

Introduction

Restorative Practice through Art

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Quilts have long been a part of the human experience. Quilts are a functional art form, providing necessary warmth and protection from the elements. They can also serve as a form of communication and can create a sense of community. When individuals come together in a quilting bee, they are unified in their efforts to bring warmth and joy to others. Like a patchwork quilt made up of many pieces, this book pulls together many components of restorative practices in the arts. Although the pieces may differ in purpose, when combined, they overlap and form a unified whole.

As you read this book, imagine the chapters as quilt blocks, each pertinent on its own but together reinforcing the united power of the arts as a restorative practice. This book includes voices from professionals in the fields of art, art education, museums, art therapy, special education, social work, and school psychology. We encourage you to find a quiet place to wrap yourself in this metaphorical quilt to absorb its many threads and motifs. We hope this book will be restorative for you, the reader, as well as your student learners as you implement restorative practices in your setting.

The threads that hold this book together are:

- Creating Safe, Brave Spaces
- Voice and Narrative Storytelling
- Mindfulness and Body Awareness
- Enhancing Social-Emotional Learning
- Fostering Resilience
- Strengthening Community Connections



I-1 Quilt by Adrienne D. Hunter.

What Is Restorative Practice?

Restorative is defined as having the ability to bring back health, strength, or a feeling of well-being. Restorative practice can be defined as actions we put into place that support, encourage, and build relationships. Restorative practice also builds resilience to cope with adversity.

Recently, there has been increased attention on implementing restorative practice in the fields of education, art education, and community work due to its ability to strengthen individuals and communities, promote positive change, and improve social connections. For example, the Mural Arts Program in Philadelphia is an innovative community arts program with a school-based arts education component that works to transform public spaces and individual lives through ongoing collaboration. What began as a project to combat graffiti resulted in one of the nation's largest public art programs. Graffiti writers were invited to redirect their talents and participate in the design and creation of public murals in their neighborhoods, which resulted in a sense of pride and place, as well as empowering them to have a voice in their community. The arts education component of Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program includes restorative practices for youth in the juvenile justice system and in foster care, as well as in-school and after-school art classes, and apprenticeship programs. The initiatives not only focus on work-skills development but also allow young people to creatively express themselves, utilize the arts to heal and unite, and illuminate the voices of those who have been marginalized.

Creative Action in Central Texas is another shining example of implementing restorative practice in a community. It uses creativity to develop potential and transform the lives of young people through the arts and youth development. Creative Action's after-school, in-school,



I-2 A wish tree facilitated by the Creative Action Program helps individuals in the community envision their future.

Photo courtesy of Creative Action in Central Texas.

and community-based programs not only provide access to quality art education but also work to strengthen community, practice social justice, and foster social-emotional development. Their approach focuses on building supportive, safe learning environments, creating student-centered instruction, and producing culturally and socially responsive arts-based curriculum. The key to these programs is using creative art to help students envision their future and provide necessary skills for success.

Restorative practices such as these focus on the strengths and interests of individuals, giving them hope for a better, more meaningful future. These efforts can also strengthen communities. How can individual educators, practitioners, and community workers create restorative practice in their own programs? How can art restore a sense of well-being for us and those with whom we work?

Creative practices can restore our sense of well-being.

The Critical Need for Restorative Practice

There is great need for restorative practice. Increases in anxiety, depression, and attempted suicide, as well as non-suicidal self-injury in children and youth, are concerning. More than a third of adolescents know someone who self-injures.¹ Increase in violence and substance abuse continues to be a major stressor for individuals and communities. School districts and families are also grappling with the impact on learning, mental health, growth, and development caused by social media and advancing technology. The United States Preventative Task Force recently responded to data showing a decline in children's mental health by recommending all youth be screened for anxiety.²

Students, educators, and their parents experienced over two years of disruption in education, and in life in general, during the Covid-19 pandemic. The trauma associated with the pandemic had a negative effect on students' attitudes toward learning.

In a national survey, teachers reported that their students' morale in school was lower than before the pandemic. In addition, students self-reported that their morale in school was lower than before the pandemic.³

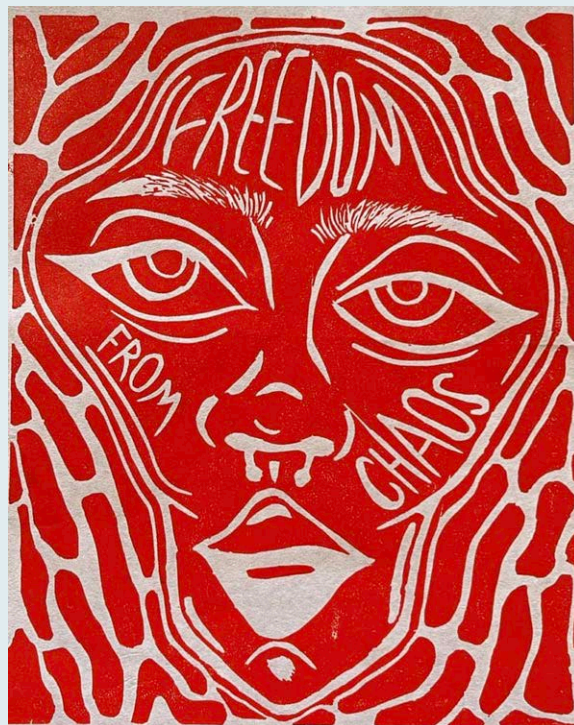
The pandemic amplified the preexisting systems that cause racial inequity and racist feelings in our country.⁴ Race is linked to patterns of power structures and prejudices. White teachers may develop instructional practices that contribute to harmful assumptions and microaggressions about race and racism both intentionally and unintentionally.⁵ The effects can be devastating for children and can harm mental health and well-being. Students may feel so exhausted and devalued that they just give up.

The arts offer the opportunity to teach young people visual racial literacy. They give students the chance to reflect on racial and political events, conduct their own

Personal Connection

As a young black girl growing up in predominantly white spaces, I couldn't find the words to express what I was going through, so art found me. I didn't care if the images I made were proportional or had balance. I was so intrigued, I just wanted to recreate what I saw. I redrew characters from my favorite animated shows, drafted designs for clothes and homes I dreamed of, recreated famous paintings we learned about in art class, and more. I was fascinated by the way that people could create reality seemingly out of thin air with art. Looking back, I was looking for an escape, a way to create my own world, a place meant just for me when the real world proved too difficult.

—Kianna Cooper, artist and aspiring change agent pursuing her MBA with plans to become a school administrator



I-3 Kianna Cooper, *Freedom from Chaos*.

research, and engage in projects designed to inform and educate.⁶ Students can learn and gain a better understanding of history. The arts can teach about cultural differences and respect for those differences. Through creative processes, students can express their cultural backgrounds and their experiences with bias.⁷

In addition to exacerbating racial and political issues, there is ongoing discrimination against people with disabilities, economic disparities, and the effects of poverty.⁸ The threat of war, school closures, and death can be traumatic and formative for children and youth. Students and teachers are processing individual and collective traumas resulting in intense stress due to a myriad of causes: societal and political tensions, displacement and natural disasters like hurricanes, fires, tornadoes, floods. We must turn our attention to what can be done to restore our well-being.

In his groundbreaking book, *The Body Keeps the Score*, Bessel van der Kolk writes that trauma is one of the most pressing issues of Western societies.⁹ He uses scientific advances to show how trauma literally reshapes both body and brain, compromising sufferers' capacities for pleasure, engagement, self-control, and trust. Recent research reveals the power of the arts to restore neuroplasticity.¹⁰ In other words, art can reverse damage to the brain caused by trauma.

Trauma experienced from racial events is real and lives within the bodies of our students.¹¹ Our bodies carry the history and trauma behind everything that falls into the category of race.¹² It is the body where pain and pleasure are experienced; the body is where our experiences are processed. Similarly, the body is the place where healing and resilience occurs. An effective way to change unhealthy patterns is to restore our physical capacity to focus and engage. Van der Kolk states that "for real change to take place, the body needs to learn that the danger has passed and to live in the reality of the present."¹³

One way to live in the present is through engagement with the arts (visual, movement, music, drama). The arts assist in the expression and communication of experiences in reparative ways using the imagination and personal narratives that restore and promote healing.¹⁴ In his review of Cathy A. Malchiodi's landmark book, *Trauma and Expressive Arts Therapy*, van der Kolk states that, it is the restorative power of "the arts that can mobilize the body and fire the imagination, and thereby help to restore vitality, self-efficacy, mastery, and self-expression."¹⁵

Restorative Practice in Education

Creating Safe, Brave Spaces

Restorative practice starts with creating safe and brave spaces for all learners. In educational settings we often hear the terms *safe schools*, *safe spaces*, *safer spaces*, and *brave spaces*. The term *safe schools* became popular in the late '90s as we focused on the physical safety of students. We developed policies and procedures for ensuring that weapons were not brought into schools. We focused on procedures for breaking up fights. We learned when we could search students. We broadened the term to *safe spaces* as we made other places such as churches, malls, and airports safer. We increased the use of metal detectors, and we required proof of identification with the goal of ensuring physical safety in these environments.

As we focused on trauma-informed practices and the mental health issues that students and adults face, we began to use the term *safer spaces* to include emotional as well as physical safety. Individuals deserve spaces that not only consider their physical needs but their emotional needs as well. All of us have the right to be in environments that are free from emotional abuse, harassment, cliques, bullying, and

isolation, where even though we are physically safe, we may suffer emotional injury.

Now we need to focus on *brave spaces*—where we have a sense of acceptance and security and feel empowered to voice our needs and beliefs without fear of retaliation or retribution. In brave spaces we feel a sense of ownership and know our work will be appreciated and accepted. We are part of a community.

Restorative practice through art encourages risk-taking in safe and brave environments. When restorative practice is embedded in art, it provides students ways to express themselves in an accepting and safe environment. Artists solve creative problems through exploration, experimentation, and revision of techniques and strategies. When one process does not work, the artist is encouraged to try new solutions. Failure to make a 3D work of art stand freely results in continued exploration of processes until the end result is a stronger, better product. Through the arts, students can realize their creative potential. Some young people are unable to face their fears in the real world but feel safe enough to take risks and explore in the arts.¹⁶ Creating safe and brave learning spaces for students can restore well-being and open up avenues for learning.

Multiple chapters of this book address the importance of safe and brave spaces. Chapter 10 points to the development of an internal sense of safety as a critical part of child development. Chapter 3 stresses the importance of creating places where students perceive that we care for their physical, emotional, and psychological safety. Chapter 2 provides examples of activities that encourage brave spaces, while Chapter 5 talks about the power of mindfulness in creating brave spaces. Chapter 8 discusses creative strategies that promote healthy environments and safety and how the Sanctuary Model can help individuals heal and learn what calms them. In Chapter 7, students experience creative freedom and

express authentic emotions within the safe spaces created at a grief retreat.

Chapter 12 offers insights on creating a safe and supportive culture for students who have experienced traumatic stress. In Chapter 4 you'll find strategies to offer choices, thereby providing a nurturing safe space to increase engagement. The authors of Chapter 18 use compassionate listening as a key component to create a brave, safe, and welcoming space. Our final chapter advocates for building trusting relationships and creating a secure, safe environment for students to express their feelings, emotions, experiences, and challenges through art.

Voice and Narrative Storytelling

In brave spaces, learners are free to vocalize their thoughts and engage in storytelling practices relevant to their experiences and needs. When students feel they are being heard, they gain a sense of ownership and belonging in the environment. They can express their thoughts openly. Chapter 2 discusses the many opportunities we can create to give students voice. A sense of voice can give hope to students when they feel alone and isolated, as covered in Chapter 11. Chapter 6 discusses how movement and dance can give students a voice without speaking; the authors share a variety of expressive techniques that don't involve talking. Chapter 10 presents information from an art therapy curriculum that uses sensorimotor exploration to engage early childhood learners in visual storytelling. The power of artmaking with others to change one's personal story and contribute to the collective narrative is discussed in Chapter 14. Chapter 9 explores the power of visual storytelling to develop empathy through the language of visual and material metaphors in puppetry. The authors of Chapter 18 blend weaving, photography, ritual, storytelling, and compassionate listening practices.

Compassionate listening, empathy, acceptance, ritual, and storytelling are critical components for giving learners a voice. These contributing authors offer various avenues to promote voice through narrative storytelling.

Mindfulness and Body Awareness

Restorative practices can offer meaningful opportunities for creative engagement that foster well-being and mind-body balance. The arts can be cathartic to students and give them an appropriate outlet for expressing their feelings. Restorative practices help students build emotional regulation. Research shows that student involvement in the arts as a restorative process has a positive impact on academic achievement, including improvements in reading comprehension and math.¹⁷ Chapter 5 provides an array of deep breathing exercises for learners and encourages adults to practice them too. In Chapter 6 you'll learn how to promote body awareness through movement, improvisation, and dance to foster mindfulness and connection with others. The authors of Chapter 19 offer walking meditation as a form of mindfulness. Chapter 8 provides ways to help learners find what calms them; the author advocates for trauma-informed educational spaces where learners can be aware of their feelings and identify and use self-grounding exercises.

Enhancing Social-Emotional Learning

When students can unclutter their minds and be free from thoughts of the problems they have faced, they can better focus on their learning. Students who can focus their attention on a specific project, such as painting a picture, can increase their working memory. Restorative practices also provide many avenues for success. When students feel productive and accomplished, they are more comfortable and confident

about academic tasks and motivated to tackle new challenges.

Addressing learners' social-emotional needs can increase their sense of belonging and agency. The arts can give hope and acknowledgment to students who might not receive validation in other areas of their lives. Celebrating visual arts accomplishments, enhancing pride by successfully articulating through visual art, and using art to celebrate and honor what is important to us can strengthen resilience.¹⁸ Freedom from restraints and belonging to a greater ideal can be empowering. When given the opportunity to express themselves, students see their strengths and interests and feel empowered to move forward.¹⁹



I-4 Kianna Cooper, *Pieces of Me*.

Chapter 7 discusses the importance of teaching students how to grieve, how to understand their feelings, and how to express their emotions in a meaningful way through group projects. Chapter 16 emphasizes the importance of including social-emotional learning in arts education because it provides an important avenue in teaching socialization and empathy. Chapter 10 advocates for using the arts to foster an emotional state and climate that facilitates learning in early childhood education; the author incorporates children's literature and multisensory experiences to address social-emotional learning. Chapter 19 teaches us the importance of allowing learners to express themselves freely through artistic media. The author of Chapter 5 reminds us of the importance of mindfulness as a key component and a lifelong skill for teaching social-emotional learning. In Chapter 17, you'll read about the direct connection between social-emotional concepts and artistic practices, and learn ways to integrate them for enhanced

learning. Chapter 8 provides a whole array of strategies for focusing on children who are hurting emotionally and stresses that a key component of social-emotional learning is awareness of one's feelings. Chapter 11 stresses creating an environment of hope for students. When students believe there is hope, they are empowered to achieve.

Fostering Resilience

Resilient students can successfully move from a survival mode to one of thriving. A hopeful vision can strengthen students' ability to overcome adversity and find success.²⁰ In an article in *The Atlantic*, Jessica Lahey describes hope as "a kind of vaccination against the virulent effects of poverty, addiction, and childhood trauma."²¹ The arts provide students with hope for a better future. Artmaking that focuses on learners' vision for the future or that is based on their strengths and sources of joy can give students hope and help them identify their

Personal Connection

This vignette encapsulates the power of art to restore a sense of self and illustrates how art can be used to transform adversity into something positive.

In my ceramic work, I sunk into myself. It's where my most quiet moments birthed pieces through a stressful time. My hands created while my heart broke and my mind raced. Through my creations you'll find me, a rekindled artist, learning to create more for myself. You'll find moments of stumbling and moments of confidence. You will slowly see a person who is becoming enamored with the process of making art again. Hopefully you'll see the reflections of excitement for what these new, yet familiar pathways will yield.

–Erin Smiley



I-5 Erin Smiley, *Swim Fishes Swim!*, 2018. Clay, ceramic glaze, 11" x 8 ½".
Photo by Erin Smiley.

assets and talents, set realistic goals, and work to achieve them.²²

In Chapter 11, the author describes how her middle school learners used photography to illuminate hope and their vision for the future amidst a global pandemic. Chapter 19 offers arts-based interventions that provide valuable opportunities for individuals to resolve internal tensions and hardships and restore resilience and positive self-image. Chapter 1 discusses using expressive art for awareness, restorative healing, and resilience. The author of Chapter 8 uses trauma-informed practices to help learners deal with loss and envision their future. Chapter 12 offers practical strategies for student-driven visual arts education that utilizes trauma-informed practices to help learners thrive. Chapter 6 discuss the benefits of movement and dance in building confidence, resilience, and self-expression.

Strengthening Community Connections

Strong relationships between individuals and their communities foster resilience, yielding success and greater productivity. Studies show that empathetic concern from educators, in the form of kindness and compassion, can have a positive impact on standardized testing, overall grades, and graduation rates.²³ Improving connections and strengthening social bonds can increase opportunities for academic success in students. Restorative practice through the arts provides avenues for students to strengthen connection to their communities. Students can utilize their artistic talents to help their communities in creative ways.

The arts are a connector for learning about others and finding commonalities and shared experiences through empathy.²⁴ Art can empower students by enhancing their sense of purpose. One community art program invited students from a variety of public and private schools in Memphis,

Tennessee, to knit hats. The hats were used for a collaborative performance art event, then donated to children receiving treatment at St. Jude's Hospital. Participants showed pride in contributing to the comfort and well-being of another. Helping others enhances individual and community resilience.²⁵

Community-building programs such as these take many forms. Many communities are promoting the arts through a variety of strategies, for example, painting murals on the sides of buildings that need a facelift. Some have art shows that highlight local talent. Some communities have music in the park where local individuals can perform. When students see purpose in what they are doing and how it can improve their community, they have hope that their talents will be utilized in a meaningful manner. In addition, the arts provide the appropriate tools for students to resolve problems. Artmaking includes decision-making and creative problem-solving, independently and in small groups, thereby providing students the opportunity to practice conflict-resolution skills in a safe environment. When frustration occurs, rather than getting into a disagreement or a fight with a peer, students have an outlet for their feelings.

In Chapter 4, the authors talk about creating relationships and connections within the museum environment. Chapter 2 stresses the role of community murals and exhibitions as means to create connections. The authors of Chapter 19 build collaboration and community through blended weaving, photography, and ritual storytelling. Chapter 5 describes how we can use mindfulness to connect the mind and body and strengthen relationships. Chapter 9 explains how puppetry can instill empathetic connections with others.

In Chapter 15 the authors reflect on the significance of community-engaged practices and narratives to develop culturally relevant pedagogy and curriculum, while Chapter 14 shows us how the rituals

inherent in artistic practices can facilitate community healing after collective loss. Chapter 11 discusses the value of activities that bring individuals together to heal after a shared trauma. In Chapter 13, the authors offer an inspiring example of community engagement and empowerment for learners of all ages through the *Finding Freedom Summer Traveling Exhibit* and accompanying art lessons. This community collaboration offers ways to learn and move beyond a troubled history. These are all examples of how initiatives to strengthen community can have powerful effects on society and the individual.

Why the Arts Are Well-Suited to Restore

The arts are specifically well-suited to restore well-being through creative processes. In addition to strengthening resilience by developing creativity, resourcefulness, sense of belonging, and relationships, the arts help young people see multiple perspectives on an issue or problem. Unlike some other academic subjects, there is not only one correct answer in art. Students learn to see multiple solutions and multiple answers through art.²⁶ Students are also able to observe that peers may have different feelings that result in different artistic expressions. Sharing perspectives promotes learning²⁷ and respect for the individuality of their peers. Students also learn empathy and compassion when they are allowed to choose the materials and subjects to create work that is meaningful to them.²⁸

Art develops creativity. Creativity involves finding new approaches to a problem. Successfully solving creative problems can restore a sense of self-worth and self-assurance. When students can express themselves and think creatively, they discover the many options available to them. They can experiment in a safe environment, see what works best for

them, and create finished products that denote their identity and individual ideas. Creativity also involves resourcefulness and the ability to identify, utilize, and sometimes transform available resources to solve problems.

Art elevates student voice and choice. The arts provide opportunities for students to speak in their own voice through their creations. Students who have experienced trauma often feel they have limited control over their lives. Giving young people creative choices, and choices in which medium and processes they use, empowers them. Choices give students a sense of control of their own future and teaches them to reframe mistakes from failures to opportunities for growth and learning.²⁹

How to Use This Book

This book can be read linearly or non-linearly. The chapters are written by experts in the field, are evidence-based, and address important topics, such as creative healing practices, visual and performing arts as therapy, trauma-informed methods, transformative learning, and restorative indigenous practices. It provides beneficial information for professional development and to prepare pre-service teachers. In addition, it provides insights and practical strategies for artists, art educators, art therapists, creative arts therapists, social workers, counselors, psychologists, special educators, nurses, students, and all those working in schools, community settings, alternative educational contexts, long-term care facilities, and hospitals.

This book is a resource. However, we encourage you to consult and collaborate with professionals in the field who are credentialed and licensed. Those professionals can provide therapy and can offer guidance and insights to successful implementation of arts-based restorative practices. With the complexity of multiple needs apparent

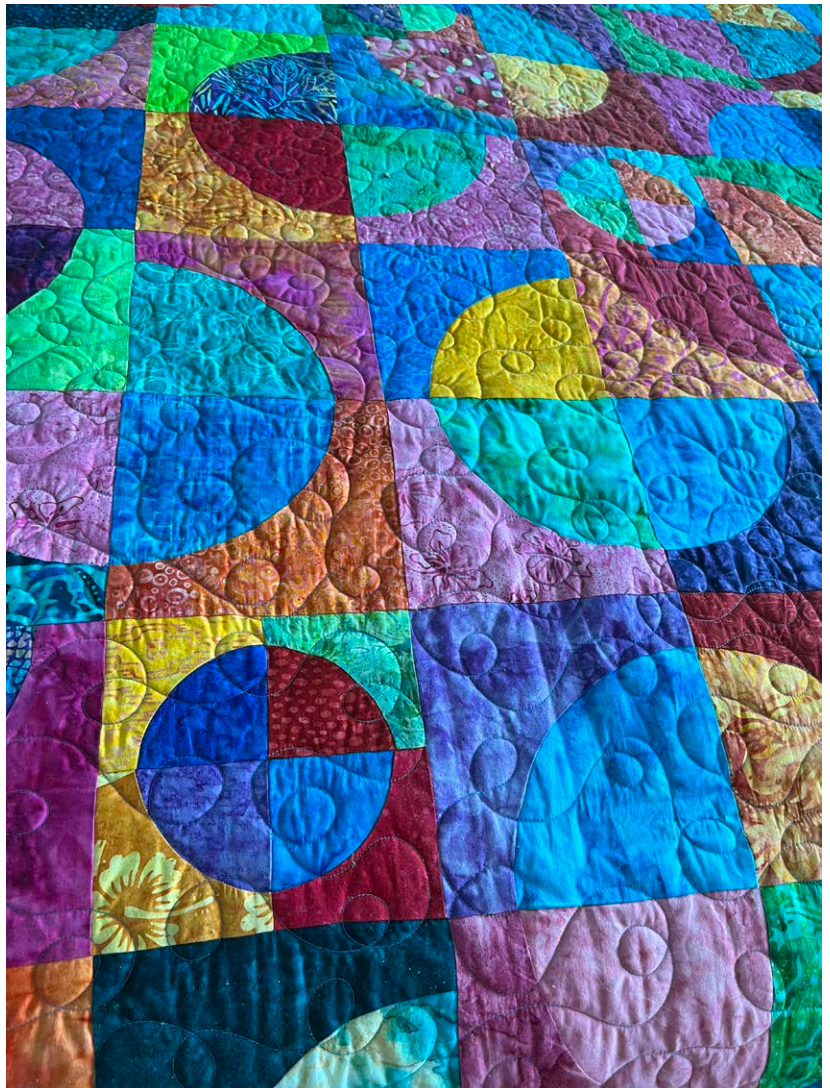
in varied settings, collaboration is key to success for all learners.

Each chapter starts with an introduction by the editors and concludes with suggestions for implementation and questions for discussion. Readers will notice common threads throughout the book that stitch ideas together and reinforce concepts.

Quilts can be created by an individual but are often the product of many hands. Each quilt consists of many components: a woven cloth top, a layer of batting, a woven back, and overlapping threads that create design patterns and add strength and reinforcement. All are necessary components that make the quilt more resilient. Piecing and quilting are ways to organize what's meaningful and significant. Patterns emerge. Quilts can be functional and expressive, convey warmth and can be an expression of love. Instead of focusing on a finished quilt, we encourage you to continue ongoing efforts to embed new ideas and pieces to aid in your development as a restorative practitioner. What are your own patterns as an educator facilitator?

Similar to a quilt, this book brings together a wide range of voices from educators, therapists, students, and community workers on the important path toward restorative arts education. Our intention is to provide you with practical arts-based examples and strategies to support you and those with whom you work. While this book will not make you a therapist, we hope it offers you a greater understanding of how to intentionally support students in educational settings in meaningful ways. We invite you, the reader, to connect to the ideas presented here as inspiration for your own work in the field. May you rekindle familiar pathways that are restorative and create new pathways on this journey that serves us all.

**The arts
provide
students with
hope for a
better future.**



I-6 Quilt by Adrienne D. Hunter.

Notes

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