plan is not complete without the student voice. What a shift from teacher-focused to student-centered!

The LC is an avenue for practicing the RJ philosophy; it is dynamic and flexible for any curriculum. The word dynamic was used to describe the possibilities of the LC. It means that the LC is subject to change and can be modelled or planned to meet specific curriculum need and instructional objectives. A creative teacher can use it for introduction a topic, follow-up, test/exams reviews and much more. There are resources available for effective practice that I have recommended in this study. Apart from these resources, there are experts to with consult for support. At a point after seeking support from my supervisor, I also contacted Anita Wadhwa whose work has inspired my study for advice as a young RJ researcher; we spoke and exchanged

ideas for future practice. So emotional and social related matters should not be left for school counsellors alone, the classroom teacher can offer support and assistance. To a beginner this can be challenging but the experience can grow and develop with practice. I am growing in the LC experience from interaction with others and expression of my emotion (thoughts and feelings) to that of equal partnership. I used to think that relationship as equal partnership is only about care, making others feel good, almost losing sight of the aspect of responsibility as it relates to teaching the curriculum. It is important to understand the depth of equal partnership as the end product of the LC where the talking arrow goes two ways, back and forth. This is more than just talking; it is about getting to change, holding the students accountable for their learning. For this, I found the use of RJ framework questions helpful as recommended by experts. Their use, along with circle formation made a huge difference. I recommended them both made a huge difference, so I am prescribing it to teachers and educators who desire to reach equal partnership with their students. For the participants in this study—teachers, students and the researcher, this is a work in progress.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: MUN and NLESD Ethics Approvals

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) 21, Spinnaker Rd., Canada, A1C 5S7 Tel: 709 264-2503 icehr@mun.ca www.mun.ca/interdisciplinaryethics/human/icehr	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>ICEHR Number:</td> <td>20181065-ED</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Approval Period:</td> <td>December 1, 2017 – December 31, 2018</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Funding Source:</td> <td>Not Funded</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Responsible Faculty:</td> <td>Dr. Dorothy Vaandering Faculty of Education</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Title of Project:</td> <td><i>The Dynamics of Learning Circle in High School Teachers and Students in Equal Partnership</i></td> </tr> </table> <p>December 1, 2017</p>	ICEHR Number:	20181065-ED	Approval Period:	December 1, 2017 – December 31, 2018	Funding Source:	Not Funded	Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Dorothy Vaandering Faculty of Education	Title of Project:	<i>The Dynamics of Learning Circle in High School Teachers and Students in Equal Partnership</i>
ICEHR Number:	20181065-ED										
Approval Period:	December 1, 2017 – December 31, 2018										
Funding Source:	Not Funded										
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Dorothy Vaandering Faculty of Education										
Title of Project:	<i>The Dynamics of Learning Circle in High School Teachers and Students in Equal Partnership</i>										

Mrs. Bukola Boluwade
Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Mrs. Boluwade:

Thank you for your correspondence of November 17 and 29, 2017 addressing the issues raised by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) concerning the above-named research project.


ICEHR has re-examined the proposal with the clarification and revisions submitted, and is satisfied that the concerns raised by the Committee have been adequately addressed. In accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)*, the project has been granted full ethics clearance to December 31, 2018. ICEHR approval applies to the ethical acceptability of the research, as per Article 6.3 of the *TCPS2*. Researchers are responsible for adherence to any other relevant University policies and/or funded or non-funded agreements that may be associated with the project.

If you need to make changes during the project, which may raise ethical concerns, please submit an amendment request with a description of these changes for the Committee's consideration. In addition, the *TCPS2* requires that you submit an annual update to ICEHR before December 31, 2018. If you plan to continue the project, you need to request renewal of your ethics clearance, and include a brief summary on the progress of your research. When the project no longer involves contact with human participants, is completed and/or terminated, you are required to provide the annual update with a final brief summary, and your file will be closed.

Annual updates and amendment requests can be submitted from your Researcher Portal account by clicking the *Applications: Post-Review* link on your Portal homepage.

We wish you success with your research.

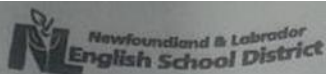
Yours sincerely,



Kelly Blidook, Ph.D.
Vice-Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research

KB/lw

cc: Supervisor – Dr. Dorothy Vaandering, Faculty of Education
Associate Dean, Graduate Programs, Faculty of Education



Chairperson: Goranwy Price
CEO/Director of Education (Interim): Anthony Stack

Research Approval Conditions

Research Title & Investigator(s): Dynamics of Learning Circle in High School Bukola Boluwade

Your request to conduct this research is NOT approved:

Your request to conduct research in our district is approved subject to the conditions/requirements checked below:

1. A list of selected schools must be forwarded to my office before the research can begin.
 - 1a. The list of targeted schools has been received ☒
2. Final approval to conduct this study will rest with the principal of each targeted school and the targeted group of teachers/students/parents where applicable. ☒
3. Conducting the research will in no way negatively impact instructional time for students and teachers. ☒
4. Conducting this research must not put any burden of responsibility on school administrators or other staff unless they specifically agree to it. Such agreement must not negatively impact instructional time. ☒
5. Participation in the study will be voluntary and participants will be able to opt out at any time without prejudice. This must be clearly communicated to the participants at the outset. ☒
6. For students under 19 years of age, the researcher(s) must secure parental consent and confirm such consent with the principal before the research proceeds. Students 19 years of age and older must provide their own consent. Regardless of age, youth must be clearly informed from the outset that they may refuse to participate, even if their parents consented to their participation. ☒
7. Ensuring anonymity of participants and confidentiality of all data generated and collected throughout the research. ☒
8. Before the research project can begin, it must receive final approval from your university's Research Ethics Committee and a copy of this approval must be sent to the Senior Education Officer (HR) as per the contact information listed below.
 - 8a. Ethics Committee approval letter has been received ☒
 - 8b. Not applicable ☐
9. If there is potential risk in this research project that some participants may relive a traumatic experience which can cause emotional or psychological stress, counselling services and other appropriate supports must be available during and subsequent to the data collection process. Researchers are responsible for providing such supports. This service will not be provided by the NLESD. ☒
10. A copy of the research findings and resulting papers/reports must be directed to the CEO/Director of Education or designate. ☒
11. Research results must be made available to the schools involved and the individual participants who request them. ☒
12. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District takes no responsibility in conducting this research, and will not be held liable for any negative impacts relating to this research effort. The full responsibility to organize and conduct this research rests with the researcher(s). ☒

Recommended by: Webster Loope
Senior Education Officer

Date: Dec. 21/17

Signature of Approval: Anthony Stack
Associate Director of Education

Date: _____

Signature of Compliance: FBP
Researcher

Date: Dec. 21/17

A signed copy of this form MUST be returned to the address below and to the potential schools before research can begin:

Attention: Associate Director of Education
Newfoundland and Labrador English School District
95 Elizabeth Avenue
St John's, NL
A1B 1R6

Appendix 2: Typical Learning Circle Pedagogy for Curriculum

Materials: Talking piece, centre piece, timer with a harmonious ringer, writing material (paper, cardboard and markers).

Preparation: Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs without desks.

Welcome to the space of the Circle.

Mindfulness Moments or 3-minute focus circle after recess/break/previous class- pause, breath, and listen to the sound (using timer with harmonious ringer).

Remind the group of classroom values and guidelines, if they have one, if not, the group can make one.

Introduce the “Round”: A round is a pass of a talking piece around the circle. The keeper poses a question and, as a participant (may answers first if participants seem lost by giving some examples of the type of responses but then asks someone to go first and then as facilitator, be sure you give indication that any answer is acceptable...this can be done with a simple ‘thank you’). The keeper then passes that talking piece to the person to his/her left or right. On the first round, participants are invited to say their name as well as respond to the question. Note that, it is always okay for a participant to pass.

Check-in Round: To start the round, the keeper/facilitator/teacher will ask a question like, “Please share one word that describes how you are feeling today /now”

Begin class (Main activity): The teacher/facilitator and I will co-teach by displaying/writing the topic for discussion and study using multimedia chalkboard/PowerPoint/flipchart/video clip, and drawing the student attention to it informing them that they will have opportunity to share what they know soon. By giving the topic ahead of time, they can gather their thoughts together prior to the Circle.

Round #1: The teacher/facilitator will ask the students in the Circle to please share what they think or know about the topic or what they think the topic is about. After everyone has shared, ask: Is there anything anyone else would like to share? Anything you notice or are surprised by?

Round #2: The teacher /facilitator will ask: what are some things about this topic that you hope you will learn or know how to do? After everyone has shared, ask: Is there anything anyone else would like to share? Anything you noticed or are surprised by?

Round #3 (**Check- up**): The teacher/facilitator will ask: Do you have any concerns or worries about learning this topic? What do you think would be helpful for you to make this a good learning experience?

Check-out Round: What can you take away that is useful to you in the circle? Use the “RJE Framework Questions” below as a guide:

- What happened?
- What were/are you thinking?
- What were/are you feeling?
- What’s been the hardest thing for you?
- Who has been impacted? How?
- What do you need (to do) to go on?

The teacher/facilitator will ask the students to say/write a critical reflection about the discussion they had within the circle in the online classroom communication portal or any other preferred format.

Closing: Thank everyone for participating in the circle or use a quote.

This session can be alternated depending on a specific unit of the curriculum using learning circle to:

- Check for students’ understanding.
- Introduce a new topic/unit/concept
- Develop tips and strategies in doing homework, so students support and learn from one another.
- Share reflections.
- Exam/test reviews.

The teacher/facilitator will model learning circles to the students and after will then group them depending on the number of the participants to facilitate learning circle on a specific aspect of the unit of consideration. Following this is a sample of the Science Lesson Plan for the LC:

Science 1206 Lesson Plan

Extreme weather

Readings: Nelson Science 10

Prerequisite Knowledge and Skills: By the end of the class, students will be able to:

- Formulate questions about concepts dealing with extreme weather conditions and related issues.
- Recognise the weather group they belong to for class activities.

Enduring Understanding: Sharing by students who have experienced severe weather.

Essential Question: How can you description of an extreme weather event?

Time	Activity	Prep
11.05	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing of agenda on the whiteboard • Students getting seated in the circle arranged desks <p>Activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Setting class guidelines: what do I need from others to be my best? 2. Check-in Question: Think about the topic for consideration today, what type of extreme weather are you? 	Get coloured papers, scissors, markers, masking tape
	<p>Introduce the topic: Extreme Weather</p> <p>Exercise:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write 5 minutes description of an extreme weather event. 2. Use of pictures to discuss on extreme weather across the world in 2017 3. Video: 	Projector

	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrOYxLt9SCI	
11:30	<p>List of Extreme Weather</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thunderstorms and Tornadoes 2. Floods and Droughts 3. Hurricanes, Typhoons, and Tropical Cyclones 4. Extreme Heat and Cold 5. Blizzards 6. El Nino and Le Nina <p>Description and examples of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thunderstorms and Tornadoes 2. Floods and Droughts <p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balloon activity, write science 1206 (Breathing life into the curriculum) 	<p>On Paper</p> <p>Get coloured paper</p>
11:50	<p>Check-up circle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing of experience on extreme weather- Teacher and Students. • Formation of weather group (Grouping of students) <p>Check-out Question: What is the one thing that you can get from the class today?</p> <p>Closing: "...working together is success"- Henry Ford</p>	
12:05	Thank you.	

Appendix 3: Mr. Patrick's Teaching Philosophy

“My pedagogy toward teaching focuses on developing a positive teacher / student relationship based on respect. For successful teaching and learning to take place, students need to feel safe to take risks. Within the classroom, sharing ideas, including misconceptions, provide the opportunity for positive learning to take place. It is my opinion that the best learning occurs when the curriculum is linked to the experiences of students and is shown to be real to them. In addition, I feel that it is best to learn and teach for understanding rather than memorizing. When curriculum, is linked to real life situations, conceptual learning is more apt to take place. When teaching, I often remember the Confucius quote, “I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.” With this in mind, I always get students to solve questions after being shown an example. Sometimes, I get them to complete the examples independently while I complete the solution concurrently on the board. I believe students should be taking responsibility for their own success and failures. As teachers, we have to facilitate this transition of students being dependent on the teacher for academic results and behaviors to independent and intrinsically motivated learners. In my experience this is a challenging goal but an essential one.”

Appendix 4: Consent Form/Recruitment (Teacher)



Faculty of Education

St. John's, NL Canada A1B 3X8

Tel: 709 864 3403 Fax: 709 864 2345

www.mun.ca

Consent Form/Recruitment (Teacher)

Title: The Dynamics of Learning Circle in High School: Teachers and Students in “Equal Partnership”

Researcher(s): Boluwade Bukola, Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Room: ED3011A, 709-765-1541, Email: bfb478@mun.ca

Supervisor(s): Dr. Dorothy Vaandering, Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Office: E-5025, Tel: 709-864-3266, Email: dvaandering@mun.ca

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled, The Dynamics of Learning Circle in High School: Teachers and Students in “Equal Partnership”

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, Boluwade Bukola, if you have any questions about the study or would like more information before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

Introduction: I am a master's student in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Studies, Faculty of Education at Memorial. Students' state: As part of my Master's thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Vaandering.

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this study is to explore various ways that learning circles can be used in high school science class. The aim is to examine if learning circles impact teacher and students relationships and if they feel there is more of an equal (shared) partnership that improves students' participation and achievement.

What You Will Do in this Study:

During the study, a specific unit in science curriculum that you choose will be taught using learning circles. We will co-plan each science class and co-teach each class. We will be using RJ philosophy, a set agenda and guidelines for the learning circles. The learning circles allow for every student to have opportunity to participate actively in a critically reflective manner. As this is a different approach for this class, I am studying how students' experiences or levels of achievement are impacted. For the four weeks of this unit, the study will include observations of the students and yourself as you engage with the learning circle approach. I will also interview you and willing students individually. Students interviewed individually will also be invited to participate in a focus group interview. These will be my sole responsibility but we will plan together when these will take place in order not to take away the class time. Through our time together, I will be taking notes and recording how you are engaging the students with the learning circle approach.

Length of Time: The time required to plan for each lesson will be between 15-20 minutes. The observations will occur during the regular school time for science class and my interview with you will be at your convenience.

Withdrawal from the Study:

Participation is voluntary and you may request permission to withdraw from the study at any time. You will be invited to share your perspective during the individual interviews but you are

always free to leave the interview at any time. If at any point you wish to withdraw, you are totally free to excuse yourself. Any data collected from you to that point will be destroyed. Withdrawal from the study will be permitted till the end of the unit of study. After that, data will be used anonymously.

Possible Benefits:

As the teacher, you will benefit from this study as you will experience a new pedagogy which will allow you grow in your teaching capacity. In most cases, past experience indicates that academic relationships deepen and support student learning which will boost the teacher's performance. The study will also contribute to the growth of the implementation of restorative justice learning (science) circles in high schools. It will provide tips for critical reflection for both teacher and students.

Possible Risks:

The circles are RJ practice grounded in relational theory that cares about people's emotions. A circle dialogue involves the students with the teacher sitting or standing physically in a circle. A talking piece (an object of meaning related to the topic or of special significance to the class) is passed one by one around the circle. When a participant receives it, they are invited to share a response verbally, to hold the piece in silence, or to pass it to the next person without sharing. A learning circle is a kind of the RJ circles that is used to teach curriculum.

The potential for emotional/psychological risk is limited as, the circle dialogue process always allows for you to pass when the talking piece comes to you. In this way you are always in control of responding.

Confidentiality:

I am interested in how learning circles impact teaching and learning and not in any individual's performance. The data from observations and interviews from this research project, your own and that of the school identity will be kept confidential. All data collected will not be disclosed to anybody except my supervisor who I will be reporting to. If audio or video recordings and photographs are made during the learning circles / interview, they will be held in a secure location outside the classroom.

There is a limit to confidentiality as the nature of a focus group will not allow me to guarantee that other members of the group will not share beyond the circle. To encourage trust, the group will discuss and mutually create and agree to guidelines for sharing beyond the circle. As a participant you must also be aware that all data and identifying information will be kept confidential unless you indicate that you are not safe (i.e. you are or have been/ abused in any way). In that case, I will need to report this for your own protection to the proper authorities.

Anonymity:

Every reasonable effort will be made to ensure your anonymity. You will not be identified in publications without your explicit permission. Although I will report direct quotations from the interview, you will be given a pseudonym, and all identifying information [such as the name of the institution, your details, etc.] will be removed from the final report.

It is planned that data from this research will be published and presented at conferences; the data will be reported in aggregated form so that it will not be possible to identify individuals. The consent form also will be separate from materials used so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given set of responses. Anonymity is limited during the class as participants will hear each other comments. To encourage trust, the participants will discuss and mutually create and agree to guidelines for sharing beyond the circle.

Recording of Data:

There will be photographing and video or audio recording as backup for the field notes taken, participants will not be identified through them and if any picture will be used for publication, faces will be blurred so that no one will be identified. The comments, photographing and video/audio recording of non-participating students in the class will be excluded from the data collection.

Use, Access, Ownership, and Storage of Data:

Data will be stored as hard copy and on a hard drive. Electronic data files will be password-protected and stored on password-protected and/or encrypted devices. Written observations will be stored in a lock file cabinet. Only my research supervisor and I will have access to the data.

Consent forms will be stored separately from the data. “Data will be kept for a minimum of five years, as required by Memorial University’s policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research.”

Reporting of Results:

The complete copy of my thesis will be submitted to Memorial University of NL. My completed thesis will be available at Memorial University’s Queen Elizabeth II library, and can be accessed online at: <http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/search/collection/theses>. I may also present the findings of this research at academic conferences and/or in journal articles.

Sharing of Results with Participants:

A copy of the summary of the research result will be sent to the school and made available to you and after completion.

Questions:

You are welcome to ask questions before, during, or after your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact me or my supervisor Dr. Vaandering (contact information above).

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University’s ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Consent:

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been able to ask questions about this study.
- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.

- You understand that you are free to withdraw participation in the study without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect them now or in the future.
- You understand that if you choose to end participation during data collection, any data collected from you up to that point will be destroyed.
- You understand that if you choose to withdraw after data collection has ended, your data can only be removed from the study until the last day of the in-class unit of study.
- You understand that the following three permissions allow for the use of audio, video, and photographic data to be collected to help me as the researcher examine what happens more fully.

I agree to be audio-recorded

☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to be video-recorded

☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to be photographed

☐ Yes ☐ No

By signing this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researcher from their professional responsibilities.

Your Signature Confirms:

- ☐ I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.
- ☐ I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation.
- ☐ A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

Signature of Teacher

Date

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix 5: Informed Consent Form (Parent/Caregiver and Student Participant)



Faculty of Education

St. John's, NL Canada A1B 3X8

Tel: 709 864 3403 Fax: 709 864 2345

www.mun.ca

Informed Consent Form (Parent/Caregiver and Student Participant)

Title: The Dynamics of Learning Circle in High School: Teachers and Students in “Equal Partnership”

Researcher(s): Boluwade Bukola, Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland,
Room: ED3011A, 709-765-1541, Email: bfb478@mun.ca

Supervisor(s): Dr. Dorothy Vaandering, Faculty of Education, Memorial University of
Newfoundland, Office: E-5025, Tel: 709-864-3266, Email: dvaandering@mun.ca

Dear Parent/Caregiver,

Your child is invited to take part in a research project entitled, The Dynamics of Learning Circle in High School: Teachers and Students in “Equal Partnership”

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your child's participation will involve. It also describes your child's right to withdraw from the study. In order to decide whether you wish your child to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, Boluwade Bukola, if you have any questions about the study or would like more information before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

Introduction:

I am a master's student in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Studies, Faculty of Education at Memorial. Students' state: As part of my Master's thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Vaandering.

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this narrative case study is to explore various ways that learning circles can be used in high school science class. The aim is to examine if learning circles impact teacher and students relationships and if they feel there is more of an equal (shared) partnership that improves students' participation and achievement.

What You Will Do in this Study:

During the study, a specific unit in science curriculum will be taught using learning circles. I will work with Mr. Philip Sheppard to plan and co-teach the classes using RJ philosophy, a set agenda and guidelines for the learning circle, observations, interviews and focus group. The learning circles allow for every student to have opportunity to participate actively in a critically reflective manner. As this is a different approach for this class, I am studying how students' experiences or levels of achievement are impacted. For the four weeks of this unit, I will be observing students' contributions in class and inviting them to participate in interviews as individuals and in focus group. Any student willing to participate as an individual and/or in a focus group will be interviewed. I am contacting you to invite your child to participate in this study. If you agree, it will involve in the following:

(1) I will be observing how people work with the learning circle approach during the class. This may include me writing notes, and taking pictures or videos that I will not share but use as a reminder for what has happened;

(2) An interview in which students who are recruited will be asked to share their perspective regarding how learning circles impact teacher and students' relationships and whether they feel there is more of an equal (shared) partnership that improves their participation and achievement.

(3) Focus group discussion which will include only the students who are willing to participate among those that have been interviewed individually. If they are in the focus group each of them will interact and reflect on the same questions while listening to others in the group.

When conducting the interview/focus group, no one from the school or science teacher will be involved. Participation is voluntary and participation in one aspect does not necessitate participation in another aspect, and your child can choose to withdraw from participation at any stage without contacting you. The parental consent is required in addition to the student's assent to participate. Students should return the consent forms in an envelope provided to a dropbox in the school's main office.

Length of Time: The observation will be done during the regular school time for science class. The time required and the venue for the interviews/focus group will be planned by the science teacher and me during and after the time we spend together exploring the unit topic.

Withdrawal from the Study:

Participation is voluntary and your child may withdraw from the study at any time. Your child will be invited to share their perspective during the individual or focus group interviews; however, they are always free to pass on any question they do not wish to answer. In addition, they are always free to leave the interview at any time. If at any point your child does wish to withdraw, she/he is totally free to do so without permission or contacting you. Any data collected from your child to that point will be destroyed. Withdrawal from the study will be permitted until the end of the unit of study. After that, data will be used anonymously.

Possible Benefits:

All students in the class will benefit from this study as they will receive immediate feedback on the classwork during learning circle from the teacher and their peers. In most cases, past experience indicates that academic relationships deepen and support student learning. The study

will also contribute to the growth of the implementation of restorative justice learning (science) circles in high schools. It will provide tips for critical reflection for both teacher and students.

Possible Risks:

The circles are RJ practice grounded in relational theory that cares about people's emotion. A circle dialogue involves the students with the teacher sitting or standing physically in a circle. A talking piece (an object of meaning related to the topic or of special significance to the class) is passed one by one around the circle. When a student receives it, they are invited to share a response verbally, to hold the piece in silence, or to pass it to the next person without sharing. A learning circle is a kind of the RJ circles that is used to teach curriculum.

The potential for emotional/psychological risk is limited as, the circle dialogue process always allows for you to pass when the talking piece comes to you. In this way you are always in control of responding. However, I will be very observant of responses, and if I notice any uneasiness, discomfort or embarrassment, just like in any class situation, I will provide support as much as possible. Should I need further advice I will then contact a local counselling service or general (NL) crisis line.

Confidentiality:

I am interested in how learning circles impact teaching and learning and not in any individual child's performance. The data from observations and interviews from this research project and your child and their school identity will be kept confidential. All data collected will not be disclosed to anybody except my supervisor who I will be reporting to. If audio or video recordings and photographs are made during the learning circles / interview, they will be held in a secure location outside the classroom. There is a limit to confidentiality as the nature of a focus group will not allow me to guarantee that other members of the group will not share beyond the circle. To encourage trust, the group will discuss and mutually create and agree to guidelines for sharing beyond the circle. As a participant your child must also be aware that all data and identifying information will be kept confidential unless your child indicate that she/he is not safe (i.e. she/he is or has been/ abused in any way). In that case, I will need to report this for your child's own protection to the proper authorities.

Anonymity:

Every reasonable effort will be made to ensure your child's anonymity. Your child will not be identified in publications without explicit permission. Although I will report direct quotations from the interview, your child will be given a pseudonym, and all identifying information [such as the name of the institution, your child's details, etc.] will be removed from the final report.

It is planned that data from this research will be published and presented at conferences; the data will be reported in aggregated form so that it will not be possible to identify individuals. The consent form also will be separate from materials used so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given set of responses. Anonymity is limited during the class and focus group interviews as participants will hear each other comments. To encourage trust, the group will discuss and mutually create and agree to guidelines for sharing beyond the circle.

Recording of Data:

There will be photographing and video or audio recording as backup for the field notes taken, participants will not be identified through them and if any picture will be used for publication, faces will be blurred so that no one will be identified. The comments, photographing and video/audio recording of non-participating students in the class will be excluded from the data collection.

Use, Access, Ownership, and Storage of Data:

Data will be stored as hard copy and on a hard drive. Electronic data files will be password-protected and stored on password-protected and/or encrypted devices. Written observations will be stored in a lock file cabinet. Only my research supervisor and I will have access to the data. Consent forms will be stored separately from the data. "Data will be kept for a minimum of five years, as required by Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research."

Reporting of Results:

The complete copy of my thesis will be submitted to Memorial

University of NL. My completed thesis will be available at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II library, and can be accessed online at:

<http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/search/collection/theses>. I may also present the findings of this research at academic conferences and/or in journal articles.

Sharing of Results with Participants: A copy of the summary of the research result will be sent to the school and made available to you and your child after completion.

Questions:

You are welcome to ask questions before, during, or after your child's participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact me or my supervisor Dr. Vaandering (contact information above).

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you or your child have been treated or you or your child's rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Parental Consent:

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been able to ask questions about this study.
- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what your child will be doing.
- You understand that your child is free to withdraw participation in the study without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect them now or in the future.
- You understand that if you choose to end participation during data collection, any data collected from your child up to that point will be destroyed.
- You understand that if you choose to withdraw after data collection has ended, your data can only be removed from the study until the last day of the in-class unit of study.

- You understand that the following three permissions allow for the use of audio, video, and photographic data to be collected to help me as the researcher examine what happens more fully.

I agree to let my child be audio-recorded ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to let my child be video-recorded ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to let my child be photographed ☐ Yes ☐ No

By signing this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researcher from their professional responsibilities.

Your Signature Confirms:

☐ I have read what this study is about and understand the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.

☐ I agree to let my child participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of their participation, that their participation is voluntary, and that they may end their participation without my consent.

☐ I have read the student recruitment letter and discussed this project with my child.

☐ A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records (will be given the student at beginning of study).

Signature of Student Participant's Parent

Date

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Student Assent

The information above is also for you as student participant. Please read, sign, and return pages 6-8 of the Informed Consent Form in an envelope to a dropbox in the main office by _____

Also note that, you are free to decline participation or withdraw at any stage, even if your parent has provided consent. Please, you can indicate your decision by choosing from the following options:

- ☐ Yes, I will participate in this research. ☐ No, I will not participate.

If yes, what will you be willing to participate in this research? Please, pick Yes/No for each of the following options:

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------|----------|
| a. | Participants Observation | Yes / No |
| b. | Individual interview | Yes / No |
| c. | Focus group | Yes / No |

Name of Student Participant

Signature/Date

Signature of Student Participant's Parent/Caregiver

Date

Appendix 6: Recruitment Letter



Faculty of Education

St. John's, NL Canada A1B 3X8

Tel: 709 864 3403 Fax: 709 864 2345

www.mun.ca

Dear Student in Grade 10 Science 1206

Do you ever wonder if there are different ways that teaching and learning can happen so your perspectives are heard? As a teacher, I wonder about this often so I have designed a research project to find some answers. In November, I will be co-teaching a chemistry unit with Mr. ... using a learning circle approach with your class to discover if this might make a difference.

My name is Boluwade Bukola, and I am a student in the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Studies, Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am conducting a research project called **The Dynamics of Learning Circle in High School: Teachers and Students in “Equal Partnership”** for my master's degree under the supervision of Dr. Dorothy Vaandering. The purpose of the study is to explore various ways that learning circles can be used in high school science class.

I am contacting you to invite you to participate in this study. If you agree, it will involve the following:

- (1) I will be observing and taking note of how people work with the learning circle approach during the class. This may include me writing notes, and taking pictures or videos that I will not share but use as a reminder for me of what has happened;
- (2) An interview in which you will be asked to share your perspective regarding how learning circles impact teacher and students relationships and whether you feel there is more of an equal (shared) partnership that improves your participation and achievement.
- (3) Focus group discussion which will include only the students who are willing to participate among those that have been interviewed individually. If you are in the focus group each of you will interact and reflect on the same questions while listening to others in the group.

The time required and the venue for the interviews/focus group will be planned by the science teacher and me during and after the time we spend together exploring the unit topic. I will conduct the interview/focus group and no one from the school or science teacher will be involved. Please read the full letter of information and the consent form that is attached.

Participation is voluntary and participation in #1 (observation) does not require participation in #2 (interview) and #3 (focus group). You can choose to withdraw from or change your participation in any stage without permission/contacting your parent/caregiver. Because of your age, parent/caregiver consent is required in addition to your assent to participate. Please return the consent forms in the envelope provided to a dropbox in the school's main office.

There will be photographing and video or audio recording as backup for the fieldnotes taken. If I do use them for publication, faces will be blurred so that no one will be identified. Anonymity is limited during the class and focus group interviews as you will know who is involved and listening to each other comments. There is a limit to confidentiality as the nature of a focus group will not allow me to guarantee that other members of the group will not share beyond the circle. To encourage trust, the group will discuss and mutually create and agree to guidelines for sharing beyond the circle. As a participant you must also be aware that all data and identifying information will be kept confidential unless you indicate that you are not safe (i.e. you are or have been/ abused in any way). In that case, I will need to report this for your own protection to the proper authorities.

The potential for emotional/psychological risk is limited as, the circle dialogue process always allows for you to pass when the talking piece comes to you. In this way you are always in control of responding. However, I will be very observant of responses, and if I notice any uneasiness, discomfort or embarrassment, just like in any class situation, I will provide support as much as possible. Should I need further advice I will then contact a local counselling service or general (NL) crisis line.

If you have any questions about me or my project, please contact me by email at bfb478@mun.ca, or by phone at 709-765-1541.

Thank-you in advance for considering my request,

Boluwade, Bukola

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr.chair@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

“A partnership approach values the unique identities each partner brings to the experience of learning and working together”-NUS 2012

Appendix 7: Interview Questions

Teacher

1. What is your teaching philosophy?
2. What is the impact of restorative justice learning (science) circle on your teaching and learning outcome?
3. How do you experience a paradigm shift using RJ learning circle to teach science compared to a traditional setting?
4. How do you perceive or experience teacher and students in equal partnership, before and after using learning circle to teach science (success & challenges)?
5. How will you encourage or support RJ implementation and sustainability?

Students

- a. We have been able to use learning circle for your science class, how would you describe the experience, the best things, and the hardest things?
- b. How are learning circles different than your previous learning experience?
- c. The learning circle allows the teacher and students to sit together teaching and learning.

Using RJ framework, please respond to the following questions:

- What were you thinking when we first started learning circle?
- What are you now thinking about learning circles?
- How were you feeling when we started?
- How are you feeling now?
- What was/is the hardest thing for you? Best thing?
- How have you been impacted by learning circles?

- How have others in your life been impacted by you while participating in learning circles?
 - What do think could have been done differently in learning circles?
- d. If you were to choose a type of class arrangement for taking science, would you prefer our traditional way of learning or a learning circle? Explain?