THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON TEACHERS' RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN EDUCATION (RJE) PRACTICE IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

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Abstract

COVID-19 brought significant challenges to education and Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) practices. This study examined how COVID-19 impacted teachers' RJE practices in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). The research focused on the impact of COVID-19 in three aspects: teachers-student relationships, Circle practice and addressing harm and conflicts. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted online with four NL teachers who had practiced RJE during COVID-19. The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. The results showed that teacher-student relationships and Circle practice were negatively impacted during COVID-19. RJE was rarely used to address harm and conflicts among students due to the lack of in-person social interactions. COVID-19 also brought opportunities to RJE practices, including improved relationships between some students and their teachers. The pandemic reiterated the importance of the comprehensive RJE implementation in schools. It revealed that the administration's understanding of RJE was the participants' most needed support for their RJE practices. The results indicated that a whole-school approach is essential to the successful implementation of RJE and it is necessary to develop RJE practices in virtual spaces in the future.

Keywords: Restorative Justice in Education, COVID-19, teacher-student relationship, Circle practice, conflict resolution

General Summary

Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) is an educational approach that holds human worth and interconnectedness at the center. It aims to build nurturing relationships, equitable learning environments and address harm and conflicts. Circle practice is used regularly in RJE. This study examined how RJE practices were impacted by COVID-19 in NL from teachers' perspectives. It focuses on COVID-19's impact on teacher-student relationships, Circle practice and addressing harm and conflicts. Seven one-on-one interviews were conducted with four teachers. After analyzing the interview transcripts, the results showed that teachers-student relationships and Circle practice were negatively impacted by COVID-19. RJE was rarely used to address harm and conflicts. COVID-19 also brought opportunities to RJE, including enhancing some teachers' relationships with their students . The results indicated that it is significant to continue using RJE beyond COVID-19 with the whole school embracing RJE values. It is also necessary to develop RJE practices in virtual spaces.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Significance of the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic brought significant changes to almost every aspect of our lives. We faced and continue to face unprecedented social, cultural, and economic challenges. As one of the most important human activities, education has been significantly affected worldwide. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, n.d.), most governments had to close schools, including universities and colleges, to contain the spread of COVID-19. By January 12, 2021, school closures caused by COVID-19 negatively impacted more than 800 million learners across the globe. According to the BC Center for Disease Control (2020), school closures brought multiple challenges, including interrupted learning progress, increased stress levels, and mental health issues among students. In NL, over sixty thousand students on different levels were directly affected by the decision of school closure and remote teaching in 2020 (CBC News, 2020). After the number of new cases largely stabilized in NL, the school reopening plan was launched in September 2020. At that time, social distancing and masks were required in the classrooms and hallways after schools reopened in NL. The ongoing situation brought/is bringing many challenges to students, parents, and teachers. According to a survey conducted by CBC News journalists in Atlantic Canada and Eastern Ontario, many teachers in NL expressed that they felt "exhausted," "burned out," and "afraid" while being in the classroom during COVID-19 (CBC News, 2020). The stress among teachers was real and prevalent. From my personal experience as a university student, my study was also affected by COVID-19. When the lockdown started in March 2020 in St John's, both courses I took were moved from in-person to remote online synchronous teaching.

In this global crisis, the implementation of restorative justice in education (RJE) was

inevitably affected. Evans and Vaandering (2016) defined RJE as a framework for "facilitating learning communities that nurture 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" (p.15). RJE holds the worth of all at its core, emphasizing mutual concern, respect and human dignity on both the individual and collective level. One of the courses I took when COVID-19 hit was about restorative justice, in which talking Circles were the primary teaching pedagogy employed in the class. Talking Circles create a safe space for the participants to build trust and connections. The process requires all the participants to sit in a circle and pass around a talking piece to decide the order of the speakers. The challenge of education became apparent to me when the Circle conversations switched from face-to-face to online platforms. In addition to its impact on my personal experience, RJE is one of my major research interests. I was eager to study how the RJE practices in NL were being affected by COVID-19. As an approach that emphasizes relational ways of being, and as school closures immediately disrupted relationship building through in-person meetings in schools, there needs to be more in-depth research into the short-term and long-term effects of COVID-19 on RJE practices. Although more studies about the impact of COVID-19 on education are emerging, few studies were conducted on how RJE was affected during the pandemic in the Canadian context. Therefore, my current research focusing on teachers will be informative as it provides a unique opportunity to reflect on the pandemic and its impact on RJE practices. It also provides insight into how RJE practices need to continue in the classroom as the post-COVID-19 stage evolves.

1.2 Problem Statement

There is no doubt that COVID-19 brought significant challenges to education worldwide. Teaching and learning activities were severely disrupted due to multiple factors, including school

closure and lack of digital devices. Without previous experience with crises like COVID-19, educators struggled to find solutions to those challenges in their teaching practice. The incomplete understanding of COVID-19's impact on education caused great confusion and chaos in continuing education during the pandemic.

As an important educational practice, it is critical to understand how RJE was impacted during COVID-19. Understanding its influence can provide valuable information and guidance in finding and refining the solutions to address those challenges brought by COVID-19. Meanwhile, there are important learning opportunities embedded in the process of understanding the pandemic, which can guide the RJE practices beyond the pandemic and prepare for potential crises in the future.

1.3 Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to find out how RJE practices were affected by COVID-19 from teachers' perspectives. It explores the impact of COVID-19 on three aspects of RJE practices: Circle practice, teacher-student relationships and the use of RJE to address harm and conflict. The research findings are expected to 1) help other RJE practitioners reflect on and improve their RJE practices; 2) provide implications for RJE practices beyond COVID-19; 3) inform the design of future RJE programs for teacher development.

1.4 Research questions

The research question of this study is how teachers' RJE practices were impacted during COVID-19 in NL. Three sub-questions are posed: 1) How are the relationships between RJE practitioners and students affected during COVID-19? 2) What are the challenges and opportunities in RJE practices during COVID-19? 3) What do the RJE practitioners need to be at their best in implementing RJE during COVID-19?

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The current study was conducted within the framework of RJE theory. As shown in Figure 1.1, the core of RJE theory is the belief that all people are worthy and interconnected through relationships. There are three essential components in RJE theory. First, it aims to build a healthy and nurturing environment for children by fostering the right relationships among all people in schools. Second, RJE acknowledges that conflict and harm can often provide learning opportunities for the whole community. It is vital to address and transform harm and conflicts in RJE (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Third, the learning environment needs to ensure inclusivity, equity and justice. The first two components of RJE theory guided the methodology adopted in this study and the data analysis process. I focused on the impact of COVID-19 on teacher-student relationships and the use of RJE to address harm and conflicts. As talking Circles are an important element for embodying RJE practices in terms of relationship building, conflict resolution and other purposes, I also examined how Circle practice was changed during the pandemic. The theory's component of creating a just and equitable learning environment in RJE did not guide my work as it went beyond the scope of the study's purpose. At all times, the data was considered in terms of interconnection and worth through relationships. More details about RJE theory will be provided in the literature review chapter.

Figure 1.1 *Model of Restorative Justice in Education (Evans & Vaandering, 2016)*

1.6 Definition of Key Concepts

1.6.1 "During COVID-19"

In the current study, where the data collection lasted from June to October 2021, the phrase "during COVID-19" implies the following three periods.

1) "The first lockdown," when all schools in NL were ordered to be closed from March 2020 to July 2020

2) "School reopening," when the students and teachers were able to return to in-person class in September 2020

3) "The second lockdown" when all schools were closed briefly from February 11 to February 26, 2021

1.6.2 Talking Circles

Talking Circles in RJE are intentional spaces for open and inclusive communication among participants. Given their central role in RJE, in this report, "talking Circles" will be referred to as "Circles" for short. In a talking Circle, the values of RJE are practiced and maintained. With the guidance of a facilitator, participants will sit in a physical circle to discuss a certain topic. A talking piece (e.g., a meaningful object to the group) will be passed around to ensure everyone has a chance to speak. Only those who hold the talking piece can speak, while the rest of the group listens to the speaker attentively. In a school setting, talking Circles can be used along a continuum of a quick classroom meeting, to a teaching/curriculum Circle, to an in-depth conversation addressing difficult topics or incidents of harm, to Circles addressing trauma or grief (Boyes-Watson and Pranis, 2020). It provides a safe and non-judgmental space for students to speak from their hearts (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). One of the most commonly used talking Circles is check-in Circles. Students are encouraged to share their thoughts and emotions in check-in Circles so that a sense of connection can be established in the classroom. It provides an opportunity for students and teachers to know what is going on with each other. With the passing of a talking piece, students will answer light questions such as "on a scale of 1-10, how are you feeling?" or "what is on your mind right now?"

1.6.3 Teacher-Student Relationships (TSRs)

Building healthy and high-quality relationships holds a central position in the theory of RJE. Healthy relationships can only exist when there is respect and shared power among people. The needs of people should be met on both individual and collective levels without prioritizing one or the other (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Many RJE practices, such as Circle practice and restorative questions, are implemented to nurture trusting and caring connections between teachers

and students (Gregory et al., 2016). From the perspective of RJE, high-quality relationships can be identified by the power dynamics between teachers and students. When power is shared in a balanced way, the relationships will be healthy and nurturing. The expectations and support from both parties will be equal and reciprocal. Whereas in unhealthy relationships, power is used in a distorted way, which can be self-serving and overbearing. When people are dominated and coerced by others, the relationships will inevitably cause conflicts and even severe harm.

1.6.4 Addressing Harm and Conflict in RJE

Within the RJE framework, the focus of harm and conflict shifts from the breach of rules and regulations to the violation of human relationships. When addressing harm and conflict, RJE aims to include all the stakeholders involved in an incident. Discerning and meeting the underlying needs of everyone in the community plays a central role in conflict resolution in RJE. Accordingly, punitive measures are considered to be unacceptable responses to harm. RJE adopts both preventive and responsive measures in addressing harm and conflict. The whole-school approach in RJE implementation is an important preventive measure. There will naturally be fewer conflicts when there is mutual care and respect in a restorative school. When harm and conflict happen, RJE addresses both the behavioural issues and the systemic injustice causing the misbehaviours. In RJE, a balanced power dynamic in schools is crucial for preventing harm and conflict from happening in the first place. Additionally, conflicts are viewed as opportunities to strengthen relationships in RJE because they can potentially reveal unmet needs and unacknowledged harm. In the cooperation of solving problems together as a community, conflicts can bring the transformative power that bonds the community members even closer (Evans & Vaandering, 2006).

1.7 The Role of the Researcher

As the instrument of research, researchers play an important role in qualitative studies. As a graduate student whose research focuses on restorative justice, I am deeply intrigued by COVID-19's impact on teachers' RJE practices. This study intends to bring more insights into understanding how RJE practices were adapted during the pandemic and how they can continue creatively in the post-COVID 19 era.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) pointed out that sincerity and authenticity are fundamental in the researcher and participant relationship. To establish a trustworthy relationship with the participants, I actively reached out to the participants before the formal interviews began. I took this opportunity to establish a relationship by introducing myself, explaining the research purposes and details, and inviting them to ask questions. Moreover, I addressed the ethical issues at this stage. I ensured that the participants knew their anonymity was protected and that they had the right to withdraw any consent they gave during the study. Before the study began, I familiarized myself with the situations, such as the participants' needs and the insider language. It helped me collect thicker research data while making the participants feel comfortable. I intend to build an equal, collaborative relationship with the participants using RJE theory as the conceptual framework. I tried not to power over the participants with any academic armour (e.g., academic jargon) but explored the topic together with them. Finally, as an international student from a different cultural background and educational system, I carried certain assumptions about teacher-student relationships. The pre-knowledge may bring biases to my interpretation of the data. Therefore, I have been cautious and actively reflected on the potential presumptions to strengthen the credibility of the study.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

The literature review chapter provides an overview of the comparison between RJ and RJE theory. It explores the debate between affirmative RJE and transformative RJE theory. Moreover, this chapter examines important literature on three key components in RJE: Circle practice, teacher-student relationships (TSRs) and addressing harm and conflict. It looks into both the challenges and opportunities COVID-19 has brought to education.

2.1 The Theory of RJ and RJE

Although Restorative Justice (RJ) has only gained popularity in the past few decades, the concept and values have long existed in many other cultures, such as Maori traditions and North American Indigenous cultures (Zehr, 2015). Considered the pioneer of the modern definition of RJ, Zehr (2015) explained that "restorative justice is a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offence and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible" (p.25). Situated within the context of the judicial system, the three pillars of RJ theory are "harm and needs," "obligation" and "engagement." When applied in education, the definition of RJE has evolved to fit its unique situations. According to Evans and Vaandering (2016), RJE is "facilitating learning communities that nurture 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" (p.8). It is a vision of education that values the contribution of community engagement for the wellbeing of both the individual and the group. Like the three pillars in RJ, there are three core components in RJE - "nurture healthy relationships," "create just and equitable learning environments," and "repair harm and transform conflict" (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p.14). Table 1. shows the comparison between RJ and RJE theory. First and most obvious, both theories are a shift from a rule-based paradigm to a

relationship-based paradigm. RJ and RJE stress creating an engaging and inclusive environment, and they both emphasize respect, worth and interconnectedness for all. Besides the commonalities, there are also distinct differences between them. Because RJ originated in the judicial context, it mostly focuses on healing and repairing harm after an offence happens. However, RJE functions in the educational context. Therefore, its goals are to create an inclusive environment to nurture healthy relationships as well as conflict resolution after relationships are harmed. Lastly, the core questions show different foci in these two theories. The starting point of RJ theory is the victims and offenders. Nevertheless, the RJE core questions begin by questioning the self. As depicted in Figure 2.1, the changes should always begin with the self. In the education context, it means that RJE should start with adults (e.g., educators and caregivers) respecting and honouring themselves as necessary to respect and honour their students and colleagues. With that, this study intends to find out how RJE practice was impacted during COVID-19 from teachers' perspectives. The focus on teachers reflects one of the central principles in RJE theory: positive changes should always begin with adults. It is the adults that should create a nurturing and supportive environment where everyone is respected, honoured and cared for.

Table 2.1 *Comparison of RJ and RJE*

RJ Definitions	RJE Definitions
"Restorative justice is a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offence and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible" (Zehr, 2015, p.62).	"Facilitating learning communities that nurture 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" (Evan & Vaandering, 2016, p.15).
Three pillars in RJ	**Three core components in RJE**
• Engagement • Obligations • Harms and needs	• Nurture healthy relationships • Create just and equitable learning environments • Repair harm and transform conflict
RJ core questions	**RJE core questions**
• Who has been hurt? • What are their needs? • Whose obligations are these?	• Am I honouring? • Am I measuring? • What message am I sending?
RJ Values	**RJE Values**
• "Underlying restorative justice is the vision of interconnectedness" (Zehr, 2015). We are all connected in the web of relationships. • Respect for all. •Interconnections and individualities are both important.	• All are worthy of respect • All are worthy of dignity • Mutual concern • All people are interconnected

Note. The content in this table is summarized from Zehr (2015) and Evans and Vaandering (2016)

Figure 2.1 *Ripples of Relationship (Evans & Vaandering, 2016)*

Most schools are designed to be hierarchical. It is not rare to experience power imbalance in educational institutions. However, sharing power is necessary for building healthy and nurturing relationships. When power is shared in the right way, both the individual and the collective needs can be satisfied (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). In RJE theory, the Relationship Matrix (Figure 2.2) was developed to illustrate the role power dynamics play in relationships. Power balance can be manifested through the expectations and support one has for others in relationships. As the level of expectations and support change on the vertical and horizontal axes, the relationship type changes accordingly. As shown in Figure 2.2, healthy relationships can only be formed when there is a balance between one's expectations and support for the other. Power is shared WITH each other. When power is shared in balance, there will be mutual respect and genuine care for each

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other. On the contrary, relationships will suffer when there is a gap between one's expectations and support. People are considered objects to be managed, ignored, or depreciated in unhealthy relationships. When people are "powered over" by others, naturally, there will be destructive energy radiating from toxic relationships, hurting ourselves and those around us.
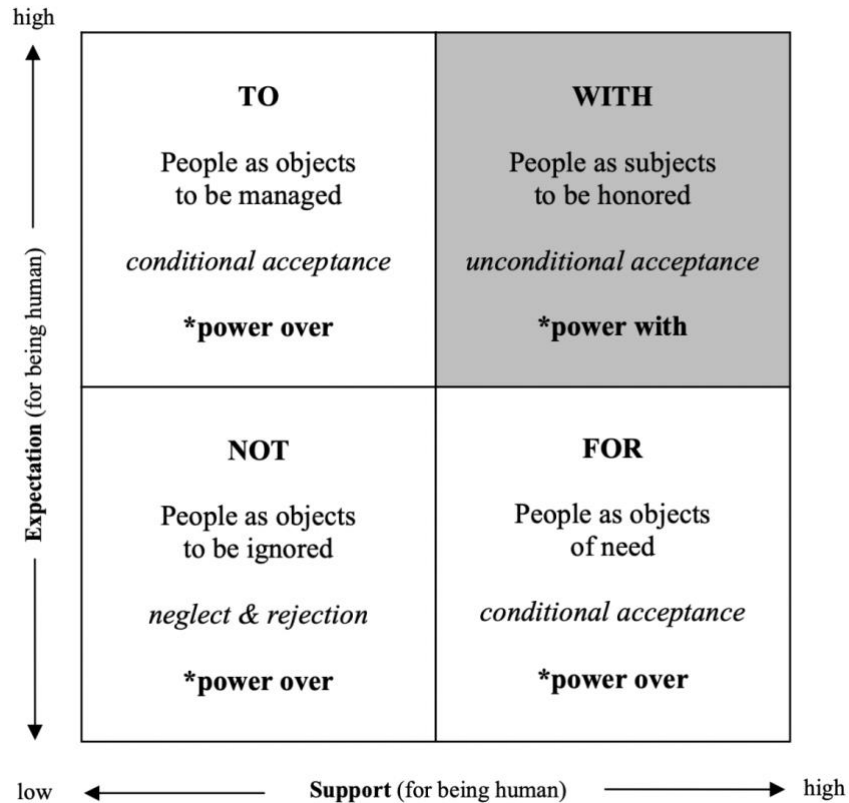
Figure 2.2 *The Relationships Matrix (Evans & Vaandering, 2016)*

2.2 Affirmative RJ vs. Transformative RJ

Like any other field in the academic world, there are tensions and debates in understanding what restorative justice is. Different explanations formed a spectrum and at the two ends of the spectrum are affirmative RJ and transformative RJ (Woolford & Nelund, 2020). The former focuses on dealing with individual behaviours, yet the latter aims to deal with the behaviour issues and the

deep-rooted causes of those issues (Reimer, 2019). In affirmative RJ, the goal is to maintain the existing rules. The status quo is considered the reference point. Any major changes from the status quo are considered a deviation. In education, affirmative RJ is viewed as a tool to address the individuals' disruptions, hoping to restore the previous classroom orders by eliciting changes in behaviours. The hidden causes of those behavioural issues in policies, structures and culture are usually ignored in affirmative RJ (Reimer, 2019). Unlike affirmative RJ, transformative RJ aims to tackle the issues on both the individual and the systemic level. It is essential to look at the injustice in the structure that has been causing the behavioural problems. In transformative RJ, a paradigm shift is indispensable in addressing social injustice and power inequity (Llewellyn, 2011). It questions the existing rules in education, challenges the punitive school environment, and aims to transform the status quo by addressing the deep-rooted problems in the structure (Reimer, 2019). In addition, transformative RJ is not simply a theory. It is a "way of life" (Llewellyn, 2012). In transformative RJ, people should explore how we can live collectively as our "best selves" (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). If people internalize the philosophy of transformative RJ and apply it to daily life, naturally, the practitioners will take issues of social injustice and power inequity into account when addressing students' behavioural issues (Elliott, 2011).

The different philosophical foundations between these two approaches determined that affirmative RJ's goal is to maintain and reinforce social control. However, the goal of transformative RJ is to dismantle the existing system and encourage social engagement (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). While regulations and disciplines hold a central place in affirmative RJ, transformative RJ prioritizes human relationships and invites people to connect with each other. From the transformative perspective, humans are closely connected. Therefore, behavioural issues can never be considered individualistically. In transformative RJ, students are humans that ought

to be listened to, cared for, and respected, while in affirmative RJ, students are viewed as objects to be managed and controlled (Reimer, 2019). Since the goal of affirmative RJ is to maintain the existing educational structure, which is about compliance and control, affirmative RJ allows the use of punitive measures in education (Tonry, 2010). In fact, RJ is a new form of punishment from the affirmative perspective, which is necessary to restore a just and orderly society (London, 2011). Compared with transformative RJ, affirmative RJ is more accepted by the school administrations because it does not challenge the current school system. Its restriction to behaviour corrections becomes an advantage in promoting RJ in schools, making it seem more "practical" than transformative RJ (London, 2011). As the affirmative RJ advocates claimed, the compromised RJ is better than no RJ at all (Reimer, 2019). However, the acceptability should not overweigh the authenticity and integrity of restorative justice. Transformative advocates reject any co-option modifying RJ principles to make the retributive practices less harsh under the name of RJ (Cunneen,2012) because "anything less than a transformative approach to injustice tends only to scratch the surface of the problem" (Woolford & Nelund, 2020, p. 153). Despite the debate on RJE theory, the differences will eventually be reflected through RJE practices. In the following section, I will focus on one of the most important practices in RJE theory – the Circle process.

2.3 Circle Process

As the most used conversation form in RJE practice, the Circle process aims to "create a safe space for people to connect with others in a good way, even in circumstances of conflict, harm, or difficulty" (Pranis, 2005, p. 33). The Circle process is beyond the function of a conversation tool because of its deep-rooted values aligned with the philosophy of RJE. According to Boyes-Watson & Pranis (2020), there are six theoretical foundations supporting the Circle practice in schools. In the following sections, I will discuss the six foundations with supporting literature from

different education scholars.

First, the Circle process supports the student's development into a whole person. Dewey (2013) pointed out that schools should meet the needs of students' psychological and social development besides supporting their academic growth. The cultivation of cognitive skills (e.g., writing skills and mathematical skills) plays an important part in traditional education. However, numerous studies have shown that non-cognitive skills such as persistence and curiosity can have a long-term positive effect on a child's life. According to Zwicky (as cited in Pranis, 2015, p.71), the Circle process can serve as part of the social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. Multiple social skills and conflict resolution skills can be gained through the Circle process. Since the Circle protocol is inclusive and equal by design, it provides a safe space for students to practice their emotional skills learnt in other SEL curricula.

Second, the Circle process is perfect for building positive relationships in education. As the philosopher Krishnamurti (2008) said, "the purpose of education is to cultivate the right relationship, not only between individuals but also between the individual and society" (p. 20). The importance of relationships in education is evident. Multiple theories in different fields have confirmed that healthy and caring relationships between adults and children are an indispensable factor in enhancing young people's cognitive ability as well as social-emotional learning. The Circle is a suitable tool to help connect the participants in a meaningful way because Circle practice itself is "a process for building relationships" (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2020, p. 34). It provides a rich soil for the relationship to take roots and grow.

Third, the Circle process can enhance the whole-school approach to establish a nurturing school environment. Schools should be the home for teachers and students. Students should feel welcomed, accepted, and connected with each other in their schools (Krishnamurti, 2008).

According to Boyes-Watson & Pranis (2020), a positive school climate plays a crucial role in the students' social and emotional development. A caring school environment is built up by all its members, including non-teaching staff such as the janitors and cafeteria workers. The Circle process can perfectly support this whole-school approach to building a positive learning environment because the nature of Circles can help bring "shared leadership, equality, connection and inclusion." It encourages "focus, accountability and participation from all" (Pranis, 2005, p. 11).

Moreover, reward and punishment are often the first way teachers use to discipline students in traditional education. However, the Circle process provides an alternative way to discipline the students by inquiring into the deep causes of the misbehaviours. According to behavioural learning theory (Davis et al., 2015), students' behaviours are largely learnt from the external environment and have little to do with internal factors such as temperament and interests. Positive behaviours are often reinforced by rewards, and negative behaviours are discouraged by punishment. Nevertheless, those artificially cultivated behaviours will often change once the external reinforcement is removed. Additionally, there is always fear associated with punishment. Fear cripples the mind and kills creative thinking. A student cannot learn when the mind is full of fear and anxiety (Krishnamurti, 2008). Without addressing the root causes of those misbehaviours, any external suppression of those behaviours is still a "veneer of compliance" (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2020, p. 521). Aligned with the values of restorative justice, the Circle process provides an opportunity to inquire into the root causes of the misbehaviours and to address the harm done to the victim and the needs of the offenders. (Zehr, 2015). Under the guidance of restorative justice theory, conflicts in the Circle process are seen as learning opportunities instead of hazards that need to be avoided.

Circle practice can provide healing power for students who may have experienced trauma. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for children to experience trauma outside of school. Most children came to school with a conditioned mind already. They may have been hurt by their parents or other people at home (Krishnamurti, 2008). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) refer to stressful and traumatizing incidents which occur before children reach the age of 18 (n.d.). ACEs can have a long-term impact on a person's emotional and cognitive development. However, children can be protected from the negative effects of trauma if they have someone who truly cares about them, such as a nurturing teacher or a trusted friend (CDC, n.d.). It is especially important to make the school an "oasis" that can provide the care, support, and nutrition for children to grow and thrive (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2020). Regular Circle practices in schools can help cultivate students' resilience and mitigate the long-term effects of trauma. It is the good relationship in Circles that brings the healing power to any children who may have experienced trauma in their life (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2020).

Lastly, the Circle Process can create a space for mindfulness for the participants to observe and inquire without fear. Incorporating breathing and silence can set a mindful rhythm for the Circle process. It can allow the participants to be fully aware of the actuality and the present. In this awareness, there is the observation without choice, condemnation, or justification (Krishnamurti, 2008). The Circle process can guide the participants to contemplate those fundamental questions in restorative justice theory: "What happened/is happening? What was/am I feeling/thinking? What is the hardest/best thing for me? Who is impacted by this? How? What do I need [to do] to move forward?" (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Just like Krishnamurti (2011, 1:04) said, "to understand is to transform what is." The Circle process itself is a mindful practice

that brings healing power to transform the conflict and the hurt.

2.4 Teacher-Student Relationships (TSRs)

As mentioned in the previous section, Circles can help build positive relationships in schools. Among all the relationships children have with adults , the teacher-student relationship is undoubtedly one of the most significant relationships. According to Hughes, Cavell, and Jackson (1999), the teacher-student relationship in school is a critical factor in predicting students' outcomes. A positive teacher-student relationship is associated with better academic engagement and results (Roorda et al., 2011). It can also predict less aggression among students and better social and emotional functioning (Reddy et al., 2003). Promoting healthy and high-quality relationships holds a central position in the theory of RJE. Many RJE practices are implemented to nurture trusting and caring connections between teachers and students, such as Circles and restorative questions (Gregory et al., 2016). In this section, I will explore the theoretical foundations of TSRs and the influences TSRs have on students' development and teacher wellbeing.

2.4.1 Theoretical Foundations for TSRs

Numerous studies have shown the significance of high-quality TSRs in education. According to Williford and Wolcott (2015), three main theories have guided the definition and interpretation of TSRs. First, attachment theory has been used to explain the relationships between teachers and students, although it was initially used to describe the relationships between parents and children. Parents are usually considered the safe base for children to seek psychological security. The warmth and care from parents will allow children to explore an unfamiliar environment without being daunted by fear. Similarly, teachers can form a secure attachment with students, which will help students fully engage in learning activities with a low level of fear and anxiety. Positive TSRs are also shown to help teachers address young students' issues and problem

behaviours (Williford & Wolcott, 2015). The second theoretical foundation of TSRs is self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, as cited in Williford & Wolcott, 2015). According to this theory, it is children's basic psychological need to have "relatedness, competence and autonomy." Warm, supportive, and caring TSRs can help students meet their needs, therefore, improving their school performance. Third, developmental system theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, as cited in Williford & Wolcott, 2015) also provides theoretical guidance for TSRs. In this theory, TSRs are considered a proximal factor that can influence children's development. TSRs are affected by multiple factors such as teachers' and students' characteristics and school climate. Correspondingly, supportive teacher-student connections, such as the classroom culture, may positively impact the system in return.

2.4.2 The Influence of TSRs on Students

According to Pianta (1999, as cited in Williford & Wolcott, 2015), high-quality TSRs are associated with high levels of warmth, sensitivity, closeness, openness in communication and low levels of conflict and dependency (ibid.). TSRs can significantly affect children's social-emotional development because they provide a basic social environment in which students' learning can take place (Roorda et al., 2011). There are close links between TSRs and SEL skills acquisition among children (Williford & Wolcott, 2015). Teachers' involvement and sensitivity can support children's social-emotional development, such as acquiring communication skills and gaining autonomy (ibid.). Conversely, conflict-ridden TSRs with a lack of warmth will contribute to emotional distress in children (Drugh et al., 2011, as cited in Kurdi & Archambault, 2018). The negativity is that such TSRs can even worsen the existing problems in a child (Pianta & Nimetz, 1991, as cited in Kurdi & Archambault, 2018). In addition to the impact TSRs have on students' social-emotional development, studies have shown that TSRs can significantly impact students' academic

performance at schools (Liberante, 2012). According to Churchill and colleagues (2011, as cited in Liberante, 2012), class works that are both engaging and challenging can help students focus better on their tasks, yielding better academic performance. Positive TSRs can allow teachers to have an insight into their students' interests, emotions and learning preferences. Those insights will guide teachers when they design classroom content, which can be more tailored for the students, thus motivating them to study more effectively. In addition, positive TSRs often indicate high levels of teacher support for their students. It is more likely to elicit a positive learning environment for children at school when the interactions between teachers and students are healthy and supportive (Gregory et al., 2016).

2.4.3 The Impact of TSRs on Teacher Wellbeing

In most cases, teachers are usually the people who lead and influence, while students are merely expected to respond to teachers' actions (Schlechty & Atwood, 1977). It may seem plausible. However, the assumption of students being mostly passive may not be true. Many sociologists first observed that teachers not only can influence/support students but also are influenced/supported in return (Schlechty & Atwood, 1977). According to the results of a meta-analysis study (Spilt et al., 2011), TSRs can affect teachers both mentally and professionally. Positive TSRs can increase the enjoyment of teaching, while disruptive TSRs will have an emotional toll on teachers, leading to stress and burnout.

Nowadays, being a teacher is considered one of the most stressful jobs because of its high emotional demands (Milatz et al., 2015), which are described as "emotional labour" by researchers (Glomb & Tews 2004, as cited in Milatz et al., 2015). Statistics have shown that up to 30% of the teachers are impacted by emotional drainage and ill-being, such as anxiety and low moods (Milatz et al., 2015). The interactions between teachers with their students are regarded as the most critical

factor contributing to emotional labour in a teaching position (Johnson et al., 2005, as cited in Milatz et al., 2015). According to Hargreaves (2000), teachers get the most enjoyment and motivation from the relationships with their students. It is reported as one of the core reasons teachers stay in their positions (Hargreaves, 1998). Positive TSRs are considered teachers' "internal rewards" that give meaning to their work (Milatz et al., 2015). Similarly, conflictual and distant TSRs can take an emotional toll on teachers' mental health by inflicting stress and other negative emotions on them. Negative TSRs can make teachers feel vulnerable and rejected by their students (Milatz et al., 2015). It can also cost teachers' professional wellbeing by decreasing their self-efficacy and work motivation (Yoon 2002, as cited in spilt et al., 2011).

As mentioned earlier, there are three main theories by which TSRs are guided: attachment theory, self-determination theory and developmental system theory. According to attachment theory, students need a warm and caring connection with adults to get emotional security, and teachers also need close reciprocal relationships with their students (Spilt et al., 2011). Safe relationships with students will meet teachers' psychological needs for emotional security, a basic psychological need for all human beings. Moreover, self-determination theory postulates three basic human needs: autonomy, belongingness, and competence. Both children and adults need to form close relationships with others. Teachers have a basic need for relatedness, too (ibid.). Since teachers spend most of the time in the classroom with their students, it is believed that TSRs are most likely to be the source for teachers to fulfill their needs for belongingness and relatedness (Hargreaves, 2000). The abovementioned theories explain why TSRs are a significant component of RJE theory. They also echoed the *reciprocity* in RJE theory. Mutual concern and respect are crucial components in RJE. They are essential in nurturing relationships, building an equitable environment and resolving conflicts. Healthy TSRs can help both nurture students and support

teachers. In the process of relationship-building, it is possible that conflicts may arise as connections deepen. Harm can also happen when problems in relationships are not properly addressed. In the next section, I will focus on another central component - the use of RJE in addressing harm and conflict.

2.5 Addressing Harm and Conflict in RJE

2.5.1 What Is Harm and Conflict in RJE?

Traditionally, wrongdoing that brings about harm and conflict is often associated with breaking the rules and laws. The way of addressing them is normally a "deserved" punishment for the offenders (Zehr, 2015). The definition became different in the context of RJ. In RJ, wrongdoing is defined as the "violation of people and interpersonal relationships" (Zehr, 2015, p.24) instead of rules and regulations. The focus of addressing harm and conflict is uncovering the hidden needs of both offenders and victims. Furthermore, the causes of the wrongdoing need to be addressed on both the individual and the collective level. Offenders are obligated to explain the causes of their behaviours. The other stakeholders involved in the incident also need to be held accountable, such as the community and the whole system in society. The restorative process is the process of solving problems collaboratively, accompanied by potential learning and healing. The goal of RJ is to put things right as much as possible by reparation and restoration (Zehr, 2015). When RJ is applied in education, misbehaviours are often looked at within a context. Students' misbehaviours are "responses" that stem from deep-rooted reasons. It is the adults' responsibility to uncover the reasons and restore a healthy context for students. When harm and conflict happen, students' sense of dignity can be negatively affected (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Meanwhile, conflicts are viewed as teachable moments in RJE. Supported by educational psychology, conflicts have great value in self-growth, the learning process and community building (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005).

2.5.2 Why Use RJE in Discipline?

In education, when students' misbehaviours cause harm and conflict, adults tend to address them by inflicting punishment on those causing the concern. If the behaviours do not repeat, the conflicts are considered resolved. On the surface, it seems quick and easy to conduct. However, punishment has little benefit in developing a child's ability for self-discipline or teaching them to take responsibility for their wrongdoing. The misbehaviour is only suppressed by the fear brought by punishment temporarily (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005). In fact, there are many negative effects brought by punishment. Evans and Vaandering (2016) pointed out that when people feel dominated and coerced by others, they will usually repel and exert their power in different ways. They may also submit to the power and diminish their value. Students may feel the teachers use power over them when they are punished. In response, they may confront the teachers in anger or shut themselves off to gain more power. Being treated unjustly by adults, students may even bully or hurt their peers for more power. Punishment is usually ineffective or even harmful. (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005). On the other hand, RJE provided an alternative perspective on addressing harm and conflict. As mentioned earlier, restorative discipline focuses on meeting needs and nurturing healthy environments. The restorative process is a collaborative process for problem-solving. Despite the effectiveness of restorative discipline, the biggest reason for adopting RJE to address harm and conflict is because it is the right thing to do. Everyone deserves an opportunity to express their views regardless of being the one causing harm or the one harmed. It is the inherent human dignity that ensures this birthright (Hicks, 2019).

2.5.3 The Characteristics of Addressing Harm and Conflict in RJE

Instead of asking, "What rules were broken? Who did it? What do they deserve?" RJE asks questions about how to address the harms, needs and obligations on both the individual and

collective level. The restorative discipline aims at bringing healing, learning and putting things right to the extent possible (Zehr, 2015). Guided by the RJ principles, restorative discipline in schools has a few distinctive characteristics.

First, RJ is concerned about all stakeholders involved in the incident, including those causing harm and the harmed. Zehr (2015) pointed out that offenders can also be victims when harm happens. It is because many offenders have been hurt or traumatized previously. The unresolved trauma may become the contributing factor to the harm caused by the offenders. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the offenders' experiences of being a victim. Traditionally, we assumed children's misbehaviours are due to the desire to get things or avoid taking responsibility. RJE provided a new framework in which misbehaviours are seen as results of unmet needs or lacking relevant skills (Brummer, 2021). From this perspective, punishments are invalidated because they are simply the manipulation of behaviours on the surface by inflicting unpleasant experiences. The unmet needs are still left unaddressed.

Second, meeting the underlying needs of everyone involved in an incident is the primary principle in addressing harm and conflict from the RJE perspective. When harm occurs, RJE aims at restoring, for instance, the broken relationships or self-worth by meeting the needs of everyone impacted by the incident (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). As human beings, we have natural needs for belonging, leisure, autonomy, et cetera. Students act out of their desire to satisfy those needs (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005). It is the responsibility of adults to identify, acknowledge and guide them to find appropriate ways to meet their needs. When some of the needs cannot be satisfied in the school environment, educators still play an important role in referring the students to appropriate support (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Meanwhile, schools must provide safe spaces where all the measures above can happen.

Third, the whole-school approach is a distinctive characteristic of using RJE to address harm and conflict. The effectiveness of restorative justice practices will be greatly improved if the whole-school approach is implemented, where every stakeholder in the school community can see things from the restorative lens (Hopkins, 2004). According to Amstutz and Mullet (2005), building a nurturing school environment is an important preventive measure for addressing harm and conflict in RJE. RJE practices need to start from various aspects, including school policies, restorative training for school leaders, teachers, and staff, supporting curriculum, et cetera. RJE practices must go beyond the allotted Circle time or certain practices. It is crucial to establish and maintain a restorative ethos through a whole-school approach, in which harm and conflict can be addressed in a non-punitive way.

Fourth, RJE is committed to addressing injustice embedded in the system to uproot the causes of harm and conflict. As previously mentioned, transformative RJ focuses on both behavioural issues and the injustice and inequity that have been causing those issues. Within the RJE framework, conversations about racism, hierarchy, sexism and other social justice-related topics must happen. It is important to ensure that the power dynamics in schools are shared among the community members in a balanced way. Without addressing the injustice in the system, the effectiveness of RJE will inevitably be compromised. No matter what changes happen in the behaviours, they will not be sustained if the oppression in the system is left untackled.

2.6 The Impact of COVID-19 on Education

After examining the essential components in RJE theory, I now shift to another topic regarding the impact of COVID-19 on Education, hoping to provide an overview of its impact on both teachers and students.

2.6.1 The Impact of COVID-19 on Teachers

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 in most countries, the new virus has caused a worldwide impact on the education systems. In order to contain this virus, many countries closed schools. The school closures and other disruptions caused by the pandemic affected 825 million learners all around the globe as of January 12, 2021 (UNESCO, n.d.). In response to school closure, many schools opted for remote learning so that teachers could continue teaching through the internet. However, online learning exposed more social and economic problems that may have already existed prior to the pandemic, such as educational inequality, family education, and limited access to the internet (Jain et al., 2021). These problems are commonly faced by societies in both developing and developed countries. In this section, I will discuss how the current pandemic has affected teachers and students; what challenges and opportunities COVID-19 has brought to the two groups.

2.6.1.1 Challenges for Teaching According to Jain et al. (2021), digital gaps are experienced by both learners and teachers. The first gap is the access gap to stable internet. In the research conducted in Delhi, India, only 17% of the government school have online classes supporting infrastructure, and 79% of the teachers in the private schools reported having no/poor internet connection. The main obstacle for teachers to provide online education in Delhi is the unreliable internet connection (Jain et al., 2021). Another challenge brought by online learning during the pandemic is the digital skills gap teachers faced. With a rapid switch to online teaching, teachers must be familiar with using multiple platforms such as Zoom, Google Classroom, and Microsoft Teams. Nevertheless, almost three-quarters of the teachers from the government schools in Delhi responded that they had not been trained to conduct online classes, and nearly half of the schoolteachers indicated that they lack adequate digital skills when teaching online (Jain et al., 2021). Lastly, teachers also face the *usage gap.* Some teachers find it challenging to adapt to the

new teaching methods. This made them unable to motivate their students and create interactive classes online. Only 25% of government school teachers in Delhi reported engaging with students on all working days (Jain et al., 2021).

Similar challenges teachers faced were also identified in some developed countries, although to a lesser degree. According to research by the University of Melbourne (Ziebell et al., 2020), 75% of primary teachers and 90% of secondary teachers reported having stable internet most of the time. However, problematic internet connections can still hinder teaching online in Australia. For example, one of the teachers reported that the students had to turn off the videos to create enough bandwidth for the teaching to continue. Similar issues also existed in Canada. The digital divide between rural and urban areas in Canada even worsened during the pandemic. According to Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), only 53% of the rural communities have access to high-speed internet. The figure in urban communities is 89.5%. The students studying at home during the pandemic had to tolerate the negative effects of low bandwidth, such as frozen screens or inconsistent internet connection. It became more difficult when there was more than one child in the household because the low-speed internet often allows only one person to be online (Stewart, 2020).

Another common obstacle teachers encounter in India and Australia is that they find it difficult to engage disadvantaged students. Since teachers could not interact with students physically or see their body language, it was hard to discern their individual needs and provide the proper support. One thing that needs to be paid attention to is that almost 70% of the Australian teachers in the research reported that their work time increased overall by 6 hours weekly. On top of the extra workload caused by online teaching, the feelings of loneliness and fatigue from more screen time added additional stress to them. This caused the teachers to be concerned about their

own physical and mental health (Ziebell et al., 2020).

2.6.1.2 Opportunities for Teaching Although COVID-19 has brought many unprecedented challenges for teachers, there are still some positive sides that should not be overlooked or minimized. First, the relationships between teachers, parents and other caregivers were strengthened due to the increased communication and collaboration during COVID-19 (Ziebell et al., 2020, Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). The remote learning at home created a great opportunity for the caregivers to get involved in the students' learning, especially for children with special needs at school. Second, apart from the closer relationship between teachers and caregivers, the collaboration between colleagues also increased. During the pandemic, teachers supported each other to overcome the difficulties together. The staff collegiality and collaboration allowed more resources to flow smoothly in the school communities. The cooperation across schools also broke down the walls that may have been built up due to the competition for resources (e.g., funding). Third, many innovative education methods have been created to cope with the current education emergency. Teachers were forced to use digital methods of teaching, which they might have been hesitant about before the pandemic. In addition to using online platforms such as Zoom and Cisco WebEx, teachers also developed many other creative ways to mitigate the limitations of remote learning. It is safe to say that COVID-19 expedited the digital teaching and learning process and challenged some rigid educational practices. Teacher proficiency has also increased in trying and creating new pedagogies (Ziebell et al., 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

2.6.2 The Impact of COVID-19 on Students

2.6.2.1 Challenges for Learning In this ongoing educational emergency, students undoubtedly are the group that has been negatively affected the most. According to YouthTruth (2020), almost half of the students in the study reported that they were moderately or significantly

affected. The students faced multiple obstacles in learning, including the lack of access to the internet, distractions at home and negative emotions. For example, most students in Bhutan have little access to smartphones or TV at home. Since the majority of the students are in rural areas in Bhutan, the cost of the data package can be a financial burden to the family, preventing them from having continuous access to online learning (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). The current pandemic also took an emotional toll on students. Based on the YouthTruth (2020) survey results in the United States, the biggest obstacle in learning for almost half of the students are "feeling depressed, stressed and anxious," with the second being "distractions at home and family responsibilities (44%). A report from Statistics Canada showed that the students were affected in various aspects, including academic performance and mental health. (Statistics Canada, 2020). One of the reports from the Brookings Institution (Kuhfeld, 2020) in the United States showed a noticeable decrease in students' math ranks in all grades, as much as almost 50% in Grade 3. In fall 2019, 79% of the students from Grade 3 to Grade 4 reported making academic gains. However, this number went down to 57%, with 22 percentage points decrease in fall 2020. In Australia, teachers reported that 16% of all primary and secondary students attended classes online, only 50% of the time during the scheduled times. There was also a greater number of students in rural schools who chose not to attend online classes at all during the designated times. In addition, only 2.4% of the teachers reported that their students always completed their homework. Almost 40% of the teachers thought the students' work standards decreased during the pandemic (Ziebell et al., 2020). Undeniably, students' academic performance from K-12 was negatively affected.

2.6.2.2 Opportunities for Learning It was widely predicted that school closures would affect students negatively due to online learning and unequal access to educational resources (Kuhfeld, 2020). However, there are still various positive outcomes emerging from different

reports. According to Kuhfeld (2020), the student participants' percentile rank (Grade 3 to Grade 8) in reading in fall 2020 did not necessarily drop compared with fall 2019. It may be attributed to students' reading by themselves and getting support from their parents. The survey report in Australia found that the students were becoming more technology savvy. They also see an improvement in "independence, organization and resilience" among the students (Ziebell et al., 2020). Because online learning can add more "accessibility, affordability, flexibility" to the course content, some American students expressed that online learning can, in fact, help them learn more. They can study at their own pace and have more free time (YouthTruth, 2020). Students also felt they got extra help from their teachers during the pandemic. They enjoyed the culture of care and respect enhanced by this crisis and wished it could continue even after schools reopen. What is more heartening is that the relationships between teachers and students in spring 2020 even increased compared with spring 2019. Students reported that the teachers were more willing to get to know their life outside of the school during the pandemic. The students in America felt they got more attention from the teachers, especially when having the one-on-one consultation (YouthTruth, 2020).

Chapter 3 Method and Methodology

The purpose of this study is to gain some insights into teachers' RJE practices during COVID-19. Teachers' feelings, thoughts and experiences are the types of data that I aimed to collect. I chose to use case study as the qualitative methodology for this research. I conducted seven semi-structured interviews with four participants to collect data. None of the participants were from the same school. In this chapter, I will describe the method and methodology, participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis in the current study. I will also justify my choices on the issues above.

3.1 Case Study

According to Merriam (1998), the qualitative case study is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process or a social unit." The definition of a "case" is "a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (p. 27). Case study is also particularistic because it focuses on a specific event, program, or social group. Namely, the subject of a case study is a bounded system. The boundaries defining the case or cases usually are identified by time and place (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993). In addition, case study is usually conducted in a real-life context, when it is impossible to separate the phenomenon from its context (Yin, 2014). Based on Yin's (2014) explanation, the selection of a case should not be limited to the researcher's convenience only. It should be selected based on how "significant" or "special" the case is. It should be distinctive circumstances that are interesting and important enough to study, such as a revolutionary discovery or the process and the repercussions of a crisis.

I believe that case study is an effective qualitative methodology for this study for two reasons. First, COVID-19 was such a special event that began in 2020. Based on the literature

review, COVID-19 has brought unprecedented challenges on different levels all over the world. Its impact on education is beyond significant. Based on Yin's (2014) guidance on selecting cases, COVID-19 is undoubtedly a remarkable circumstance worth an in-depth study. Its impact on RJE also deserves careful examination. Second, the impact of COVID-19 on RJE is a complex system where no clear variables can be separated from its context. It needs a holistic view to understand this particularistic, real-life situation. Therefore, case study is a very appropriate qualitative methodology for the current research.

3.2 Sampling

Purposeful sampling is recommended for participant recruitment by experts in the field (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). It includes different types, such as typical case sampling, maximal variation sampling, and extreme case sampling (Patton, 2002, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In the current study, I used typical case sampling, which means the selected cases will be the typical cases for the research problem. Therefore, the field can be studied from the inside through those cases (ibid.). In this study, I interviewed four teachers who are all from public schools in Newfoundland. Three of them are elementary school teachers, and one teacher is from a Junior high school. All of them were using RJE practices frequently prior to the pandemic. They tried to continue practicing RJE online during the pandemic with their students. I mainly used three ways to recruit the participants. First, I contacted some teachers who took the course ED 6463 Relationships First: Rethinking Educational Engagement and asked them to distribute my recruitment letter. Second, I contacted the Relationships First: Restorative Justice in Education Consortium in Newfoundland and Labrador and asked them to post my recruitment letter on their social media pages. Third, I reached out to a teacher through personal connections. She had been practicing RJE in her class during the pandemic. Using the three methods mentioned above, I

successfully recruited four teachers to participate in my research. Participant A, Participant B and Participant C were primary and elementary school teachers in the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD). Participant D was a junior high school teacher in the same school district.

3.3 Data Collection

In the current study, I used one-on-one, semi-structured interviews to collect data, the most commonly used method to obtain information in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). According to Patton (2015), interviews can provide an opportunity for researchers to "enter into the other person's perspective" and to understand their "feelings, thoughts, and intentions." It is consistent with the type of data that I aimed to collect. Thus, interviews can help generate the best data for the research by eliciting purposeful conversations in the current study. In addition, online interviews are a much more efficient method with a lower cost of time and money under the restrictions of COVID-19. Following the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) requirements, interviews should only be conducted remotely to ensure safety during the pandemic. Therefore, the cost of time and money to find the venue and commute to the venue for the interviews was significantly reduced compared with traditional in-person interviews. Judging from Dexter's perspective (1970) that interviews should be preferred when it has a lower cost, online interviews are undoubtedly the most suitable choice for the current study. I will expand on online interviews in the following sections of this chapter.

3.4 Online Interviews

Due to the restrictions of COVID-19 and the requirements of ICEHR, all seven interviews were conducted online using the platform Cisco WebEx. I had two interviews with each of the elementary teachers. I had only one interview with the Junior high school teacher due to time

conflict. According to Salmons (2015), there is an increasing number of information communication technologies (ICTs) and computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools that can assist data collection online, especially during the current pandemic when almost everything was moved online. The flourishing of Zoom, Google Meet, Cisco Webex, and other online platforms have proved the positive influence that the internet can have on our work and study during the pandemic. Salmons (2015) explained several strengths and weaknesses when using online interviews. First, online interviews can eliminate the limitations brought by time and space. Interviews can happen whenever and wherever as long as there is an internet connection and appropriate electronic devices between the interviewers and participants. In the current research, online interviews helped the teachers save time and energy in participating in the study compared with in-person interviews. The teacher participants did not need to set aside too much time from their busy schedules to travel to a place for the interviews physically. Additionally, the interviews mostly happened when the teachers were at their own homes or workplaces. The familiar environments helped them to relax and feel more comfortable during the interviews. Another advantage of using online interviews is that it allows the interviews to be recorded in an easier and less intrusive way. Regular videotaping is relatively obtrusive, and the participant may feel uncomfortable being recorded (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p.131). Online interviews can reduce the obtrusiveness since no external equipment is set up. The participants can hardly notice being recorded when the interviews are happening online. Moreover, online conferences and videotaping have been widely used during the pandemic. The participants have already been familiar with videos being recorded. Therefore, online interviews provided many conveniences for both the researcher and the participants in the current study.

Despite all the convenience brought by technology, there are also some weaknesses

embedded in using online interviews. One of the biggest challenges of online interviews is their dependence on internet connection. Any technology glitches can cause a loss of information. For example, the internet connection was disrupted for 10 minutes during one of the interviews I had with a participant. We had to stop the interview and reconnect online. Although the interview continued after the issue was resolved, the participant and I felt frustrated, and the flow of the conversation was disrupted. Another downside of online interviews is the lack of non-verbal communication. Phutela (2015) pointed out that non-verbal communication plays a crucial role in various communications. The commonly used non-verbal communication includes eye contact, facial expressions, hand movement and body posture. It is so powerful that it can replace the function of verbal communication in certain situations. It conveys information that can be hard to express in languages. For example, a teacher participant put her hands over her face while talking about online teaching. Her body language clearly showed me her frustrated feelings about teaching students online. However important non-verbal communication is, online interviews allow limited opportunities to capture the participants' non-verbal cues. During the interviews, it was difficult for me to make eye contact with the participants through the camera. It was also hard to read the postures since the camera could only show their upper bodies. Thus, a lot of the non-verbal information from the participants was not captured during the online interviews, causing the loss of the information during data collection.

3.5 Interview Guide

In the current study, I created an interview guide (See Appendix I) to help me conduct all the online interviews. The questions were divided into three parts targeted at the three sub-questions in the study. Additional questions were added as they emerged throughout the interviews. I tried to maintain flexibility and spontaneity in all the conversations. For the first interview with

each participant, I always started with self-introduction and greetings, followed by a few opening questions. Those opening questions helped me get a general idea of the interviewees' teaching and RJE practices history. They were also intended to help the interviewees relax and "settle in" before being interviewed. All the questions were open-ended so that more conversations could be generated. The questions were presented to the participants in chronological order: time prior to COVID-19, the first lockdown in NL and school reopening in NL. The timeline helps to show the history of the teachers' RJE practices during the different stages of the pandemic. It also helps readers of the study to compare different teachers' experiences easily.

3.6 Data Analysis

Following the completion of data collection, thematic analysis was adopted as the method to analyze the data. It is widely used in qualitative research due to its flexibility compared with other analytical approaches. Thematic analysis focuses on identifying meaningful themes and patterns emerging from the data. It can take a range of forms and can be both inductive (data-oriented) and deductive (theory-oriented) (Clarke & Braun, 2017). According to Ayre and McCaffery (2022), when an interview incorporates important aspects of a theory, a theoretical framework can be adopted in the primarily inductive data analysis process. In the current study, the data analysis process largely adopted an inductive approach, generating the findings rooted in the participants' narratives. It ensured the flexibility of revealing additional themes that were not in line with the theoretical framework. Informed by RJE theory, the data was considered in terms of interconnection and worth through relationships.

After cleaning the interview transcripts, I immersed myself in them by reading and rereading the data thoroughly until fully familiar with it. This process continued throughout the research until the completion of the final report. While reading through the data, I actively sought

recurring themes, patterns, and trends. Guided by the RJE theory, I categorized the themes and patterns under Circle practice, relationships, and addressing harm and conflict. Meanwhile, I ensured that there was flexibility in the process by paying close attention to the trends that were not included in the RJE framework. The aim of adopting both deductive and inductive data analysis approaches is to help understand the participants' narratives more compressively. As both Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) argued, data collection and analysis should be conducted simultaneously because the data collection process can be optimized by the hunches and tentative speculations in the initial data analysis process. In the current study, I started the preliminary analysis of the transcripts after the first few interviews. I made necessary alterations to the subsequent interviews based on the initial data analysis. I also kept a journal of important notes as I read through the transcripts. To ensure the trustworthiness of the current research, I followed Merriam's (1998) validation strategies, which include "member checks," "use of thick description," and "disclosure of researcher bias." I sent the transcripts to each interviewee for member checks after all the interviews were finished. While writing the final report, I used a thick and rich description to present the findings precisely. I also critically reflect on my assumptions, relationships, and worldviews that may bring biases to the current research.

3.7 Role of the Researcher

Roulston (2010) proposed six approaches to interviewing: neo-positivist, romantic, constructionist, postmodern, transformative and decolonizing. Under the romantic conception of interviewing, researchers recognize and analyze their subjectivity. Meanwhile, researchers strive to build a rapport with the participants in order to have an in-depth understanding of their inner worlds. As a student researcher, I am aware that I have my subjectivity during all the interviews. It has affected how the data was generated through my interactions with the participants. One of

my subjectivities is that I embrace the values of RJE as my educational philosophy. It is a similar situation for the teachers I interviewed. It is the shared views on RJE that help build a common ground for us to have conversations. During the interviews, I tried to build a genuine relationship with the participants by using humour and sharing my personal RJE experiences and feelings. For example, a teacher described the difficulty of teaching younger children online. I also shared my thoughts about working with students in lower grades. The shared experience allowed me to build an empathic connection with the teacher, which helped elicit more in-depth knowledge about the participant.

As a researcher, I played an active role in all the interviews. The cooperative relationship with the participants led to the research data being co-constructed by both the researcher and the researched. In this process, I was not only the questioner but also the learner. It is the self-revealing and deep communication that brings about the self-knowledge of both the researcher and the researched (Douglas, 1985, as cited in Roulston, 2010). Through the interviews, I have gained more knowledge about the understanding of RJE. My subjectivities during the research were also revealed through having conversations with the participants. For example, I started to understand that RJE practices in real life are much more complicated than the theory itself. I also realized that my understanding of teacher-student relationships influenced by my cultural background is very different from that in the context of Canadian education. The awareness of my subjectivities helped me to analyze the teachers' perspectives more objectively.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are considered carefully throughout the research process. After obtaining the approval of ICEHR, I started the participant recruitment process. I ensured the teacher participants were fully aware of their rights and protection during this study. The participants knew they had

the right to withdraw at any time before and during the interviews. They could still withdraw from the study even after the data was collected. In addition, multiple measures were taken to protect the participants' identities. For example, all the interview videos were named with the participants' initials. Any identifying information will be anonymized using pseudonyms in the transcripts, the thesis and any published materials. Another aspect that needs extra attention is online data storage. Since all the interview recordings are stored online by Cisco WebEx, I ensure that my WebEx account is safe and that my computer is always password protected.

Chapter 4 Findings

In this chapter, the findings of the current study are reported in detail. This chapter will answer the research question of how RJE was impacted during COVID-19 by addressing the following sub-questions:

1) What was it like to practice RJE during COVID-19?

2) What are the challenges and opportunities in RJE practice during COVID-19?

3) What do teachers need to continue practicing RJE in the post-COVID-19 era?

In the first section, the overview of the RJE practice during COVID-19 was presented in the order of "first lockdown," "second lockdown," and "school reopening," which is different from the chronological order. The purpose is to help readers have a better understanding of the similarities and differences between the two lockdowns. The first section also focuses on how the three core components (Circle practice, Relationships and Conflict resolution) were impacted during COVID-19. The second and the third sections aim to answer the remaining two sub-questions. The three core components in RJE theory serve as a standard to determine the challenges and opportunities for RJE practices during COVID-19. From the lens of RJE theory, teachers' needs that can help continue RJE practices beyond COVID-19 were examined in the last section. In order to ensure the anonymity of the study, letters A, B, C and D were used to represent the four participants. Participants A, B and C were primary and elementary school teachers. Participant D was a junior high school teacher during COVID-19.

4.1 Time Periods

The current study covered three chronological periods during the pandemic: the first lockdown, school reopening and the second lockdown in NL. On March 14th, 2020, the first presumptive case of COVID-19 was announced in NL (CBC News, 2020). As multiple health

measures were put in place to prevent the spread of this novel virus, all the schools and childcare centers were ordered to close across NL two days later. This decision affected 64,000 students across the province on different levels. Following the closure of the schools, almost all the teaching and learning activities were moved online (CBC News, 2020). The remote instruction continued from March 2020 to September 2020 - NL's first lockdown period. As the cases of COVID-19 remained relatively low during the summer of 2020, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador released the school reopening plan in August, announcing that in-person classes could resume when specific safety protocols were followed. The schools officially reopened in the Fall semester of 2020. Most teachers and students went back to their classrooms after being online for five months. However, the province declared a second lockdown on February 11th, 2021, after a surge of COVID-19 cases (CBC News, 2021). All the teaching and learning activities were moved online again during the second lockdown. As COVID-19 started to be in control, most NLESD schools were able to return to in-person classes after February 26th, 2021 (NLESD, 2021).

4.2 What Was It Like to Practice RJE During COVID-19?

COVID-19 disrupted RJE practices on different levels. Many participants had to minimize or stop practicing RJE, especially during the first lockdown. Despite all the challenges, some participants continued practicing RJE in creative ways. This section will take a closer look at how they overcame the difficulties and kept using RJE during the crisis.

4.2.1 The First Lockdown – "It's Just Overwhelming."

After the in-school instruction was suspended on March 16th, 2020, all the teaching and learning activities were moved online within a short period of time. The sudden switch to remote teaching left teachers little time to adjust to the new teaching mode. All the teacher participants reported that they felt stressed and overwhelmed during the first lockdown:

In the first lockdown, I found one of the biggest challenges was not knowing how to do anything online… I had no idea other than just to say, "okay, you go. Okay, now your turn," in terms of how to set up an RJE Circle. And I just didn't have a clue, really. (Participant C)

During the first lockdown, the school district required neither meeting curriculum standards nor student attendance. Teachers were not required to teach the curriculum. Instead, they were expected to strengthen the existing relationships with the students and their parents. Students were not required to attend the classes either. They could choose to join the online lessons based on their own needs. According to the teacher participants, teaching became "very difficult" and "extremely challenging" during the first lockdown. At the beginning of the pandemic, all the teacher participants indicated that they struggled to find out how to do things online, including RJE practice. The exploration with little previous experience was the most challenging part for teachers. In addition, teachers suddenly had many more responsibilities online compared with in-person classes. They needed to manage the online platforms, find the right content for online teaching, as well as maintain relationships with the students. The workload of teaching increased significantly. One of the participants could not help expressing her frustrations with a heavy sigh:

I got to make sure that I have the Google meet. I got to make sure that I have all the things set up. I got to make sure that the invitations go out to the students. I got to make sure that it's open at the right time, make sure that you're the last one to leave… There was just a lot of stuff that I felt I didn't have a chance to do any of the things I wanted to do… then adding the whole stress of covid and the whole world was shut down… this made the whole thing feel overwhelming. (Participant B)

With so many responsibilities on the teachers' shoulders, RJE was mainly "put on the back

burner." All the teacher participants reported that they either had to stop practicing RJE or could only practice it to a minimal degree. They were already struggling with teaching online, let alone practicing RJE.

4.2.2 The Second Lockdown – "I Did Not Have Too Much Time Making Space for Relationships."

On February 9th, 2021, NL was under lockdown for the second time due to the surge of COVID-19 cases. All district K-12 schools were ordered to revert to online learning from February 11th to at least February 26th, 2021 (NLESD, 2021). Although it was the second time switching to remote instruction, teaching online during the second lockdown has several salient differences from the first. Since the second lockdown only lasted for a short period of time, curriculum and attendance were required for all the students. Teachers and students were both expected to follow their regular schedules in school. Having had the online teaching experience in the first lockdown, it did not take too much time for both teachers and students to adjust to it. As one of the participants described:

> During the first lockdown, I was just a chicken with my head cut off, running around, trying to figure out something for them. But this time, we had a better understanding of the technology and stuff, which made a big difference. (Participant C)

Because curriculum was required during the second lockdown, teachers needed to be prepared to teach the curriculum and take care of the logistics of online teaching, for example, making sure the students follow the online meeting etiquette (e.g., muting the microphone when not speaking). With the already packed schedule, the participants indicated that it was not easy to practice RJE online during the second lockdown due to the limited instruction time. Teachers felt pressured to finish the teaching tasks online, let alone add RJE to their teaching:

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So I felt a lot of pressure to make sure I was getting a curriculum covered during that time. Because of that, I wasn't taking as much time to make sure that I was building and continuing the relationships with these kids. And that was a mistake on my part, I probably should have spent more time on the relationships, but your hands were tied in 2020. (Participant C)

4.2.3 School Reopening – "It Is Almost the Same as It Was"

In August 2021, the government of NL announced the Return to School Plan for 2021 (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2021). Students in the province could return to the classroom on September 8th, 2021, with proper health measures in place. The plan aimed to help the teachers and students have a nearly normal school experience as the pre-COVID-19 conditions. Two COVID-19 transmission scenarios were identified in the plan: "low-risk" and "high-risk." Students and teachers were expected to follow different health guidelines in different scenarios. Instruction modes would also change according to the COVID-19 situation. The concept of cohorts was adopted in the plan: "A cohort is a group of students and staff who remain together throughout the school year" (p.27), and it was best to avoid mixing the different cohorts. Since most participants are primary school teachers, they could almost return to normal schooling as prior to the pandemic. The students could interact with each other as long as they remained in a cohort and did not mix with other cohorts. RJE practices also resumed what it was like before the pandemic by following the safety measures:

They (the NLESD directors) very quickly decided that the kids are considered a cohort, and within that cohort, they're allowed to touch all the same stuff, et cetera. So, it really didn't change a whole lot the way we did things. (Participant A)

Because we have cohorts, we're allowed to do that. They sit next to each other. They can share and hand out the hand sanitizer… It works pretty well, the same as a regular talking Circle. (Participant B)

4.2.4 Circle Practice

Despite the disrupted RJE practices, most teacher participants tried to recreate the Circles online during the first lockdown. Check-in Circles were the most used Circle practice adopted by the participants. The teachers used it to start the online meetings as a warm-up activity. However, the protocols of Circle practice became very challenging when moved online. There were two main obstacles in practicing RJE in virtual spaces during the first lockdown: technology incompatibility and low student engagement, which will be explained more in the latter part of this chapter.

During the second lockdown, one of the participants started using Google Jamboard to create a better Circle experience online. Google Jamboard is a digital whiteboard that can allow all the participants to work on the same project simultaneously. As shown in Figure 4.1, teachers placed the students' names in a circle in Google Jamboard. A picture was chosen as the "virtual talking piece." Students could move the "talking piece" by dragging the picture on the platform. According to the teacher participants, using Google Jamboard helped her create a more legitimate Circle experience for the students.
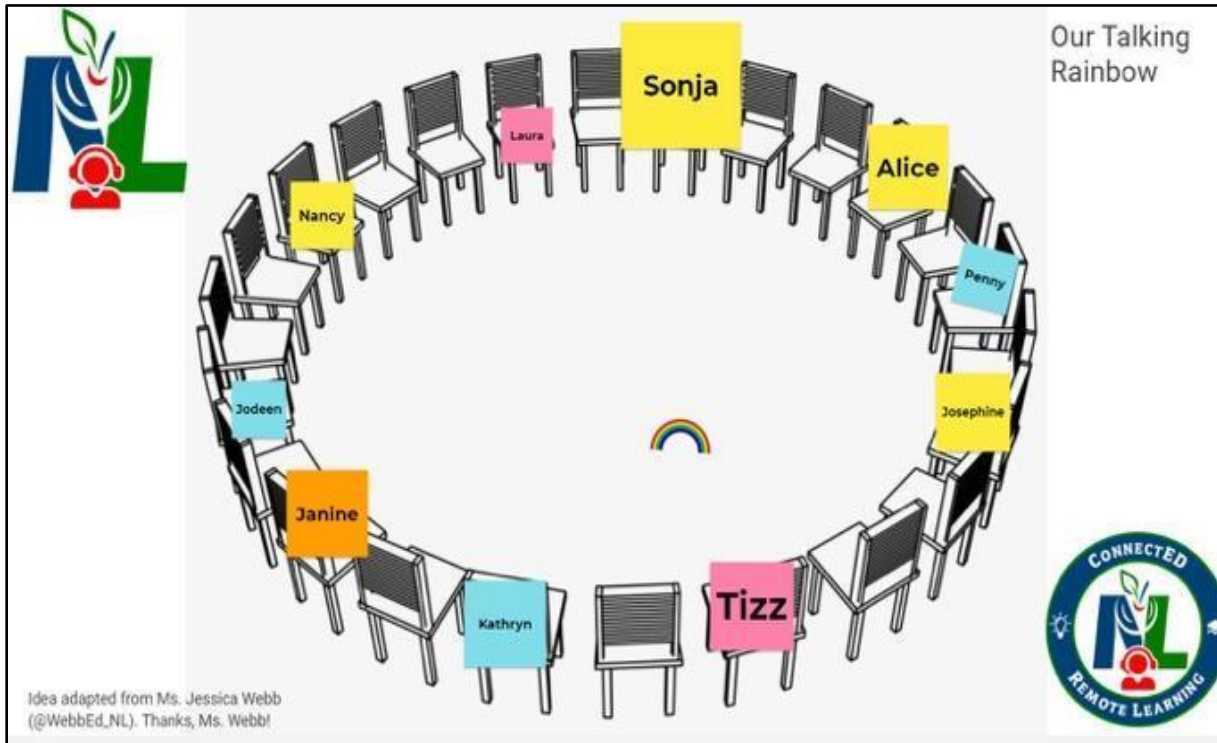
Figure 4.1 *Virtual Circles in Google Jamboard (NLESD Distance Learning, 2021)*

Between the two lockdowns was the period when most of the schools reopened in NL. As

mentioned earlier, two COVID-19 transmission scenarios were identified in the Return to School

Plan: "low-risk" and "high-risk." (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2021). Although

most schools were in the low-risk scenario, where primary and elementary school students did not

have to wear masks or maintain physical distance within their cohorts, they needed to wear masks

in public areas such as the school bus. Adults in schools were required to wear masks all the time.

When students just returned to school in September 2020, there was a lot of uncertainty and fear.

As much as they wanted to resume regular RJE practices, they were unsure if it would bring more

risks, especially when students gathered in the Circle. Participant C said, "I personally was very

nervous about doing group work because I didn't know if the kids were allowed to be that close together because there was no really clear information." Apart from the safety concerns in the classroom, the lack of physical space became the biggest obstacle for Circle practice. In order to maintain social distance, students' desks were spaced out in the classrooms. Multiple teacher participants described that no space was left in the classroom to form a physical circle while keeping the six-foot social distance between their desks. Moreover, students were not allowed to bring a talking piece which was meaningful to them to the classroom due to the concern of COVID-19 transmission.

> We didn't necessarily get in the Circle in September just because there wouldn't have been the space to spread the kids out and make a circle with all the rest of the classroom the way they were. So we did a lot of sharing and giving kids opportunities to share and tell stories of what had happened and stuff like that. But it was definitely a very modified, insufficient version of RJE, but that was there. (Participant C)

With all the restrictions, it was difficult to resume the in-person Circle practice at the beginning of school reopening. It was not until October, when COVID-19 cases remained low, that teachers started to regroup the students in cohorts and have regular circles.

4.2.5 Teacher-Student Relationships

The most challenging period for the teacher participants occurred when all the teaching activities were moved online during the first lockdown. Teachers made every effort to mitigate the negative effects of disrupted teaching and learning activities. However, it still took a toll on the teacher-student relationship. During the first lockdown, all the teacher participants reported that their relationships with the students decreased to different degrees, especially at the beginning of the pandemic. Teachers found it extremely frustrating that they could not communicate with their

students as they normally did before the pandemic. They could not discern the students' needs by observing their body language; they could not give or receive instant feedback with the students' microphones or cameras turned off; they could not even have proper eye contact with the students when talking through the cameras. Since the curriculum and attendance were not required during the first lockdown, some students stopped showing up in the classroom. Furthermore, class time length was significantly reduced. Teachers used to meet their students each day for 6 hours during the weekdays. During the lockdown, class time was reduced to 2-4 hours per week. The lack of class time contributed to the decrease in teacher-student relationships.

> It was hard (to build relationships) … I didn't feel like I could build that same relationship using Google Meet. If I was in the class and I was struggling with the student, I would sit with the kid at recess time and say, hey, what's going on in your life? … I couldn't do that on Google Meet. It wasn't the same. So, even though I'd say, hey, tell me about what's going on at home. They would be like, yeah, it's okay. But if I had them in the class, I could have made more connections with them. So I really felt that it did suffer. Now because I already had a better relationship [with] some of the students, it was okay. But I still feel like it kind of slipped back. There were students that I know that if I had them for the full year, I feel like I would have made definitely more of a connection (Participant B）

According to Participant D, the junior high school teacher, the relationship between her and her students basically plummeted during the first lockdown. It was very difficult to maintain any relationships when the only way to communicate was through online posts in Google Classroom. According to the participant, she had lost a significant number of connections with her students. She was only able to maintain 15% - 20% of the relationship.

From February to September, the majority of them did nothing and had no connection.

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Really. Like they would check in if you posted something. You might get 5 or 6 of them sending back an "okay," but that would be it. It was not a real connection. We worked really hard on making that connection for the second one, but the first one was terrible. (Participant D)

The online school requirements in the second lockdown were different from the first one. During the second lockdown, teachers and students must follow the regular schedules. As a result, there was little time left for RJE practices in the packed schedules. It also decreased the quality of teacher-student relationships during the second lockdown because less time was available for relationship building. The pressure of academic requirements also pushed some students away from their teachers. Unlike the online teaching during the first lockdown, when the focus was on building relationships by keeping the class fun and lighthearted, students were expected to follow their regular schedules and finish their schoolwork during the second lockdown. As one of the participants explained:

When we had the online classes in the previous lockdown, while you're playing hangman, you can kind of chat while you're doing things. While you're teaching how to do fractions, you don't have much chatting. So I did find the relationship wasn't as close during the second lockdown. (Participant C）

As teachers and students got comfortable with teaching and learning while implementing the health measures, the initial fear and uncertainty were dispersed after in-person classes resumed. Most teachers reported that their relationship with the student improved because they were able to have in-person interactions with them. As participant A summarized, "the relationship within my own class was similar to the way it would have been because we were allowed to pretty much carry on as we always had just within the class. "Although some teachers started teaching new

students when school reopened in September, they still felt that building relationships with the students was much easier than the time of teaching online. One of the challenges in building a relationship after the school reopened was communication while wearing a mask. According to Participant B, who taught Grade one and two during the Fall semester of 2021, wearing masks impeded her communication with the students because they could not see her facial expressions. The communication largely relied on her body language and verbal instructions. For instance, the teacher would verbally express her happiness instead of merely showing the student a smile. She would also squint her eyes so that the students could see she was smiling. She would also give them an "elbow bump" instead of a hug as encouragement. She made sure to have eye contact with the students so that they would know they were listened to attentively. With younger children, teachers felt they were in a dilemma of sticking to the health measures and meeting their students' needs for physical touches, such as a pat on the shoulders or simply a hug.

> There are times when the students will come to me and say, Miss, I need a hug. Okay, and how do you turn to a 6-year-old and say, "nope, sorry, I can't give you a hug because of Covid-19". You can't do it. It's part of the risk that I have to take and have to think about it, and it's just the way it is. (Participant B)

It is clear that the teacher-student relationship was negatively impacted during the pandemic. Numerous factors, including disrupted communications and students' packed schedules, contributed to the decrease in the teacher-student relationships. Although teachers tried every effort to maintain the connections with their students online, relationship building in virtual spaces was able to replace that in real life, where teachers and students can have natural conversations and feel each other's existence.

4.2.6 Addressing Harm and Conflict

During the first and the second lockdown, all the teacher participants reported that there was simply not too much conflict. The lack of interaction among the students gave little chance for any significant conflicts to arise. In the first lockdown, teachers and students met online infrequently, leaving little space for conflicts to happen. In the second lockdown, the students were required to follow their regular schedules prior to the pandemic. Since the focus was on finishing the learning tasks, there was little conflict during the second lockdown either. As participant C described:

They didn't get a chance to get on each other's nerves because their contact was limited unless their parents were setting things up. And they also weren't seeing each other outside of that class time… so for me, there were no conflict issues that arose during the lockdown.

The students were excited to see their classmates during the limited online meetings. However, the lack of social interactions could become the potential cause of conflicts. For instance, a teacher participant had to intervene in a case about online bullying during the pandemic. An online Circle was used to address the issue with the presence of the students and their parents. After the Circle process, it was clear that the student who posted offensive content was looking for attention due to the lack of social interactions, but it surfaced as bullying others online.

One obstacle the participants encountered in using RJE to address conflict online was the lack of opportunity to have an individual conversation with the students. Before the pandemic, it was easy for teachers to have a quick Circle with just a few students involved in the conflict. When things were moved online, all the activities were conducted as a group. Their chance to have "a quick conversation grabbed in the hallway" literally disappeared, as one teacher participant described:

Online teaching kind of killed individual conversations. We were always there as a whole

group. There was no way to have a conversation with this one student anymore. It was always like in front of everybody… In the past, if something was going on and I could address that with just one student. I tried not to call kids out in front of everybody, but I had no choice because there was no other way (during teaching online). It was always the whole group stuff. (Participant A)

RJE was seldom used to address harm and conflicts due to the lack of social interactions during the pandemic. It was challenging to use RJE to resolve conflicts, even if there were any because online meetings made it impossible to have a private conversation with the students involved in a conflict.

4.3 What Are the Challenges and Opportunities in RJE Practice During COVID-19?

There were numerous difficulties teachers had to overcome to continue RJE practices, including the lack of student engagement, limited technological support, and disrupted communication. Meanwhile, the pandemic created new opportunities for certain groups of students. This section will explore the challenges and opportunities the pandemic brought to RJE practice from teachers' perspectives.

4.3.1 Challenges

4.3.1.1 Disengagement During the pandemic, the lack of student engagement was a significant challenge for RJE practice. Although student engagement has multiple definitions, the comprehensive understanding of student engagement includes three levels: behavioural, motivational, and cognitive (Groccia, 2018). Behaviorally, students with high engagement levels are expected to exhibit consistent efforts in the learning process; Emotionally, they will show their genuine interest and passion for the learning materials; Cognitively, students with high engagement levels will actively process their thoughts and experiences in class (Groccia, 2018).

All the teacher participants in the current study reported that student engagement dropped significantly on all three levels during the pandemic, especially during the first lockdown.

First, some students chose not to attend the online classes because student attendance was not required during the first lockdown. According to the teacher participants, they had not seen some of the students at all during the first lockdown. Those who did show up might choose to turn off their cameras and remain silent in the online activities too. The students' lack of engagement in their behaviours brought difficulty to RJE practice because it was challenging to continue Circles or other practices when the participants were absent. As one of the teacher participants commented, "It was a real struggle when not all the students were on and not all the students are participating. It's really hard to figure out what to do."

Second, the participants reported that remote teaching caused emotional exhaustion among their students. It was not easy to engage them in class as most of them felt unmotivated. Compared with the first lockdown, their lack of motivation was more obvious in the second one after experiencing virtual school for several months. The students were so mentally exhausted by online teaching that they did not want to engage anymore. The disengagement on the motivational level was reflected through their behaviours of turning off the cameras and remaining silent in class:

A lot of people complained that their students were totally silent. I think, at that point, they weren't burned out yet from it. So they actually did leave their cameras on, and they would talk. But for the virtual school in the second lockdown, I think it became more common for kids just not wanting to engage because they were just sick of it, just like adults. (Participant A)

Third, the students became less interested in the class content during online teaching. The students were not willing to actively think or engage in the classroom experiences. One participant

shared that only 4 to 5 students out of 18 actively participated in the writing class. The rest of the students either chose not to come to the class or not finish the assignments even if they came to the class. The problem of student disengagement was prominent among teenagers as well. According to the junior high school teacher participant, there were not as many synchronous online classes for high school students as for primary school students. The interactions with the students mostly happened through the posts in Google Classroom. However, few students would respond to the teachers' posts. Most of them chose to remain silent online. There was a noticeable decrease in the students' cognitive efforts to learn from the online classes. Unfortunately, the lack of engagement among the students also impacted teachers' attitudes negatively:

> We had a day when we were gonna dress up like a superhero or dress up like your favourite character. (Only) three people dressed up. I think that they found it hard too to engage in it. And when you have trouble with getting the kids to engage, it's kind of hard to feel engaged yourself. (Participant B)

As described above, the students' engagement levels decreased considerably during the pandemic. It was mainly reflected by low attendance, lack of motivation and participation in online classes. RJE practice was also impacted negatively by students' disengagement because it was difficult to continue any practices when the students were absent.

4.3.1.2 Technology During the first lockdown, Google Meet was the most used platform for online teaching. Some participants also used it to practice Circles online. However, the functions of Google Meet were not compatible with the Circle protocols. When practicing Circles in person, the participants can sit in a circle, allowing everyone to see and talk to each other. By passing around the talking piece, the participants can take turns to speak. The situation became very different when it was moved online. It was almost impossible to form a virtual Circle in

Google Meet because the *participants'* videos were in different orders on each *participant's* screen. Moreover, the videos appeared on the screens in grids imitating the traditional classroom seating arrangement, representing a teacher-centred learning space. The absence of the talking piece was another issue in online Circles. A talking piece is a meaningful object that can ensure all the participants have an equal opportunity to express themselves (Pranis, 2005). However, it became almost impossible to use a talking piece in virtual spaces. Thus, teachers had to revert to the traditional ways of calling on students, which is far from ideal because it puts the *teachers'* power back at the center of the classroom.

One participant shared that during the online Circles, she played the role of the talking piece. Students passed the "talking piece" by verbally informing the teacher or crossing their arms in front of their cameras if they did not want to speak. By making adaptations, the teacher participants felt they could still practice circles in a very modified method, but the ease and the natural flow of in-person communication were lost while turning on and off their microphones or cameras. The teachers felt that they were the ones who primarily directed the conversations:

> We could have conversations, and if there was something we were talking about, I could call on them to answer. But it was more like I was directing the conversation, much more than I might have if we had been in the classroom. (Participant A)

> Typically, I would never say, "Okay, it's your turn." But at the time, I didn't really know of another way to do it, and every screen kind of showed the pictures in a different order… So the kids had two options, they could just cross their arms over their screen like that if they wanted to pass, or they could unmute and say that they wanted to pass. It wasn't ideal, but it still gave everybody the opportunity to share something without being interrupted.

And we are kind of just working with what Google gave us at that point. (Participant C)

Another obstacle regarding technology was the lack of digital literacy among the teachers. Switching to remote teaching was relatively more manageable for those who were already familiar with the technology. However, it was extremely challenging for some teachers who seldom used those online tools. Learning to use the technology was already a challenge for them in the first place, let alone practicing RJE online:

> One of the big obstacles for me is technology. I'm not a person who knows technology really well. So, I have to take my time and work my way through it and learn all the things and add to that, trying to do the curriculum and trying to make the connections with the kids and stuff. It felt like it was just overwhelming. There was so much happening, then I struggled with that. (Participant B)

> I know some teachers at my school were just completely lost. I had to sit down on FaceTime with one of my colleagues. She was near the end of her career. One night and for probably 2 hours, we were just sitting there, and she was walking herself through how to do this and that. So it's really, really hard on some people, which was unfortunate. (Participant C)

With the use of technology, online teaching enabled teachers and students to maintain basic communication during the pandemic. However, the incompatibility between the digital tools and the protocols of RJE practices (e.g., Circles) and teachers' lack of digital skills made it difficult to use RJE during COVID-19.

4.3.1.3 Communication One of the most salient themes emerging from the participants' narratives is how the communication between teachers and their students was negatively impacted during the pandemic. First, all the participants reported that the communication with the students

online was "mechanical," "artificial," and "lacking the natural flow." It seemed overly designed, and it was usually the teacher who directed the conversations:

It just feels really artificial. I would have to be guiding the conversation instead of there being any natural flow to it. We weren't physically there together. So it's just staring at a screen burning your eyeballs. (Participant A)

When conversations happen in person, the interaction has a certain spontaneity. One of the participants shared that the students might go off-topic to talk about what they are interested in. Those anecdotes are great opportunities to build relationships and learn about who they are. Participant C also felt that:

It's just a lot easier to build relationships with kids in person because conversations are just going to happen organically. They could have quick little talks and more situational conversations. They did not have to come up with a topic to chat about because the online thing is not as fluid and natural as in-person conversations.

Second, non-verbal communication was greatly reduced during the online teaching. Understanding and responding to students' needs is an essential part of RJE practices (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). As one of the teacher participants described, "seeing what they feel is a big part for me using restorative justice of getting to know them, who they are and what they like." However, RJE online was not able to help teachers fully grasp their students' emotions, needs, feedback and feelings by merely looking at the screen. As mentioned previously, students could turn off their cameras and mute themselves online. Teachers could not detect any of the students' needs if all they could see was a black square on the screen. Even if the cameras were on, there was still limited body language shown on the screen. Teachers were not able to observe their students' hand movements or body gestures. Compared with in-person classes, there was a

significant loss of nonverbal communication. Feeling very frustrated about the situation, one participant said:

> It's really hard to help when you can't see their faces, and you can't interact with them because it's not just faces. Some of the kids learn how to hide emotions on their faces. You can see it in their hands that are tensed, but I can't see their hands, or you can see it in the way that they're shaking their foot, but if I can't see them shaking their foot, it's really hurting me to read their emotions on it. And I got to say I found that extremely difficult. (Participant B)

> I definitely prefer in person, where I can see them and read their body language. I can talk to them. I can understand what they need. Whereas online, I couldn't make that connection, and I couldn't do the things that you could do in person. (Participant B)

Communication was undoubtedly disrupted during COVID-19 for primarily two reasons. First, the natural flow of in-person communication disappeared with the shift to online teaching. The conversations online became mechanical, unnatural and teacher-led… Second, there was little body language involved in online teaching. Teachers received limited feedback from their students due to the lack of non-verbal cues.

4.3.1.4 Disruption In remote teaching, disruption was a common factor that negatively impacted RJE practices. All the teacher participants in the current study mentioned that their online teaching was disrupted before the online meeting etiquette was established (e.g., no talking over people; microphones on mute). The disruption usually came from two sources: the students and their learning environments. At the beginning of the pandemic, Google Classroom did not have the "mute all" function. The online classroom was "chaotic," as one of the participants described.

Another teacher also mentioned that their students would send funny emojis in the online chat box, which she found very distracting:

> Honestly, the biggest challenge with online Circles was that kids like to take the markers and draw circles everywhere on Google Jamboard. It didn't seem to matter how many times I told them to stop. They were just gonna keep doing it because I guess there's no real consequence when you're online. (Participant C)

Another type of disruption usually came from the environment in the students' homes. Because most of the students studied at home, the students' surroundings brought various distractions to the online classroom, such as the sound of the TV, family members talking to each other or the noise of cooking in the kitchen. If the disruption happened in the physical classroom, teachers could easily manage the noise by shutting the classroom door or asking the students to be quiet. However, the distractions from the students' homes were not under the control of the teachers:

> One of the kids did his Google Meets in the kitchen. There's a lot of noise in the background like someone was watching TV in the living room, and his mom was cooking lunch or something like that in the background. I found that kind of stuff a little bit annoying just because all that background noise gets to be a bit frustrating for everybody. (Participant C)

The presence of the parents could also become a distraction in RJE practices. One of the teacher participants taught Grade one and Grade two students during the second lockdown. Their parents had to be with the students because they were too young to be online alone. The presence of the parents became another distraction because they were not Circle participants. The "intrusion" of the parents impeded the participant from creating a safe space for only the students and the teachers. As participant A described, "suddenly there is an audience. They are not participants. They are an audience to it. It was not going to work." The other participants who

taught older students provided a different perspective on relationships with parents or other family members. They reported that the parents of their students were supportive and helpful, eager to share the students' life at home. For example, two participants had an activity of virtual cookie baking with their students during the pandemic. They asked the parents to prepare all the ingredients at home and asked the students to share their process of baking cookies via cameras. Both participants received positive feedback from the students, and the parents' efforts to prepare for the activity were a key to its success. It needs to be noted that parents did not directly participate in any RJE practices online during the pandemic, for example, in check-in Circles. Their roles mainly were about providing information to the teachers and preparing materials for the students.

4.3.2 Opportunities

4.3.2.1 Not All Relationships Decreased Although the teacher-student relationship decreased for most teacher participants, some students' connections with their teachers improved during the first lockdown. Teachers were instructed to keep the class content light and fun at the beginning of the pandemic. Meeting curriculum expectations was not required, and the online teaching focused on maintaining the existing relationships. Most teachers chose to use games and fun activities during the online meetings. The lack of academic pressure helped those students who usually struggled academically in class have a closer relationship with their teachers. One teacher shared that the first lockdown provided an opportunity for the students to know their teachers personally. Since most teachers taught from home, "the students were literally in my living room," as one of the participants described.

> I think I got a much closer relationship with some of the quieter, more reserved kids than I would have if we had stayed in the classroom the whole year, especially the kids who might struggle a little bit more academically… So, because of the lockdown, and because we are

doing things solely based on relationships as opposed to academics, I guess those kids didn't have that same discomfort that they would have... For the kids who struggle a bit more academically, I think it was really good for them to have positive experiences with their teachers that they might not get as many of on a regular basis in school, which I think, also help build our relationships and kind of made this year. (Participant C)

Another group of students whose relationships with their teachers benefited from the online teaching were the quieter and the more reserved students. Three participants mentioned that the quieter students who usually remained silent in class engaged more with their teachers during the online classes. It is possible that being in a familiar environment such as their homes helped the quiet students feel more comfortable expressing themselves. In addition, online teaching creates unique virtual spaces for quiet children to bond with their teachers. One teacher shared that she would be online to answer students' questions during a scheduled time. It was usually the quiet students who chose to interact with her in those sessions. She noticed that those students would use online posts to share their thoughts and feelings. It was the online platforms that provided a safe space for those quiet children to voice their thoughts by writing instead of talking in front of their classmates.

I think there were definitely some benefits to practicing some components of RJ online. It gave some of the quieter kids an opportunity to speak out who might not feel so comfortable normally in class with everybody around them... I feel because she was at home, kind of in a safe space, where she probably felt more comfortable physically. She was able to share more with the class, which was really nice. (Participant C)

In addition, online teaching also created opportunities for those who may not be able to have had connections prior to the pandemic. For instance, one participant shared the story of her

student, who was homeschooled due to health conditions. When remote school started, she invited the student to the virtual classrooms so that they could have some social interaction with their peers, which is crucial to the social and emotional development of young people.

4.4 What Do RJE Practitioners Need to Continue Practicing RJE in the Post-COVID-19 Era?

Discerning needs and having them met is an important component of RJE theory. Thus, this section explores the support teachers wanted to have for RJE practices, as well as their reflections on the understanding of RJE during the pandemic.

According to the teacher participants, all of them received support from their schools for teaching online to various degrees. On the one hand, all the teachers reported that there was almost too much support from their schools for online teaching. They were overwhelmed by the large number of resources sent to them. They did not have enough energy to go through all of them. On the other hand, the teacher participants wished the school leaders could give them more support by understanding and embracing the values of RJE theory instead of treating it as one of the behaviour management tools. One teacher participant shared her struggles with using RJE without the support of her school:

> RJE wasn't supported by my admin, and the whole school uses punitive methods. It's just not compatible. You can't operate that way when the whole rest of the building is doing something else. It doesn't work. And there's absolutely no recognition or support for restorative methods of conflict resolution… So it just was not feasible at all. (Participant A)

Apart from seeking endorsement from the administration, multiple teachers mentioned that they wished the guidelines from the school district and the government was more explicit and

clearer. During COVID-19, teachers faced unprecedented challenges in their job. However, there were no clear rules or expectations for the teachers. They were expected to explore how to teach online by themselves with little guidance or direction during the pandemic. As two participants commented:

We didn't have a direction on what we should be doing online. We didn't have a direction of how often we should be on. We didn't have a direction on what we would do if the kids didn't come. (Participant B)

We were told none of that, which is kind of like, okay, just go online now with a minimum expectation. You don't have to meet with them. They don't have to show up, and it's like… Well, I need more direction. Are you expecting me to be doing math with them? Are you expecting me to be doing social studies? Are you expecting me just to read with them? What is that you want me to do, and we had no direction on what that was. (Participant B)

On the one hand, so many resources were shared with teachers that it almost overwhelmed the teachers with too much information. On the other hand, the lack of clear directions on how to teach online during the pandemic left teachers feeling confused and disoriented. There was a prevalent need for teaching guidelines from the school district and the government during COVID-19.

4.4.1 Teachers' Reflections on the Understanding of RJE

When asked how their understanding of RJE has altered during the pandemic, all the teacher participants agreed that the crisis showed them the significance of RJE practices in meeting the students' emotional needs. During COVID-19, the students needed social and emotional connections more than ever. They longed for the relationships they had with their teachers and

peers. The RJE practices played an essential role in meeting the students' needs and improving their mental health:

> The lockdown really reiterated the importance of those relationships with the kids… Whereas sometimes, we think as teachers that the kids just want to be home playing video games and stuff like that and that the relationship doesn't matter that much. But a lot of kids in my class thanked me every single week for meeting with them and chatting with them, and a lot of kids said all my friends didn't get to see their teacher at all. How horrible is that? So I think it really reiterated the importance of that relationship that you're building with the kids and that they actually value the time and stuff that you spend with them for the most part. (Participant C)

In addition, the participants also mentioned that although regular RJE practices were disrupted during COVID-19, they felt RJE was always part of their teaching because RJE is not limited to the protocols. It is a paradigm that they can base all their teaching activities on. No matter in what conditions, as long as they could provide a safe space for the students, regardless of being online or in-person, they were already using RJE.

> One of the big parts of RJE is the relationships that you have with your class and the students and making them feel safe and comfortable. I think even though sometimes we feel like we stopped practicing RJE because we didn't feel we had the technology. I think that as long as we are having the meetings with the kids, and we are talking to them and keeping in touch with them, we are still practicing. It might not have been the whole system, and it might not have been done perfectly. But at the end of the day, as long as your students knew that they had a safe place with you, I think you were still meeting the general idea of restorative justice in education. (Participant C)

COVID-19 put a pause on almost everything from March 2020 in Canada. It also became a reflective experience for educators to examine their daily practice. The pandemic reveals the indispensability of RJE practices in meeting students' emotional needs. It also validated the claim that RJE is not only about the practices. It is a philosophy that can be reflected through day-to-day teaching and learning.

Chapter 5 Discussion

This chapter will discuss the findings of the current study in detail. This chapter will answer the research question of how RJE was impacted during COVID-19 by addressing the three sub-questions:

1) What was it like to practice RJE during COVID-19?

2) What are the challenges and opportunities in RJE practices during COVID-19?

3) What do teachers need to continue practicing RJE in the post-COVID-19 era?

The findings will be compared against the existing literature for a deeper understanding. The implications of the current study on RJE practices beyond COVID-19 will also be discussed in this chapter.

5.1 What Was It Like to Practice RJE During COVID-19?

NL saw two major lockdowns between March 2020 and March 2021 due to COVID-19. Despite the similar public health measures, there were distinctive differences in RJE practices during the first and the second lockdowns. During the first lockdown, RJE practices were mainly put on pause with the widespread school closure. Teachers had little previous experience in practicing RJE online. It was a confusing, overwhelming, and challenging time for the whole education system. Comparatively, RJE practices in the second lockdown were much smoother because teachers had become more familiar with different digital platforms, teaching protocols and other situations in online teaching. The first lockdown served as a learning opportunity for teachers to explore and gain experiences, similar to the trial-and-error stage in an experiment. As one of the participants summarized, "we always do things better in the second time around." Buda and Czékman (2021) found similar variations. In Pandemic and Education, they pointed out that most decisions at the beginning of the pandemic were made without complete knowledge of the

crisis. All the educational stakeholders were trying to figure things out. During the first lockdown, teachers took the opportunity to adjust to the new challenges, getting familiar with the new protocols and teaching tools. It was "a period of accelerated learning and experimentation" (Buda & Czékman, 2021, p. 4). With the knowledge and skills they acquired from the first lockdown, teachers naturally became more confident in teaching online during the second lockdown.

According to the participants' narratives in the current study, check-in Circles were the most used RJE practice during the pandemic. Their descriptions indicated that check-in Circles "survived" during the pandemic because they are easier to conduct compared with other RJE practices and could be a perfect warming-up activity to engage students at the beginning of a class. Velez et al. (2021) pointed out that check-in Circles played a more important role during the pandemic because they provided the opportunities for necessary social interactions and mental support for students under the stress of isolation. According to the participants, check-in Circles became great warm-up activities to engage their students due to their lighthearted nature. During COVID-19, multiple adaptations were made for teachers to continue using Circles (Morneau, 2020, as cited in Velez et al., 2021). However, it was challenging to recreate the same atmosphere in virtual Circles when there were so many uncontrollable factors, such as various distractions (Velez et al., 2021). According to Smith et al. (2020, as cited in Velez et al., 2021), teachers and students struggled with different distractions from the noise at home, technology glitches, or students' misbehaviours (e.g., sending irrelevant texts in the chatbot), which teachers felt they had little control over. Another difficulty the teacher participants faced in Circle practice was the lack of compatible platforms, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

As mentioned in chapter 4, all the teacher participants reported that their relationship with the students decreased to different degrees during the pandemic. It coincides with the findings in

the report released by the Alberta Teachers' Association (2020). Seventy-five percent of the teachers in Alberta indicated that their emotional connections were not the same as before COVID-19. The survey study conducted by the University of Melbourne (Ziebell et al., 2020) also shows that students' social development, which helps them to build positive relationships with teachers, parents, and peers, was negatively impacted. However, not all the relationships dropped during the pandemic. As mentioned in Chapter 4, some quiet students and students who struggled academically had a closer relationship with their teachers during the pandemic. Similar findings were found in the literature. Ziebell et al. (2020) identified that a small percentage of teachers surveyed in their study indicated that the pandemic could positively impact some students. The YouthTruth student survey conducted in the USA showed that the student-teacher relationship, in fact, slightly improved in the Spring of 2020 (YouthTruth, 2020). As shown in Figure 5.1, the students in the survey reported that their relationships with teachers during school closure slightly improved compared with the pre-pandemic period. More than half of the surveyed students felt they received more support from the teachers, and the adults in school were available to help when needed. As the report summarized, "student-teacher relationships were positively reshaped as teachers took a more personalized approach." (YouthTruth, 2020). Although the current study only focuses on teachers' viewpoints, there is great value in exploring the differences between teachers' and students' perceptions of the same experiences. For example, it is necessary to examine why and how the differences came into being and what are the implications of the differences for future studies.

RELATIONSHIPS
While my school building has been closed...

...My teachers make an effort to understand what my life is like outside of school **43%**

...My teachers are available to give me extra help if I need it **61%**

...There is an adult from school I can talk to when I'm feeling upset, stressed, or having problems **54%**

RELATIONSHIPS NOW VERSUS USUAL

MUCH WORSE THAN USUAL   SAME   MUCH BETTER THAN USUAL

This composite represents average student ratings across two questions - the frequency with which teachers seek to understand students' lives outside school and teachers' willingness to give extra help - now compared to usual.

Figure 5.1 *Student-teacher relationships while schools were closed (YouthTruth, 2020)*

RJE was seldom used during the pandemic to address the conflicts because there were not too many conflicts due to the lack of in-person social interactions among the students. According to Velez et al. (2021), there was less tension among the teenagers because they could turn off their cameras, hiding their hairstyles or clothing behind the screen. Without the presence of their peers, there was less judgement and chances to have conflicts. On the surface, it seems more peaceful in virtual classrooms. However, the conflicts may have shifted from the classrooms to the students' houses or other locations. For instance, they may fight with their siblings over devices at home. Unfortunately, the conflicts outside the classroom were difficult for teachers to be aware of or intervene in. Before the pandemic, it was easy for teachers to grab a quick conversation in the

hallway with the students involved in a conflict or to have a group Circle if more students were impacted. It became impossible when everything was moved online. When conflicts happened at the students' homes, teachers were in an awkward situation even when they became aware of it. Teachers' need to maintain professional boundaries prevented them from getting involved in the conflicts at the students' homes. Thus, little attention was given to resolving these types of conflicts. However, it does not mean that the teachers could do nothing about it. RJE is not limited to a tool to address a single conflict. It aims at empowering the students to have the ability to resolve conflicts in their relationships with others regardless of the location. Instead of getting involved in resolving the conflicts directly, teachers could have invited students to talk about the types of conflicts at home in virtual spaces and provide them with the necessary emotional support, advice, and skills to help resolve them. It was a missed opportunity that not enough attention was given to helping students acquire the skills needed to resolve conflicts in a restorative way at home.

5.2 Challenges and Opportunities in RJE Practices During COVID-19

Although the pandemic brought unprecedented challenges to RJE practices, it also unleashed new opportunities while responding to the crisis. This section will discuss how the literature informs what the participants saw as challenges and opportunities during COVID-19.

5.2.1 Challenges

5.2.1.1 Disengagement Engagement, according to Groccia (2018), includes three levels: behavioural, motivational, and cognitive. The participants' descriptions show how the students' engagement dropped on all three levels during the pandemic and was one of the most significant impeding factors for engaging with RJE practices online. Disengagement occurred primarily as a result of what has been termed an 'attendance crisis" by Korman et al. (2020) and Simpson (2012), as some students chose not to come to the online classes at all during the first lockdown. When

they did come at that time, or in the second lockdown when they were required to come, many would turn off their cameras or not participate in the activities. This attendance crisis was widespread and confirmed as Lieberman (2020) indicated that students' attendance may have dropped by up to 20% under the influence of the pandemic, which was double the size as prior to COVID-19 (Pešikan et al., 2020; Lieberman, 2022). Velez et al. (2021) confirm the reality that students may have been present online but might still be absent or withdrawn by turning off their cameras or being away from the computer with their cameras off. Figure 5.2 showed that no more than 50% of the students surveyed in the YouthTruth project could engage in the classes while schools were closed.
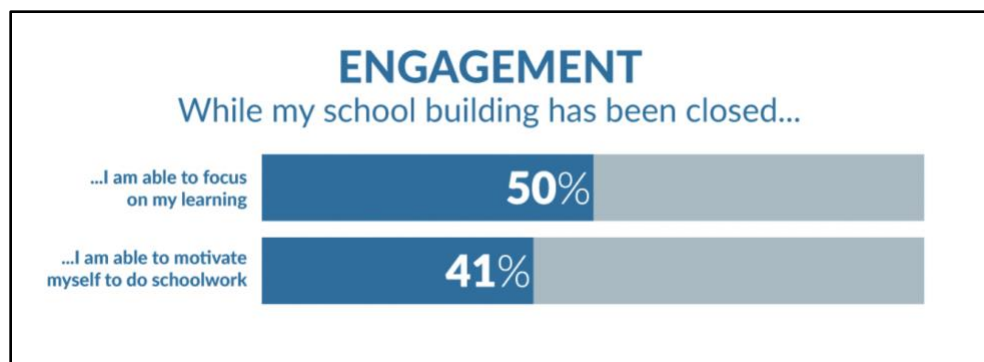
Figure 5.2 *Student engagement level while schools were closed (YouthTruth, 2020)*

Another reason for the students' disengagement in the first lockdown was the lack of online teaching resources and the incompatibility of the digital platforms. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the primary focus of teaching online in the first lockdown was to maintain relationships with the students. Teachers had to do a lot of research at the beginning to find appropriate online games and activities. The teaching materials had to be adapted to fit the requirements of remote learning (Sunita, 2020). This process was not always easy, and the lack of proper teaching materials could be unattractive to the students, therefore, contributing to the students' disengagement. In the second lockdown, both attendance and curriculum were required. However,

it did not guarantee the students' engagement. The teachers and students were required to follow the regular schedules during the second lockdown. The online classes became more task-oriented and teacher-centred (Pešikan et al., 2021), making it hard for students to engage in the classes. In addition, age played an important role in students' low engagement. Based on the participants' narratives, the students in lower grades tended to display less engagement during online classes. It was almost impossible for teachers to practice RJE online with students in grade one because they were too young to participate without the presence of their parents. Many teenagers in junior high schools chose not to engage in classes because they felt "too cool to talk."

5.2.1.2 Technology According to the participants, technology is one of the primary obstacles in RJE online practices. There are two aspects regarding the technological barriers: 1) the lack of digital platforms compatible with RJE practices; 2) teachers' lack of digital competency in using the platforms. The digital shift in the spring of 2020 took place abruptly, with teachers having little previous experience using the digital platforms (Buda & Czékmán, 2021). They felt confused and unprepared while trying to master those platforms within a short period (Pešikan et al., 2021; Sunita, 2020). Since remote teaching was more prevalent in higher education (Pešikan et al., 2021), primary school teachers with low technology competence struggled with teaching online and RJE practices (Velez et al., 2021; Buda & Czékmán, 2021; Sunita, 2020). The other side of technology being an obstacle is that the commonly used platforms (e.g., Google Classroom) do not support protocols of RJE practices. For instance, it was extremely challenging to recreate an authentic Circle experience in virtual spaces. In addition, technological glitches can easily disrupt the natural flow of RJE practices (Das et al., 2019, as cited in Velez et al., 2021). With the use of digital platforms, teachers had to take care of the technological logistics, such as ensuring the online meeting was properly set up and the participants had access to the resources (Velez et

al., 2021). It inevitably increased the teachers' workload and became taxing on their mental and physical health in the classroom (Pešikan et al., 2021). There will be more discussion on the implications of the technological barriers in the last section of this chapter.

5.2.1.3 Communication The lack of in-person interactions became a major problem in remote teaching throughout the pandemic. RJE teacher practitioners expressed their frustrations that their interactions with the students became more teacher-centred and mechanical. They struggled to get enough feedback from the students due to the lack of non-verbal cues during online classes (Velez et al., 2021). Additionally, the "unstructured time" (e.g., recess and lunchtime) when teachers could have casual conversations with their students to build relationships (Sunita, 2020) simply disappeared during the pandemic. "Online teaching is most similar to touching someone with gloves. Touching someone with gloves cannot make them feel reality", as Gandhi and Rani (2020) accurately pointed out. However, why is in-person communication so important in RJE practice*s*? What did we miss about in-person communication?

First, the need for non-verbal communication is deeply embedded in how we communicate with each other (Velez et al., 2021). According to Phutela (2015), body language consists 55% of our interactive communication in making an impression. Non-verbal communication can help develop and strengthen relationships when used appropriately. It can support or even replace verbal communication (Phutela, 2015). Non-verbal communication is also an indispensable component in RJE practice. Teachers need to read the students' body language, such as body position or facial expressions, to know their emotions and needs. When non-verbal communication was reduced during COVID-19, the teachers had to teach blindly without getting feedback, which was extremely challenging (Buda & Czékmán, 2021).

Second, in-person interaction is inseparable from RJE practices because RJ theory is deeply

rooted in a relational framework (Velez et al., 2021). For instance, the passing of the talking object, the seating in a physical circle and the sharing of refreshments after the Circle all require the participants' physical presence. Thus, it is very challenging to replicate the whole RJE experience in virtual spaces without losing some of its qualities. In RJ theory, one of the end goals is to bring people together and form authentic relationships through social, emotional, and physical interactions. Therefore, its core values have determined that RJE practices are closely related to in-person participation (Velez et al., 2021).

Third, RJ practices originated from Indigenous cultures. Direct communication among the Indigenous community members is at the core of RJ practices. For the survival and the growth of the community, it is essential to maintain close personal contact and solve any conflicts that can potentially harm the relationships among the group members. Although in-person interaction was not explicitly required in RJ practices, it was embedded in RJ traditions, which were inherited in the current RJE practices. Above all, in-person interaction is an indispensable component of RJ practices on the communicative, theoretical, and cultural levels. That is also why RJE practices faced many challenges when the in-person component was removed from the online practices.

5.2.1.4 Disruptions All the participants in the current study mentioned that their online classes were interrupted to different degrees. The disruptions include the students' distractive behaviours on the platforms, the noise from the students' surroundings and the parents' intrusion. Velez et al. (2021) support and explain this by pointing out that there are more uncontrollable factors in Circles that happen in virtual spaces than in person. In-person Circles can be more personalized by setting the lighting, the noise level and the room arrangements in order to create a comfortable space for the participants. It becomes much more restricting to make those adaptations in virtual spaces. The uncontrollable factors can become very distracting in virtual spaces. Chand

et al. (2021) found that one of the challenges teachers face during remote teaching is "human and pet intrusion." The students' attention can be diverted when their family members or pets intrude into the classroom by making noises or appearing in the audio unexpectedly. When these disruptions happen in the physical classroom, teachers could easily manage the noise by shutting the classroom door or asking the students to be quiet. However, it becomes much more difficult to reduce them when the distractions are from the students' homes since it is out of the teachers' control. As mentioned in the previous chapter, parents' appearance in the virtual Circles was an intrusion because they were not the Circle participants. According to Timmons et al. (2021), K-2 students need a great deal of assistance from their parents to help with the technology or the learning materials. The parents' appearance in virtual classes for younger children was almost an unavoidable distraction for both teachers and students.

As mentioned previously, parents also provided support to the participants during the pandemic. Their involvement has significant value in RJE implementation. However, parents' contribution remains backstage during the pandemic (e.g., providing materials needed for class activities). They were not provided with an opportunity to be directly involved in RJE practices, for instance, check-in Circles. It is a missed opportunity for RJE implementation because their involvement and endorsement may help to expand RJE practices from schools to homes and, therefore, to communities. If restorative practices can be used in both schools and at home, the consistency of educational goals and methods can be established. It is essential to the wellbeing of children. As described in Chapter 4, the current study found that RJE was seldom used to address harm and conflicts during the pandemic. It was also difficult for the participants to be involved in resolving the conflicts that happened at their students' homes. Nevertheless, teachers could have invited the parents to join the RJE practices and introduced parents to the knowledge and skills to

resolve conflicts restoratively. When parents or other family members are not included, a gap may happen in terms of the ways to interact with children. In schools, students are treated with respect and dignity. A restorative approach is adopted to deal with conflicts in classrooms. However, what would happen if a punitive and coercive educational approach was used in students' homes? Is it possible that the goodness done at school will be counteracted at home? Will the students be left confused or distressed when treated differently in schools and homes? All these questions need to be answered. However, it is certain that more involvement of parents in RJE practices can bring great benefits to a more comprehensive implementation of RJE.

5.2.2 Opportunities

Despite the challenges COVID-19 has brought to education, it also created various opportunities while responding to the crisis. The student-teacher relationship improved for some of the quiet students and some who struggled academically. Remote teaching also provided opportunities for students who may not have been able to make connections prior to the pandemic (Velez et al., 2021). As mentioned in Chapter 4, the online classes helped the student who could not attend school due to health conditions connect with their peers. The pandemic also prompted connections among teachers on a global level. During the pandemic, webinars and online courses provided them with virtual platforms to share their experiences and skills (Velez et al., 2021). Teachers from different countries could collaborate beyond geographical barriers. In addition, the disruptions in education allowed teachers to reflect on the traditional teaching methods and find creative ways to continue teaching beyond COVID-19 (Ziebell et al., 2020). The pandemic also prompted people to consider developing RJE practices in virtual spaces. There will be more discussion about it in the latter part of this chapter.

The pandemic enhanced the implementation of RJE indirectly, which may seem

counterintuitive. During the crisis, teachers, school administrators and students all came together to overcome the unprecedented difficulties. For example, teachers made extra efforts to connect with their students emotionally during the pandemic (YouthTruth, 2021). The participants in the current study also reported that teachers have been helping each other overcome the difficulties, such as teaching others to use online platforms. The empathy, kindness, and compassion that educators and students showed each other helped them go through the crisis together. It is safe to say that the pandemic pushed us to build a more human-centred, empathy-based environment for the students (Elliott-Johns, 2021). It coincided with the aim of RJE practices. The experiences during the pandemic made it clearer that "schools must be places where students feel safe, accepted and respected" (Jule, 2019, as cited in Elliott-Johns, 2021). The pandemic has forced us to move in the direction RJE has always led. It showed that it is not rules and regulations that will help us go through difficult times but mutual respect and compassion for each other.

The power dynamic of the teacher-student relationship also shifted towards a more cooperative and democratic way during the pandemic (Mazzucato, 2022). Instead of rules and regulations, human beings have been put back at the center of the educational system during COVID-19 (Mazzucato, 2022). Although the momentum is reported in the context of higher education, it shows a different possibility of teacher-student power dynamic during COVID-19. Before the pandemic, teachers may have to maintain an authoritative figure to make sure students follow the school rules. Since online teaching was new for most educators and students, they had to inquire and learn together in the exploration process. This growing momentum of collaboration and equity between teachers and students "empowered each other's worth beyond the hierarchical roles" (Mazzucato, 2022, p. 634). Admittedly, for most primary school teachers in the current study, the online classes had become more teacher-centred to maintain the class order. Compared

with the college students Mazzucato studied, elementary school students do not have the cognitive ability to cooperate with their teachers on a higher level. However, the participants also pointed out that their students sometimes helped them resolve technical issues when having classes online. Their contribution to the online classes helped them to form a more equal and collaborative relationship with the teachers.

As mentioned in the literature review chapter, the power balance is an important element in building healthy and nurturing relationships in RJE theory. According to the Relationship Matrix (Evans & Vaandering, 2016), healthy relationships can only exist when one's expectations and support are balanced in relationships with others. In healthy relationships, power is shared WITH each other. On the contrary, relationships will suffer when there is a gap between one's expectations and support for another in relationships. People are considered objects to be managed (TO), ignored (NOT), or depreciated (FOR) in unhealthy relationships. Regarding the teacher-student relationship, the traditional perspectives materialize teachers and students. They become objects to fulfill each other's obligations, which are to instruct and obey. Nevertheless, COVID-19 disrupted the status quo and almost forced the teacher-student power dynamic to pivot towards a more collective and cooperative direction.

Although these changes are not directly influenced by RJE theory, the shifts are aligned with the goals of RJE practices. It is important to note that these changes should not be considered merely a temporary response to the pandemic. They should be maintained and further developed beyond COVID-19. These positive changes will provide some foundations for the future continuation of RJE practices beyond COVID-19.

5.3 What Do Practitioners Need to Continue Practicing RJE in the Post-COVID-19 Era?

The current pandemic brought a long-lasting impact on the education system at different

levels. The continuation of RJE practices after COVID-19 will inevitably be different for most practitioners. This section will discuss teachers' needs for RJE practices that emerged during the pandemic and how they can continue using RJE beyond COVID-19.

5.3.1 The Whole-School Approach Is a Must for RJE Practices

"Many of the problems associated with remote schooling are merely exacerbations of problems with in-person schooling" (Anderson, 2021). One of them is the lack of understanding and support from the school administration. All the participants wished they had more support from the school leaders regarding RJE practices during the pandemic. This problem was only amplified because of the crisis. According to Boyes-Watson and Pranis (2020), the understanding and support from the school leaders are crucial to building a restorative school because RJE practices can only flourish when the whole school approach is adopted. A restorative school is not only about the regular practices (e.g., Circles) but also about how the RJE values are reflected through daily activities. The school policies and structures must be in line with the restorative values. Only when all parts of the school are on board for RJE can a caring and nurturing school climate be built to provide the right soil for RJE to take roots and grow. As people's lives return to normal, RJE cannot necessarily go back to "normal," allowing all the old problems to continue. A systemic approach must be adopted for RJE implementation, as Brown (2021) appealed for in her article. Only with a firm commitment from all the stakeholders in the school system can RJE reach its fullest potential and bring fundamental transformation to schools (Brown, 2021).

5.3.2 Developing RJE in Virtual Spaces

As mentioned previously, RJE practices adopt the in-person method predominantly. There has been little exploration of the possibility of using RJE in virtual spaces. The most developed virtual RJ practice before 2020 was virtual peace rooms. It is limited to addressing the disruptions

and conflicts in virtual spaces, such as cyberbullying (Das et al., 2019, as cited in Velez et al., 2021). Due to COVID-19, teachers started trying to use RJE online. Their experiences and perspectives provided valuable insights into the future of virtual RJE. In-person practices are beneficial to building connections, but they should never be the only solution. If virtual RJE were well developed before the pandemic, teachers would feel more prepared and confident to continue practicing RJE online. Moreover, there is great potential embedded in virtual RJE practices for greater flexibility and effectiveness (Velez et al., 2021). RJE in virtual spaces should not be simply treated as a quick response to the pandemic. It needs to be considered and developed as a regular form of RJE practices in the future.

According to the participants in the current study, one of the biggest obstacles while practicing RJE online is not having the appropriate platforms. RJE practices usually follow certain protocols. For example, there needs to be a talking piece that can be passed around in Circle practice. The commonly used platforms, such as Google classroom, Cisco Webex and Zoom, cannot satisfy the unique needs of RJE practices. In order to conduct RJE practices in virtual spaces, it is necessary to develop appropriate platforms, for example, Circl.es (https://circl.es/). With the right platforms, teachers can create fully satisfying RJE practices in virtual spaces with more efficiency. Teachers also need to have commensurate digital competency. As some teachers were unfamiliar with digital platforms, they found it extremely difficult to teach online, let alone practice RJE. Technologies were used before the pandemic, but most were considered a "supplement" to the traditional way of teaching. In fact, there has never been more attention given to virtual learning than during COVID-19 (Fayed, 2021). The unpreparedness for remote teaching could have been reduced if teachers' digital literacy had been developed intentionally before the pandemic. It is necessary to recognize the value and potential of virtual learning in the post-

COVID-19 age. The use of technology should not only be seen as an add-on, a second choice when in-person teaching is not available. Instead, more proactive measures should support virtual learning and RJE practices. For instance, the relevant training should be added to the existing professional development (PD) to improve teachers' digital competency if not included. The protocols and rules of online teaching need to be well established for a quick shift to remote teaching for future needs. For RJE practices, online protocols need to be redesigned for the online practice based on the functions of the platforms, for example, the use of the virtual piece.

5.4 The Implications of the Understanding of RJE

5.4.1 Affirmative RJ and Transformative RJ

As mentioned in the literature review, there is disagreement on the understanding of RJ among scholars. The two ends of the RJ spectrum are affirmative and transformative RJ. Affirmative RJ in education is mostly considered a tool to manage students' behaviour issues. Its goal is to maintain the status quo and not tackle the issues on the systemic level. On the other hand, transformative RJ in Education does not only focus on the behavioural issues but also the deep-rooted causes in the system. It challenges the existing punitive educational system and aims to shift the paradigm fundamentally (Reimer, 2019).

Despite the debate in the RJ world, the pandemic provided an excellent opportunity to test the theories against the practices. According to the NLESD (2021) report, teachers' primary goal during the first lockdown was to maintain and strengthen the existing relationships with their students. All the participants in the current study reported that they used check-in Circles to provide social and emotional support to their students. The limited online RJE practices became especially important when the opportunities for students to have social interactions were significantly reduced during the lockdowns. What if only affirmative RJE was used to address the behaviour

issues during the pandemic? How risky would it be if rules and disciplines were still prioritized over students' mental health under the affirmative RJE framework during the pandemic? From the transformative RJE perspective, there are deep-rooted reasons behind students' misbehaviours. The pandemic well testified to the necessity to look beyond the misbehaviours to address the causes behind them. Students may display behavioural issues due to the lack of social interactions during the pandemic. The misbehaviours can be a symbol of asking for help. For instance, in the cyberbullying case mentioned in the previous chapter, the student's misconduct is due to his need for more social interactions. Thus, it is not enough to only address the behavioural issues without challenging the causes. Another problem teachers faced during the pandemic was the lack of student attendance. In affirmative RJE, it will be considered a behavioural issue, and the students need to be punished. However, the pandemic exposed that the digital inequity embedded in the system was one of the causes of students' absence. The digital gap needs to be addressed rather than the behaviours on the surface.

COVID-19 put a pause on everything, but it provides an opportunity for us to reflect on what RJE is about and why we are using RJE. The pandemic has revealed that affirmative RJE will not be enough during or after the crisis. It is an incomplete implementation of RJE (Vaandering, 2011). The integrity of RJE is lost when merely used as a tool to manage behaviours. Deep-rooted injustice embedded in the system must be addressed under the transformative RJE framework.

5.4.2 RJE Is a Philosophy

During the interviews, all the participants mentioned that although the regular RJE practices were disrupted, they believed they were still practicing RJE as long as a safe and inclusive space was created online for their students. To them, RJE is a paradigm on which they built all

their teaching activities. It is a philosophy that infiltrated through the way of interacting with their students and way of being. RJE is never only about formal practices. It is the lens through which the practitioners can view their relationships with everyone around them (Zehr, 2015). The values and beliefs behind the lens are the internal motivations for RJE practitioners. Amstutz and Mullet (2005) precisely pinpointed the nature of RJE: "We don't propose a cookie-cutter approach to restorative discipline; to imply such would over-simplify complex and diverse community situations. Rather, a restorative approach is a philosophy or framework that can guide us as we design programs and make decisions within our particular settings" (p.8).

Covid-19 forced us to step away from the things we are familiar with. We complained, suffered, and even lamented when our connections with other people were disrupted during the pandemic. When the pandemic took away the opportunity to give a pat on the student's shoulder or a hug, we realized that our connections with other people were valuable and indispensable. We longed for human connections during the pandemic not only because we wanted to go back to normal but also because human relationships are what we need to live in the world healthily, as much as we need oxygen to survive. The sudden pause of the world made us realize that all human beings are closely interconnected, and we exist in relationships. In the post-COVID-19 era, RJE practices must be continued to rebuild a caring, inclusive and respectful new world.

Chapter 6 Conclusion and Recommendations

The current study aimed to find out the impact of COVID-19 on teachers' RJE practices in NL. By analyzing the participants' narratives, this thesis was able to draw a general picture of what RJE practices were like during the pandemic, the challenges and opportunities COVID-19 brought to RJE practices, and the implications of continuing RJE beyond COVID-19.

6.1 Conclusion

The research findings show that the sudden switch to remote teaching caused so much challenge that teachers stopped using RJE entirely at the beginning of the pandemic. The situation gradually improved during school opening and the second lockdown. The teaching experiences during the first lockdown provided teachers with an opportunity to learn, reflect and prepare for the upcoming challenges. Teachers had attempted to revive some RJE practices online in the first lockdown. Most teachers chose to continue using check-in Circles online due to their flexibility and ease of use. The findings also revealed that the teacher-student relationship decreased significantly during the pandemic, especially at the beginning of the school closure. The reduced teaching time and the discomfort of online teaching are two primary causes of the decreased relationships between the participants and their students. As teachers and students got used to the new protocols, some teachers reported their relationships improved during school reopening and the second lockdown. In addition, conflicts among the students in online classes almost disappeared during the pandemic. The lack of in-person social interaction between students and their peers gave little chance to any conflicts emerging in class. Thus, RJE was seldom used for conflict resolution. However, it did not mean that conflicts were not occurring in student homes with their siblings or parents, which the teachers were unaware of. It made it difficult for teachers to intervene.

Based on the findings, several major challenges and opportunities emerged during COVID-19. Student disengagement is one of the major obstacles in RJE practices. It is mainly reflected through students' absence in classes, lack of motivation and loss of interest in learning online. The emotional exhaustion from remote teaching drained the energy of both teachers and students. Moreover, the participants repeatedly mentioned the lack of digital literacy among teachers as a major challenge. Most teachers struggled with teaching online, let alone RJE practices, without knowing how to use the technology. Some participants managed to do Circles online, but the incompatibility of the platform features with Circle protocols prevented teachers from creating a legitimate Circle practice. In addition, the disrupted communication during COVID-19 was a major issue in RJE practices. Online communication was deemed "mechanical," "artificial," and "lacking the natural flow" by most participants. Unlike the in-person classes, the lack of non-verbal communication in virtual classes did not allow teachers to tune into their students' physical and emotional needs, negatively affecting the TSR. Despite all the challenges, the silver lining during COVID-19 is that some quiet and reserved students started to have closer connections with their teachers. The online classes provided them with a safe space to express their thoughts and emotions. Although the improved TSR is counterintuitive, similar results are found in the literature review.

Throughout the pandemic, the participants made valuable reflections on their RJE practices. Their experiences reiterated the importance of RJE practices for young people's development in schools. The findings further confirmed that RJE is a framework, a philosophy, and a paradigm that needs to be integrated into everyday teaching and learning activities. The findings also revealed that it is indispensable to adopt the whole-school approach for RJE implementation to reach its full potential. Teachers always need the support and understanding from the administration and school staff to practice RJE. Only by building a restorative school can the other

RJE practices take roots and flourish beyond COVID-19.

As mentioned previously, there is a debate between affirmative RJ and transformative RJ among scholars in understanding RJ. Although the interview questions in this study were not designed to explore the impact of COVID-19 on RJE practice in terms of building just and equitable learning environments, the research findings provided validation and supporting evidence for the necessity of implementing transformative RJ instead of affirmative RJ in schools. COVID-19 has demonstrated the importance of building relationships and meeting students' emotional needs. The pandemic amplified the benefits of transformative RJ in schools when human relationships are prioritized over rules. It would be harmful to students if punishment and addressing behavioural problems were still the priority under the affirmative RJ framework during the pandemic. If transformative RJ has been validated through the test of COVID-19, it should also be continued beyond the pandemic. Affirmative RJ is limited to behaviour, while transformative RJ informs the relational essence of education and is the direction that future RJ practices should head towards.

6.2 Limitations and Recommendations

The limitations of the current study are mainly in three aspects. First**,** the impact of COVID-19 on building just and equitable learning environments was not explored enough due to the scope of the current study. This topic has complex relationships with numerous factors, for example, the digital divide on the national level. It demands questions and answers from other systems outside of the educational context. More research on this topic needs to be conducted in the future to dissect its complexity and profound implications.

Second, the research is limited to the specific situations in NL. Compared with other areas in Canada, COVID-19 was relatively well contained in this province. Because the educational

policies during the pandemic were based on the province's unique situations, the generalizability of the research results can be limiting.

Third, there is a limitation in the research samples. The study focuses only on teachers' narratives of RJE experience during COVID-19. Moreover, the research results mainly reflected the RJE implementation during the pandemic in primary and elementary schools because three participants were teachers in K-6 grades. The perspectives of other stakeholders, especially students, need to be included in future studies to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the pandemic's impact on RJE. Students' narratives may challenge the conclusions drawn by adults. Their stories will give insights into their real needs and how adults can better meet them in the future. Their thoughts and feelings will provide honest feedback to adults on how well we did in the crisis to serve our students.

The current study has several implications for RJE practices beyond COVID-19. The research findings demonstrate that teachers need more support from the administration. Teachers would feel more empowered if the administrators truly embraced the RJE values. Viewing RJE merely as a behaviour management tool will further discourage teacher practitioners. The RJE implementation can only be most effective when the whole school is on board, and it should start with the school administration.

The findings also showed that teachers wished there were clear instructions and expectations from the school district and the government during the pandemic. It is important to do more preparation work before the next educational crisis, for instance, developing teachers' digital literacy. Since COVID-19 has revealed the benefits of online teaching, it is necessary to examine the potential of continuing remote instruction in K-12 schools. Developing RJE practices in virtual spaces is more important than ever after the pandemic. More time and energy need to be

given to developing RJE practices online, such as Circle protocols, training facilitators and constructing online platforms that can support the needs of RJE practices. Although the in-person connection is necessary, RJE practices should go beyond the limits of physical presence in the post-COVID-19 era.

In addition, the connection between teachers and parents needs to be strengthened regarding RJE practices. As mentioned in the previous chapters, there is great value in involving parents in RJE implementation. Their understanding of RJE will help expand the influence of RJE from schools to home and local communities. Thus, schools should create opportunities for parents to become familiar with RJE philosophy and practices. For instance, parents can be invited to observe or participate in daily RJE practices at schools. The meetings in Parent-Teacher Associations can also be conducted in the form of Circles. Teachers can actively introduce parents to RJE philosophy and practices as the most important agents. For instance, teachers can provide knowledge and skills about resolving family conflicts with their children with RJE approaches. Only by actively engaging parents in the practices can there be a comprehensive implementation of RJE in the future. Likewise, teachers can also reflect on their approaches to building relationships with parents. Teachers can take this opportunity to refresh their perspectives on parents' role so that teachers and parents can continue understanding and supporting each other beyond the crisis.

6.3 Concluding Thoughts

This research project aimed to find out how teachers' RJE practices were impacted during COVID-19 in three aspects: Circle practice, teacher-student relationships and conflict resolution. The research findings unveiled the challenges and opportunities teachers faced in RJE practices during the pandemic. It revealed teachers' needs and reflections on their RJE experience.

Meanwhile, the research findings provided several implications for RJE practices beyond COVID-19, such as developing RJE in virtual spaces and expanding the understanding of RJE from a behaviour management tool to a relationship-based educational philosophy. With so much unexplored, I expect the research findings to provoke more conversations among educators, policymakers and researchers regarding the changes that need to be made in RJE implementation in the future.

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Appendix I Interview Guide

Opening Questions

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself as a teacher?

2. How did you start practicing RJE as a teacher?

3. What is practicing RJE like to you?

Interview questions

1. What was your RJE practice like during COVID-19?

2. How has your relationship with the students changed during COVID-19?

3. What was RJE Circle practice like during COVID-19?

4. How did you use RJE to address any harm and conflicts in classes during COVID-19?

5. What are the challenges and opportunities in RJE practice during COVID-19?

6. How has your understanding of RJE changed during COVID-19?

7. What do you think RJE practitioners need to be at their best in implementing RJE beyond COVID-19?

Appendix II Recruitment Letter

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My name is Min Lu, and I am a graduate student in the Department of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am conducting a research project called **"The Impact of COVID-19 on Teachers' Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) Practice in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL)"** for my master's degree under the supervision of Dr. Dorothy Vaandering. The purpose of the study is to investigate how teachers' RJE practice has been affected during COVID-19. The study will provide you with an opportunity to reflect on your RJE practice during the pandemic. It will **help you discover your needs in implementing RJE and improve your RJE practice** during and after COVID-19.

I am connecting with **K-12 teachers in NL who have been practicing RJE** prior to COVID-19 and during the time between the Spring semester, 2020 to the Winter semester, 2021. I would like to invite you to participate in two **one-on-one interviews** in which you will be asked to talk about your RJE implementation experiences during the current pandemic. Participation will require **90-120 minutes of** your time in total with 45-60 minutes for each interview. All the interviews will be held online via Cisco **WebEx** due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is not a job/school/board requirement, and findings will not be reported to principals or colleagues. All the information collected will be confidential. Only the researcher and the supervisor can have access to the data. Participation in this study is not anonymous as I will know your name and contact information. However, all identifying information will be well protected and anonymized by using pseudonyms in the transcripts, the thesis, and any published materials that may result from this study including when direct quotes are used in the final research report.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me to arrange a meeting time. If you have any questions about me or my project, please contact me by email at **mlu19@mun.ca** or by phone at **709-400-3588.** If you know anyone who may be interested in participating in this study, please give them a copy of this information.
Thank you in advance for considering my request,
Min Lu (mlu19@mun.ca; Tel: 7094003588)

Faculty of Education

Memorial University

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.

Appendix III Informed Consent Form

Faculty of Education

Min Lu, Graduate Student
St John's, NL Canada A1B 3X8
Tel: 7094003588
mlu19@mun.ca
www.mun.ca

Title: The impact of COVID-19 on Teachers' Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) Practice in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL)

Researcher(s):   Min Lu, Faculty of Education, Memorial University
                   Email: mlu19@mun.ca Tel: 709-400-3588

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

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled "The impact of COVID-19 on Teachers Restorative Justice in Education (RJE)in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL)". The purpose of the study is to investigate how teachers' RJE practice has been affected during COVID-19. This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you a 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, Min Lu mlu19@mun.ca (709-400-3588), 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: My name is Min Lu, and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am conducting a research project called "The Impact of COVID-19 on Teachers' Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) Practice in Newfoundland and Labrador" for my master's degree under the supervision of Dr. Dorothy Vaandering.

Purpose of Study: The purpose of the study is to investigate how teachers' RJE practice has been affected during COVID-19 in NL. The narratives of the teachers will help to reveal their experiences and needs as RJE practitioners during the pandemic. The research results are expected to help other RJE practitioners to reflect on and improve their own practices. This study can also provide guidance for relevant programs and organizations to better support the RJE practitioners

during this challenging time.

What You Will Do in this Study: You are invited because you have been practicing RJE prior to COVID-19 and during the time between Spring semester, 2020 to Winter semester, 2021. You will participate in two one-on-one interviews in which you will be asked to talk about your RJE implementation experiences during COVID-19. Guided by the open-ended questions, you will be asked to talk about the circle dialogue pedagogy, changes in teacher-student relationships, and topics related to your RJE practice during the current pandemic. You will only share what you feel comfortable sharing and be asked not to share identifying information regarding those you might refer to.

Length of Time: The participation will require 90-120 minutes of your time in total, with 45-60 minutes for each interview. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, all the interviews will be conducted online via Cisco WebEx.

Withdrawal from the Study:
You have the right to withdraw at any time before and during the interviews. Any data collected from you up to that point will be removed and destroyed. After the interviews, you can choose to withdraw within two weeks after you receive your transcripts for review. All the interview recordings and transcripts will be removed and destroyed after your request for withdrawal.

Possible Benefits and Risks:
The study will provide you with an opportunity to reflect on your RJE practice during the pandemic. It will help you identify your needs in RJE practice and potentially improve your practice during and after COVID-19. Because the research results will be shared with other researchers and practitioners through presentations and articles, they are also expected to give guidance to relevant programs and organizations to provide better support for RJE teacher practitioners. The study will also provide implications, trends, and directions for future research in understanding RJE teacher practitioners' experiences during COVID-19.

Since basic identifying information will be collected through our meeting together (i.e. name, position, contact information), and the fact that there will only be a few participants involved, there is a risk that through the details reported in the study, informed readers may be able to identify your participation. Possible implications include associated financial and/or social risks. However, because all the identifying information will be well protected and anonymized by using pseudonyms, the risk is very low. There is also a potential emotional risk since you will be asked to discuss the impact of COVID-19. You are advised to use relevant resources for extra emotional support such as Bridge the gApp (https://nl.bridgethegapp.ca/) or the employee assistance program (EAP) if needed.

Confidentiality: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. I will carefully protect your

confidentiality by ensuring that what you share with me will not be shared with others or made public in any way other than through anonymous reporting (see below). After your interview, and before the data are included in the final report, you will be able to review the transcripts of your interviews, to add, change, or delete information from the transcripts as you see fit. All the interviews will be one-on-one interviews with the researcher. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the data.

Anonymity: Participation in this study is not anonymous as I will know your name and contact information. However, all identifying information will be well protected and anonymized by using pseudonyms in the transcripts, the thesis, and any published materials that may result from this study including when direct quotes are used in the final research report.

Recording of the Data:
The audio and video during the interviews will be recorded and stored online via Cisco Webex. You can choose to turn off your video during the interviews.

Third-Party Data Collection and/or Storage:
Data collected from you as part of your participation in this project will be hosted and/or stored electronically by Cisco WebEx and is subject to their privacy policy, and to any relevant laws of the country in which their servers are located. Therefore, anonymity and confidentiality of data may not be guaranteed in the rare instance, for example, that government agencies obtain a court order compelling the provider to grant access to specific data stored on their servers. If you have questions or concerns about how your data will be collected or stored, please contact the researcher and/or visit the provider's website for more information before participating. The privacy and security policy of the third-party hosting data collection and/or storing data can be found at https://www.cisco.com/c/en_ca/about/legal/privacy-full.html

Use, Access, Ownership, and Storage of Data:
No data will be shared with a third party. Only the researcher and the supervisor can have access to the data. The data will only be used for my thesis work. All the recordings will be stored online via Cisco Webex and the interview transcripts will be stored securely in an encrypted electronic folder in the researcher's password-protected computer. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the collected data. Data will be kept for a minimum of five years, as required by Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research. All the data will be destroyed in five years after the completion of my thesis.

Reporting of Results: The research results may be published in journal articles and conference presentations. I will inform you and provide you with access to the journal articles and conference presentations. The use of quotes and excerpts from your interviews will remain anonymous by using pseudonyms. Upon completion, I will inform you that my thesis will be available at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II Library, and can be accessed online at

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: Min Lu mlu19@mun.ca (709-400-3588) and Dr. Dorothy Vaandering dvaandering@mun.ca (709-864-3266)

Ethics: 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 or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Consent:
All the forms in this study will be digital. Your electronic 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 you 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, you can withdraw within **two weeks after** you receive your transcripts for review. All the recordings and transcripts will be removed and destroyed after your request for withdrawal.

I agree to be audio-recorded	☐ Yes ☐ No
I agree to be video-recorded	☐ Yes ☐ No
I agree to the use of direct quotations	☐ Yes ☐ No

By signing this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers 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 digital copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

Researcher's Signature:
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