

Perceptions of Secondary Administrators
on the Theory, Implementation and Outcome of Restorative Practices

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Authorization to Submit Dissertation

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Abstract

Public education in the United States is moving away from zero-tolerance policies to restorative approaches to address school discipline. The number of students experiencing removal from their educational opportunity via exclusionary discipline (suspensions and expulsions) is increasing at an alarming rate. Communities across the nation are calling for a change in discipline practices. This shift in school climate, away from the punitive, and toward embracing a restorative environment is occurring. Research on restorative practices has been primarily quantitative in nature, there are limited qualitative studies on the implementation process and outcomes from school districts shifting to a restorative mindset. This study examines the perceptions of high school administrators in a mid-sized urban school district on the theory of restorative approaches, the experiences they encounter in the implementation and outcomes as they shift from zero-tolerance to restorative practices. The research is grounded in a phenomenological lens to develop emergent themes about the administrator's experiences over the past several years as the district implemented restorative practices into the schools. This study informs our understanding of the lived experience of administrators as they are tasked with changing the mindset of their respective school staff to a restorative approach and a call for more research to include empirical studies to support and guide schools as they navigate the shift in school culture and community.

Keywords: community building, exclusionary discipline, phenomenology, restorative approach, restorative justice, restorative practice, secondary level, zero-tolerance policies

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Dedication

To my boys, may you always find the strength to work hard to achieve your goals.

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Chapter 1: Rationale

Human connectivity is rooted in the concept of 'relationship,' the way in which we connect to one another (International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP), 2018). We value having positive relationships with other people, so when conflict arises, we seek to find ways to resolve the issue between us. Conflict resolution is an essential skill for healthy functioning humans and has been a part of human societies since the earliest man (IIRP, 2018; Wachtel, 2016; Yazzie, 1994). The traditions of indigenous peoples involve using peace-keeping circles to focus on community building, repairing and reconciliation (Yazzie, 1994). Restorative justice, a theoretical framework that views wrongdoing by humans as damage to a relationship and thus, an offender must repair the relationship to restore and reconcile in the community (Nathanson, 1992, Zehr, 2002). Restorative justice was translated into practical application in the criminal justice system in the 1960's and 70's (IIRP, 2018). Implemented as a sub-framework of social justice, restorative justice sought to help criminal offenders repair the harm they caused to their community, reconcile, and build capacity to not re-offend (Gonzalez, 2012).

In the early 2000's, restorative justice concepts were introduced to education as a way to reduce the use of punitive consequences in response to student misbehavior (Fronius, Persson, Guckenbug, Hurley & Petrosino, 2016). By using a restorative approach, schools can reduce the application of exclusionary discipline, such as out of school suspensions and expulsions, which are the typical method to respond to student misbehavior (Fronius et al., 2016). Moving from punitive consequences to restorative practices requires a shift in how staff respond to wrongdoing in the school setting. This involves staff understanding the

premise of restorative justice: that a wrongdoing by a student causes harm to a relationship and that the student will be held accountable to repair that relationship, without punitive measures. While school employees continually strive to improve the culture and climate of their school buildings by seeking ways to build community; restorative practices are counter to the previously accepted use of punitive and exclusionary consequences (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2010) thereby making the change in discipline practice a challenge.

In response to education advocates seeking alternatives to punitive consequences in schools (Fronius et al., 2016), state legislatures have started to mandate changes in school discipline policy to limit exclusionary discipline and move towards restorative approaches. With these mandates, school districts across the United States are re-writing their discipline policies and tasking school administrators with navigating their staff to use a restorative approach. This includes getting staff to ‘buy-in’ to the premise of restorative practices to repair relational harm, build community, model conflict resolution skills and reduce the recidivism rate of student misbehavior (Costello et al., 2010).

According to Fronius et al., (2016) there is significant body of research showing the ability of restorative justice in schools to reduce and prevent student misbehavior, however, there is limited phenomenological research about the people involved in implementing and the outcomes of restorative practices (Brown 2018; Costello et al., 2010; Fronius et al., 2016). There are no known studies on the descriptions of the lived experiences of secondary level school administrators as they lead their staff in the implementation of restorative practices. Thus, a clearer understanding of the lived experiences of school administrators can provide other school leaders with insight on the transition to restorative practices in

school discipline. Through rich textural descriptions, a realistic understanding of what school administrators experience transitioning from punitive school discipline to a restorative approach will help other school leaders recognize best practices on implementation and outcomes.

History of School Discipline

How schools handle discipline of students has been under continued debate for equality and equity for the past 60 years (Zehr, 2002). The debate on who should monitor the behavior regulation of children in the United States, whether it is a public or private matter, continues to be divided (Alexander, 2017). In question is: “Whose job is it to guide the behaviors of children into adulthood?” Is it the sole responsibility of parents and/or guardians or is it a more collective effort, in a socialistic manner, that ‘we the people’ share a mutual challenge to educate youth in all matters of intellect, logic, and morality? Whether it was a conscious collective decision or not, as public education has evolved over the past century, it has become clear, schools are being held accountable for the regulation of student behavior (Alexander, 2017), while providing academic challenges and maintaining a safe learning environment.

This concept of behavior regulation provides a lens to view the complex social worlds of schools (Rousmaniere, Dehli & Coninck-Smith, 1997) and how it has led to a recent reformation in school discipline from zero-tolerance policies to restorative practices. To better understand why schools continue to reform policies in matters of school discipline, a history of such policies should be examined.

The course of public education in the United States over the past 150 years has seen many ebbs and flows of theories and practices about curriculum, learning styles, purpose, and character development. In regard to school discipline, the underlying theme central to all theories and practices employed have been how to guide, manage, teach, and engage children in learning within a safe classroom environment. At the turn of the 20th century, John Dewey, an educator, philosopher and widely published author, promoted the ideas of a democratic classroom; involving students in the responsibility of their learning and the classroom environment (Dewey, 1923). Dewey (1944) framed a rich historical context when he wrote that “It is a commonplace of educational theory that the establishing of character is a comprehensive aim of school instruction and discipline” (p. 346). This concept of character development as a component of public education waned in the latter half of the century, resulting in school discipline to be synonymous with punitive consequence. The resulting outcome was students being excluded from schools, rising rates of juvenile incarceration, racial disparities and a trend away from student character development in the name of zero tolerance policies.

As schools face public outcry for too many students expelled from schools, rising safety concerns and fair treatment for all students, school discipline has started to trend back towards a focus on character development, holding students more accountable for their actions and repairing the harm they incur if they disrupt the learning environment. The current theory of restorative justice echoes similarities to Dewey’s era, when the focus was on student learning with guidance and discipline, not punitive consequences. This is the premise upon which restorative practices are built.

As the educational system entered the 21st century, student behaviors in schools were not improving, in fact, they were becoming more severe. School shootings, increasing juvenile incarcerations, rising racial disparities in exclusionary discipline and students expelled for unwittingly breaking zero-tolerance policies all contributed to the dire statistics of exclusionary discipline (Johnstone, 2011). It seemed as though the knowledge gained in the previous century in the areas of educational psychology, behavior learning theories, and social justice had been placed on hold in an attempt to regain control. In re-examining the philosophy of discipline, it was clear another reform in school discipline was needed (Zehr, 2002). Zero-tolerance was not working because students removed from the school setting were not allowed to repair the harm they caused and there were not enough services available to help those students removed from school to find success (Johnstone, 2011). Looking back to the success of the social justice reform in the criminal justice system of the 1970's, the concept of restoring social justice in schools started to take hold.

Restorative Justice and Practice

This history of discipline in education brings us to the current reform: changing from zero-tolerance to restorative practice. Coming full circle from 100 years ago, the education system as a whole is looking to re-define what the role of schools is in the moral regulation of students and how to successfully accomplish that. As John Dewey, in the 1920's championed, the needs of the student must come first, moral regulation and character development should be a part of the curriculum, and students should be involved in all aspects of their learning. Students do not change behavior in the face of punitive consequences, they must be guided on a path to see how their behavior impacts the world

around them (Dewey, 1944). Going back to ideas developed by Dewey, his concepts are fostering a new direction in school discipline: restorative practices.

The premise of restorative practices focuses on building and repairing relationships (Zehr, 2002). When a student misbehaves in school, the relationship between those involved is damaged. For example: a student receives a poor grade on an assignment, uses profanity towards the teacher and storms out of the classroom. The student has damaged the relationship by disrespecting the teacher. With a restorative lens, the conflict is examined to determine how the student ended up in a situation of making a bad decision, what acts the student committed in response to that situation, what relationships were damaged and how the student is going to repair those relationships (Johnstone, 2011). This process allows the student to take ownership of his or her behavior and formulate a plan to change that behavior. The student is then allowed to make repairs and stay in school (Zehr, 2002). In contrast, zero-tolerance policies expected that a punitive consequence would send the message to the student that certain behaviors are not allowed. In the example above, a student that uses profanity towards a teacher may face a three day out of school suspension as a consequence; then allowed to return to the class without any direct repair with the teacher. This zero-tolerance system never allows an opportunity for the student to make things right in regard to the relationship with the teacher. True to its name, restorative practices aim to restore and guide student behavior in a more positive direction to reduce recidivism and limit school exclusion.

The change from zero-tolerance to restorative practices is proving difficult for educators as the perception of control that zero-tolerance instilled diminishes and disruptive

students are allowed to return to classrooms without a punitive consequence. This shift in cultural climate, from punitive to restorative, is what administrators in schools are challenged with navigating.

Problem Statement

Restorative practices are not prescriptive in nature like the zero-tolerance policies. Each individual student and situation is considered, evaluated and a course of action determined to move forward in helping the student restore relationships (Zehr, 2002). This is an extremely time-consuming process and leaves room for a lot of variance in practice. Educators like to use data-driven practices to guide instruction, yet there is limited empirical data showing that restorative practices will be successful in re-establishing moral regulation leading to academically achieving students. Further, there is skepticism about the safety of classrooms. Educators are questioning the idea that reducing out of school suspensions and keeping disruptive students in schools is safe, and in the best interest of the school as a community.

The public pressure to reduce racial disparity in school discipline as well as the number of excluded students from schools, has caused states to adopt legislative measures that impact school discipline policies by limiting the use of exclusionary discipline in schools. This has forced the hand of local school districts and administrators to redefine their school discipline policies and determine how to pursue alternatives to out of school suspensions while getting their staff to buy into the idea of restorative practices. There is limited qualitative research on the process of implementing restorative practices into schools. The following research examined administrator perspectives and practice in

implementing restorative practices from a zero-tolerance policy in a mid-sized urban school district.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide a rich textural description of the lived experience of secondary level administrators to create a more robust body of research. Using a phenomenological approach, this study utilized a research-based, in-depth interview format to develop descriptions of lived experiences of five secondary level school administrators. This study's analyses will assist school leaders in identifying the perceptions and experiences of school administrators shifting from zero-tolerance policies to restorative approaches.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of high school level administrators at a mid-sized suburban school district in a Northwestern state on the theory of restorative practices?
2. What are the experiences of high school level administrators at a mid-sized suburban school district in a Northwestern state in implementing restorative practices?
3. What are the high school level administrators' perspectives on the outcomes of a restorative approach to school discipline?

Significance of the Study

Phenomenology attempts to make sense of a particular phenomenon based upon the personal, lived experiences of study participants (Moustakas, 1994). In the context of this study, the phenomena were school-based restorative practices theory, implementation and outcomes. This study did not seek to develop theory itself; it aimed to identify the core

themes of the lived experience through an exploration of study participants' experiences. Revealing the experiences of secondary level administrators in restorative approaches to school discipline contributes to the body of knowledge on restorative justice in schools. Identification of the perceptions of restorative practices in the context of secondary level school settings contributes to the current research and reform efforts of discipline policies within school districts across the nation.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, these meanings were used for the following terms:

Community building. Sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together.

Exclusionary discipline. Any type of school disciplinary practice that excludes a student from their educational setting; the most common forms are suspension and expulsion (Costenbader & Markson, 1998).

Phenomenology. An approach to qualitative research that focuses on the study of the distinct lived experiences of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Restorative approach. A restorative approach is a framework that views student misbehavior as an offense against relationships and maintains a focus on accountability of actions with a specific emphasis on repairing the harm (Zehr, 2002).

Restorative justice. A system of justice that focuses on making things "right" after a wrong has occurred, most commonly used to aid in the reconciliation between victims and offenders (IIRP, 2018).

Restorative practices. Restorative practice is a social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision making through the use of intervention and prevention. (IIRP, 2018).

Secondary level. In public schools in the U.S, secondary level refers to high school level education, typically grades 9-12.

Zero-tolerance policies. Policies that imposes a serious punishment on a student for a rule violation with the intent to reduce or change problem behavior (Costenbader & Markson, 1998).

Assumptions and Limitations

This study assumes that the use of restorative approaches and practices will continue to be implemented as an alternative to zero-tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline. A core underlying assumption of this study is that school climate, culture and safety will continue to be at the forefront of educational initiatives and policy studies. This study also assumes that a purposeful sampling of secondary level school administrators would provide the descriptive data necessary to analyze and examine the research questions (Creswell, 1998; Morse 1994).

There are some limitations to this study. The study site is limited to one medium sized school district in a specific geographic locale in the United States, so study participants all experienced the same phenomena at the same time and in the same place. This also limits the variation in school staff and student demographics that other locations in the U.S. may experience. Another limitation to this study is that the study participants are all secondary

level administrators, the perceptions and lived experience of teachers, other school staff, families, students and community members is not reflected.

Summary of Chapter 1

This chapter included: a rationale for the phenomenological study surrounding school-based restorative practices; a brief overview of the history of school discipline; an introduction to restorative practices; the purpose of this study and statement of the problem; definitions of key terms; and assumptions and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 outlines a review of the literature including more in-depth information on the history of school discipline, zero-tolerance policies and restorative practices. This chapter also includes a synthesis of research findings on the benefits of restorative justice to the education system. Chapter 3 explains the research methodology and design approach, target population, participant selection, sample, and instrumentation. Also presented are the data collection techniques, limitations and study validation. Chapter 4 provides a descriptive analysis and emergent themes of the lived experiences of study participants. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the findings of this study, provides conclusions and implications of the research, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

There is a shift occurring in the climate and culture of American schools. Students in public schools around the nation are experiencing continual changes in their classrooms from instructional strategies, to curricular modifications, high-stakes testing, and behavior management. Of these changes, a complete theoretical reversal of practice in how schools handle the discipline of misbehaving students is taking place and will impact the social and emotional growth of students for future generations. The trend is to move away from zero tolerance, strict discipline policies mandating exclusion from school in response to all manner of offenses, in favor of restorative approaches that reduce time removed from classrooms and focuses on building student capacity. This new approach in schools stems from restorative justice theory that was initiated in the field of criminology and aimed at reducing recidivism, fosters responsibility and repairs harm. Restorative justice seeks to provide a framework for restitution, in which offenders are held accountable yet it is the relationship damaged that is the priority and should be repaired (Zehr, 2002). This allows the offending individual to take responsibility for their actions and reintegrate into the community; not only for the good of that individual but also for that of the community as a whole.

This chapter is a review of the literature on restorative justice, restorative approaches and restorative practices. Starting with a review of the current research on zero tolerance policies, the prevailing school discipline theory prior to restorative approaches will give context for the shift to a more restorative approach. The review then leads into restorative justice theory, the overarching principle that guides restorative approaches in school

discipline, restorative practices theory and finally the implementation of restorative practices in public schools in the United States.

This research seeks to understand the challenges of implementing a change in discipline philosophy and changing the climate of an urban high school. At this time, there is a relatively small body of research on restorative practice implementation and outcomes in school settings. The scholarly discourse has focused on why and how restorative practices should be implemented, not on the actual process of implementation and outcomes. The significance of examining the leadership process, professional development needed and efficacy in an urban high school as the culture and climate shifts from a zero tolerance discipline policy to a restorative practices approach will be able to inform and guide other schools. To fully understand how educators returned to a discipline practice first implemented over 100 years ago, a perspective of discipline within public education in the United States is helpful.

Discipline History 1850 - 1900

The history of discipline in public schools starts almost concurrently with the formation of the public school system. Founded in the mid-19th century, education of the nations' youth was realized as a valuable asset in the growing capitalistic country (Cremin, 2018). One of the men championed as a founding father of public education in the United States was Horace Mann. In 1837, Mann articulated to the newly formed Massachusetts Board of Public Education a cause for public education (Cremin, 2018). Calling for a program of 'common schools' for both rich and poor alike, he advocated that education was the single most important institution in American life and that public education is the central

moral commitment of a democratic education (Mann, 1852). His vision included the concept that schools should be the common element in the life of all people so that not just the wealthy were educated. Mann's approach demanded the highest regard for learning as a moral process, he held the belief that tolerance, generosity, respect for others and diligence could be learned (Messerli, 1972).

With the formalization of public school, there also came a demand for certain patterns of conduct by students, teachers, administrators and parents. Discipline in schools became a matter of establishing and identifying practices to build behavior regulation within pupils (Rousmaniere, et al. 1997). Although often managed through means of exercising authority and power over students, the overarching premise was to “discipline personal identities to shape conduct and conscience through self-appropriation of morals and beliefs about what is right and wrong, possible and impossible, normal and pathological” (Rousmaniere et. al. 1997 pg 5). Education expanded, incorporating students from varied backgrounds, instead of primarily teaching to the wealthy and privileged. With this increased responsibility on educators, the foundations for instilling social norms and defining school discipline in response to undesired behaviors became a reality in the school system (Owen, 2005). The burden of teaching behavior regulation for children from all demographics became a shared investment for parents and educators (Rousmaniere, et al. 1997).

Discipline History 1900 and Educational Psychology

At the turn of the 20th century, the potential efficacy of education became a constructive agency of improving society, realizing that it represents not only a development

of youth but also the future society of which they will be constituents (Dewey, 1923). With a recognition that education in a student's formative years directly impacts their contribution to society as they enter adulthood, research began to expand in the field of education and behavioral psychology. It became imperative that educators recognized how students learn and use specific strategies to maximize student potential. John Dewey and William James contributed to the development of educational psychology, examining the practice of education as a philosophy and scientific inquiry.

John Dewey examined the philosophy of education in relation to student capability. Dewey noted that much of the work in schools is the setting of rules by which students are to act, but the follow up must then be to help students connect the result and the method pursued (Dewey, 1923). This mindset laid the foundational work for educational researchers to examine teacher practices and student connections to subject matter, how to grow their experience and how to extract meaningful principles (Alexander, 2017).

To make the emerging science of psychology accessible to practicing educators, William James gave a series of lectures to Cambridge teachers in 1899 (Alexander, 2017). In essence, James examined the link between the art of teaching and the science of psychology; invariably an art due to the fluctuations in student responsiveness in which a teacher must weave together knowledge for individuals and the science of psychology, which was backed with scientific theory (James, 1899; Alexander, 2017). The resulting field of educational psychology was a binding of philosophy, psychology, mathematics and medicine.

The field of educational psychology continued to expand as researchers sought to solve the mystery of why some individuals appear to learn more effortlessly, quickly, more deeply, or more effectively than others and what cognitive, neurobiological, social, cultural, and motivational forces seemingly underlie those differences (Hattie, 2008). Educators and educational researchers alike hunted for the commonalities in student learning. This meant an examination of human behaviors and motivation, as well as the psychology of learning. In the actual practice of schooling children, motivators for children to behave and learn had previously centered upon corporal punishment, “the use of physical force with the intention of causing pain but not injury, for the purpose of correction or control of the child’s behavior” (Donnelly & Straus, 2005, p. 3).

Corporal Punishment vs Non-punitive 1900-1950

Corporal punishment stemmed from colonial American schools that focused on the infliction of physical pain to teach children to be obedient. Under a constant threat and fear that disobedience would result in physical discomfort, such as a spanking, hitting or swatting, students were taught the formalities of sitting quietly, paying attention and not disrupting the teaching (Kaestle, 1983). The immediate aims of such punishment were to halt the offense, prevent its recurrence and set an example for others. The purported long-term goal was to change the child's behavior and to make it more consistent with the adult's expectations so that learning could occur (Petry, 1984). However, more advocates, including Mann and Dewey, started to appear in favor of addressing student behavior with non-punitive methods. Horace Mann, yet again, was a proponent for methods of instruction that would actively engage students and diminish the need for punishment (Spring, 1986). This

was an ebb away from using punitive consequences for school behaviors and a flow towards teaching behavior regulation to students in addition to academics.

By the 1920's, the progressive education movement (Ryan 1994) had influenced schoolboards, administrators and teachers that a child-centered perspective on the classroom eliminated the need for corporal punishment. Students learned to regulate their behaviors because their teachers engaged them as active learners. Non-punitive approaches to discipline that emphasized positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior and early individualized interventions for students showing signs of misbehavior became a strategy to improve overall educational outcomes (Owen, 2005). The foundations for restorative practices in education were established.

Seeking Control of Youth

By the 1950's, educators and society at large became worried that kids were spiraling out of control (Kafka, 2011). This was exacerbated by factors such as increasing enrollments, declining family organization, racial integration and decreasing opportunities for urban youth to participate in the labor market (Tropea, 1987). Classroom organization and effective teaching methods were necessitated in order to control difficult pupils and increasingly complex school systems.

Kafka (2011) argues that control over discipline became increasingly centralized in the second half of the 20th century in response to pressures exerted by teachers, parents, students, principals, and local politicians. With growing class sizes and increased student management difficulties, teachers in large cities started to take the matter to their local school boards and demand that discipline be handled outside the classroom to maintain the

instructional focus within the class. This meant that schools needed to define and implement discipline policies that were governed by the bureaucratic structure of the district (Kafka, 2009).

At the time, the Los Angeles City School District was one of the fastest growing systems in the nation and faced increased racial diversity, overburdened facilities and mounting juvenile delinquency concerns (Kafka, 2009). Los Angeles teachers asked their centralized board to “adopt a definite policy on discipline with definitive regulations that would codify disciplinary rules, roles and procedures for all students, parents and educators within the district.” (McClure, 1957, pg 2; Kafka, 2009). In 1959, Los Angeles City School District was one of the first in the nation to adopt a district-wide discipline policy (Kafka, 2011).

During this same time period, the decision of the 1954 Supreme Court case of *Brown vs Board of Education* was the beginning of the desegregation of schools (Hogan 1984) which brought the issues of race, racial conflict and racial equality to the forefront of educational politics (Kafka 2009). As school personnel adjusted to desegregation, racial inequalities in the treatment of students began to rise (Kafka, 2011). This led to school districts across the country, by the 1960’s, to adopt and implement a more standardized approach to school discipline, enforced by administrators instead of teachers.

These new standardized discipline policies were explicitly intended to help teachers maintain classroom control through a means of punitive consequences and exclusionary practices. By standardizing consequences in response to specific student actions, schools were able to clearly define expectations and outcomes (Kafka, 2011). This was the start of

the zero tolerance policies that eliminated discretionary discipline by defining specific behaviors that would not be tolerated in school. Teachers, administrators and school boards all supported the expulsion of children from the school system under the premise that order would be restored (Tropea, 1987). This shift in responsibility also started to move discipline away from schools entirely and into the criminal justice system (Kafka, 2009).

School Discipline and Juvenile Justice System

By the 1960's, school discipline policies began to shape the current constructs of school discipline and the juvenile justice system. Within a decade, every school district across the nation had initiated a district wide discipline policy to address growing student behavioral concerns within classrooms. With continual civil uprisings over the issue of segregation, racial disparities in school discipline were also starting to increase as were the overall number of juveniles in the criminal justice system. Select populations (in particular non-white students and poor students) were being disproportionately removed from classrooms and put in 'special' schools designed for poorly behaved students (Tropea, 1987) where they were then pushed out of the school system via expulsion or referral to the criminal justice system.

In the early 1970's, exclusionary discipline, the practice of suspending students from school for periods of time often reported to range between 1 to 27 months (Tropea, 1987) started to gain national attention as a potential concern with the educational process. The excessive use of suspensions led to a 1975 Supreme Court decision, *Goss vs Lopez*, in which students and parents were given the right to due process hearing procedures prior to being suspended or expelled. This decision also mandated that students had the right to be notified

of the offense and given an opportunity to respond (Finley & Ang, 2011). This allowed parents to push back on the school or district if their student had been excluded from school for disciplinary reasons.

Even with student rights being established, exclusionary discipline was putting more students out of school, leading to an increase in juvenile crimes (Hoffman, 2014). More students began entering into the criminal justice system at younger ages and in response, behavioral learning theories also emerged to examine the underlying factors of why these increases in juvenile behaviors were occurring. Albert Bandura, a leading researcher in behaviorist learning theory, made the claim that behavior is learned from direct experience as well as indirectly from the environment through the process of observational learning (Slavin, 1994). From this research emerged social learning theory which became the bridge between behavioral theories and cognitive theories.

Social learning theory posits that human behavior is learned through the observation of others (Parangimalil, 2014); for children this includes paying attention to influential models, such as peers, parents, media, sports, arts, music and teachers. These models provide behaviors to observe and imitate. Children watch and encode their behavior and then emulate similar behaviors (Bandura, 1977). The behaviors are then reinforced or punished depending on societal norms of behavior (Slavin, 1994). The influence on young people can determine whether they act in desirable ways or lead to deviant and/or violent behaviors. Social learning theories showed that societies' definitions of behaviors largely determine if the acts are considered criminal or deviant, as well as showing that definitions change over time and place (Osher et al, 2010). An example of this is the legalization of

marijuana in several states where it is now legal to buy, possess and use marijuana. While it is still illegal for those 21 and under to use marijuana, the societal perception has changed over time and is decriminalizing the use of this drug, changing the societal norm.

Foundations of Restorative Justice

As the number of school aged youths increased in the criminal justice system, an examination of how to help curb repeat offenders and rehabilitate juveniles back into compliance with societal norms became a priority. The concept of restorative justice developed in the criminal system as an alternative to merely punishing offenders, instead seeking to hold offenders accountable for their crimes by allowing them to repair the harm they caused (Zehr, 2002). In 1969, the Institute for Mediation and Conflict Resolution (IMCR) was founded in New York to mediate interpersonal disputes and community conflicts. This mediation method allowed offenders to take responsibility for their actions through direct contact with the victim and a trained mediator that ensured the harm inflicted was repaired (McCold, 2006). The concept evolved that restorative justice was ‘pure’ restitution without punitive intent, the goal being to not suppress the crime but do justice to the victims (Johnstone, 2011). In 1978, the Department of Justice funded and opened three justice centers, in Atlanta, Los Angeles and Kansas City, to continue the work of the IMCR in mediation and conflict resolution. Eighty-eight percent of complainants and respondents reported satisfactory results out of the justice centers (Johnstone, 2011). All three institutions still operate with a high success rate and led the path for community mediation centers to open across the nation, by 1990, every state had dispute resolution centers based

on restorative justice. The success of restorative justice in the criminal justice system expanded to experience success with the juvenile justice system as well (McCold, 2006).

Zero-Tolerance Policies

Schools across the United States began to implement zero-tolerance policies in the early 1990's to address growing concerns of school violence. This retributive justice emphasized removing offenders from the general student population, excluding them from attending school, which served as a consequence for their actions (Zehr, 2002). Zero-tolerance was an effort to standardize discipline (McAndrews, 2001) and implement administrative rules to address a rising concern of weapons, drugs, violence, bullying and disruptive behaviors in schools. In 1993, Congress passed the Gun-Free Schools Act, mandating all states to pass legislation for the automatic expulsion of students from public schools for possessing a weapon in a school building (Sughrue, 2003). The act required states to legislate zero-tolerance laws or risk losing federal funds (Martin, 2000) from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The ESEA was enacted in 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson with the intent to provide federal funding to elementary and secondary schools for additional resources to support students from low-income areas and students with special needs (Guthrie, 1968). States, counties, and school districts developed policies to meet the goal of producing gun-free schools (Ashford, 2000) and to keep funds from the ESEA. Each state used an interpretation of the Gun-Free Schools Act to expand mandatory exclusion from school for safety concerns beyond weapons (McAndrews, 2001) and applied jurisdiction to the entire breadth of possible disciplinary infractions a student could commit in a school setting, in an attempt to 'send a message' to violators (Skiba &

Peterson, 1999). The practice of zero-tolerance resulted in school districts adopting policies with predetermined consequences for specific offenses. This manifested into students being subject to exclusionary discipline for any infraction that resulted in a disruption or threat to the safety of a school to include: alcohol and drug violations, physical assault or fighting, criminal damage to property, bullying and harassment, and committing multiple violations (Hoffman, 2014) in the same school year (resembling a ‘three-strikes’ discipline policy). All of these offenses could result in students experiencing a complete expulsion from a school or district for up to a full calendar year.

While there are strengths to this system, mainly in the public appearance that student offenders would not be permitted to hamper the safety and learning environment of other students; there was a growing acknowledgement of the system’s limits (Zehr, 2002). Exclusionary suspensions from school were found to be a strong predictor of a student dropping out of school (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). In addition, the “reactive and rigid approach to discipline, sometimes instituted for minor behavioral issues, reinforce social control and education as compliance” (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012, p.145). Perlstein (2000) asserts that “setting these policies in stone without any thought to the inherent ambiguities of human interaction allows only arbitrariness and exclusion and, thus, abandons the educational mission of schools” (p.6). Skiba and Rausch (2006) report that zero tolerance policies are associated with poorer school climate, lower student achievement, and higher dropout rates. In 2005, the American Psychological Association (APA) commissioned a task force to explore the impact of zero tolerance discipline policies in elementary and secondary schools. Acknowledging that safe and disciplined schools are

vital to the success of students, the task force found little evidence to support the basic assumptions of the zero tolerance approach: that certainty and seriousness of punishment will deter students, that removing severely disruptive students will deter other students from behaving in a similar manner, and that removing offenders will improve school climate (American Psychological Association, 2008).

Within a decade of zero-tolerance policies implemented across the nation, the question of effectiveness was coupled with the disparate impact on students of color (Hoffman, 2014). Mendez and Knoff (2003) examined the specific discipline rates, discovering that, in 1997 alone, black students were suspended 2.3 times more often than white students, although in some districts the suspension rate for black students was 22 times higher (Hoffman, 2014). The study continued to indicate that the increased number of out-of-school suspensions in the 1990's related to a "variety of negative academic and educational outcomes for students" (Mendez & Knoff, 2003, p. 33).

School-to-Prison Pipeline

The racial disparity in school discipline mimics the persistent academic achievement gap between minority and white students in which it is well documented that students of color consistently perform lower on measures of academic ability (Hoffman, 2014). This racial disparity in school discipline has been termed the 'school to prison pipeline,' referring to the increased numbers of students of color experiencing exclusionary discipline, lower academic test scores and the coinciding percentages of students dropping out of school and entering the juvenile justice system. The school to prison pipeline is thought to be a by-product of the zero tolerance policies (Hoffman, 2014). By suspending and expelling

students for offenses within the school, these students are subsequently removed from receiving their education, at home or on the streets more frequently and not given an opportunity to learn from their mistakes (Mallett, 2014). Compounding this issue and contributing to the 'pipeline' are issues of poverty. More than one in five children grow up in poverty in the US, and one in three children of color are poor (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013b).

Casella (2003) argues that "punishment negatively affects those who are already negatively affected by poverty, racism, academic failure and other realities" (p. 879). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) indicates that from 1997 - 2007 racial disparities in school discipline have persisted and worsened. School suspensions and expulsion continue to be common forms of punishment. In 2006, 3.3 million American students were suspended and over 102,000 were expelled (NCES, 2009). The racial distributions of these suspensions and expulsions "reveal stark disparities" (Hoffman, 2014, p. 71); 15% of Black students, 6,8% of Hispanic students, and 4.8% of White students were suspended from schools. The NCES (2012) estimated that the percentage of black public high school students who had ever been suspended rose from 37% in 1999 to 49% in 2007 while white students declined from 18.2% in 1999 to 17.7% in 2007. By 2011, the numbers haven't improved, 3.2 million students received out of school suspensions and 111,000 students were expelled. (NCES, 2017).

The school to prison pipeline is putting students on the track to the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems (Miguel & Garagno, 2017).

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world and the number of juveniles in detention is increasing (Kaeble & Cowhig, 2018). US Census data shows more black men ages 18 to 24 live in prison cells than college dorm rooms. The highly punitive, mandatory punishments of the zero tolerance system disconnects students from their school community and mirrors the criminal justice system (Gonzalez, 2012). The zero tolerance belief is that all misbehaviors are reacted to with consequence to hold the student accountable; this counters the premise of education which is to teach students responsibility and restore the learning environment that was disrupted by their behavior (Miguel & Garagno, 2017). “It is ultimately the school community’s responsibility to ensure that the student is held accountable and reintegrate the student as a productive member of the school community rather than exiling the student and thereby increasing the potential for separation, resentment and recidivism” (Gonzalez, 2012, p.5).

Restorative Justice, Restorative Approach, Restorative Practice

The theory of restorative justice arose as an alternative to the punitive paradigm in the field of criminology. Seeing an increase in the number of offenders in the criminal system, restorative justice seeks to lower the rate of recidivism, repair the harm that the offender has committed and help the offender grow socially and emotionally (Osher et al., 2010). Restorative justice is often not clearly defined with one rigid meaning, but more accepted as general outline of guiding principles. However, Zehr (2002) provides the following definition: “Restorative justice is an approach to achieving justice that involves to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense or harm to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations in order to heal and put things as right as

possible” (p. 48). The guiding principles are values based, designed to promote responsibility and help repair the harm that an individual inflicts on others. This approach began to expand beyond the judicial system in the early 2000’s and into school practices (Bevington, 2015). Growing as an alternative approach for discipline in schools, the emphasis of restorative justice is on the harm caused, rather than the act itself (Fronius et al., 2016). Rather than control student misbehaviors, restorative justice in schools seeks to resolve the issues and build relationships (Gonzalez, 2012). This aligns with the guiding principle that schools, or education in general, is designed to develop student capacity and facilitate growth.

Justice, by nature, is reactive to specific events occurring, whereas restorative approaches and practice are designed to be preventative measures to build capacity (Smith, Fisher, & Frey, 2015). In education, the terms restorative approaches and restorative practices have become nomenclature of restorative justice theory, each with a loosely defined meaning and implementation guideline yet with the end goal to change zero tolerance policies, stop the school to prison pipeline and afford education the opportunity to guide students into a positive future pathway. In the literature, these terms are often used interchangeably. For the purposes of this paper, restorative justice will be referred to as the overarching theory, restorative approaches will identify the specific approaches used in schools to reform discipline policies and restorative practices will be used to define the specifics of putting restorative justice theory into practice by teachers and administrators.

Social Discipline

Ted Wachtel, the founder of the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), has been developing definitions and applicable theory for the study of restorative practices (2005). The IIRP offers the following definition of restorative practices as “restoring and developing social capital, social discipline, emotional well-being and civic participation through participatory learning and decision making” (International Institute for Restorative Practices Mission Statement, 2005). According to Wachtel (2005), people are more responsive and likely to make positive changes when authority figures do things *with* them rather than *to* them or *for* them. This is a foundational principle for a restorative approach in schools. The IIRP developed the “Social Discipline Window” (Figure 2.1) to describe the four basic approaches to maintaining social norms and behavioral boundaries. The four are represented as different combinations of high or low control and high or low support.

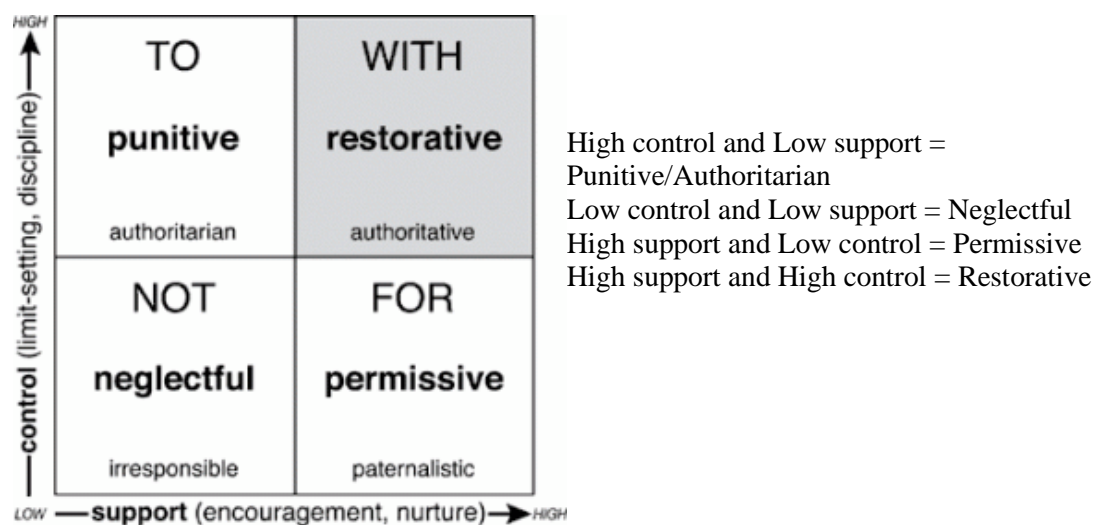


Figure 2.1: *Social Discipline Window*

The concepts of support and control on the axes is based on the premise that high control leads to punitive (authoritarian) measures: doing things *to* people; conversely, high support (paternalistic) measures leads to doing things *for* people and is permissive in nature (Costello et al., 2010; Wachtel, 2005). The high control approach, the upper left quadrant of the social discipline window, premises zero tolerance policies in that rules are set and people are held to them. The high support attitude, the lower right quadrant, assumes that nurturing alone will help people make positive changes without setting clear boundaries. The third quadrant, in the lower left, is neglectful in that there is low support and low control, leading to abdication of authority (Costello et al., 2009; Costello et al., 2010). This leaves the upper right fourth quadrant, where there is high control and high support. The positive synthesis of the best of punitive and permissive methods represents an authoritative approach leading to doing things *with* people (Costello et al., 2010). This mode of authority combines setting boundaries while supporting individuals; a basic tenet of a restorative approach. By engaging students in through built relationships then holding them accountable “is the most effective and beneficial way for schools to work with young people (Costello et al., 2009, p. 51).

Restorative Approaches and Practices in Schools

Traditional school discipline focuses on addressing student behaviors after they occur with little practice in place to proactively address student needs prior to a disruption to the learning environment. Restorative approaches are a profoundly relational practice that seeks to create a culture of connectivity so that all the members of the school community feel valued in addition to providing more equitable and respectful alternatives for

disciplinary infractions (McCluskey, Lloyd, Stead, Kane, Riddell, & Weedon, 2008). Therefore, restorative practice is not just a conflict resolution process after harm has occurred but also a proactive strategy to build student and staff capacity, helping prevent disruptions in the learning environment.

In 2011, LaMarche wrote in *Education Week*, “the time is right to end zero tolerance” (p. 1) a realization that using exclusionary discipline was not effective in keeping schools safer and deprive students of educational opportunities (Gonzalez, 2012). In 2015, Obama revised the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the primary funding for public education, ending zero tolerance as a legislative mandate for school funding. This reauthorization is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and serves to advance equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students (US Department of Education, 2017). Bitel (2005) concludes that restorative approaches, “if implemented correctly, may be a useful resource that improves the school environment and enhances the learning and development of young people” (p. 65).

Restorative approaches focus on building healthy, productive relationships between staff and students to create a positive learning environment (Smith et al., 2015; Gonzalez, 2012). When an offending student causes harm to that environment, the parties involved are encouraged to engage in reflective conversations to help the student understand the implications of their actions and ways to make amends (Smith et al., 2015). Restorative approaches can't grow in the margins of scripted, test-driven curriculum; it's based on staff hearing, understanding, and responding to the academic, social, and emotional needs of students (Ruin, 2014). The common goal of a restorative approach is to create an overall

school culture of respect, responsibility and tolerance (Fronius et al., 2016; Hantzopolous, 2013). This involves staff, teachers and administrators, learning new strategies to work with students and committing to improving the educational structure (Cole, 2013). Rather than separating school discipline from the academic mission, restorative approaches are “interwoven into every interaction in the building” (Smith et al., 2015, p. 5). Staff “buy-in” to the concepts of restorative approaches and practices (Fronius et al., 2016) are essential for successful implementation and sustainability. This echoes the teachings of Mann and Dewey from over a century ago, advocating for a focus on moral character as part of the role of educators.

While restorative approaches look to overhaul the climate of punitive discipline, restorative practices are the front lines that teachers must utilize to help students be successful in the classroom. Lewis (2009) describes restorative practices as the following: “Restorative practices have given us a way to help the kids process the things in the front of their minds that make learning secondary to them. In the classroom, it’s about getting to a state where we can work” (p. 6). Referring to the growing social issues of trauma, poverty, violence, and drugs, the same concerns that zero tolerance aimed to ‘fix,’ restorative practices helps students understand and manage their actions so that they can be better learners. Instead of removing students from the classroom for disruptions via out of school suspension, as was practiced with zero tolerance policies, restorative practices seeks to help the student understand how their actions impact the rest of the classroom and allows the student to make amends (Costello et al., 2009). Restorative practices creates meaningful relationships between staff and students, utilizing mediations between conflicting

individuals or groups, holding restorative conferences to allow the harmed relationship to be repaired, creating restorative circles, and having the growth mindset that students have the capacity to change their behavior (Smith et al., 2015).

Varnham (2005), presents a program from New Zealand that uses an example of restorative practices at work with younger students using the REACT anagram with five principles:

- Repairing the harm done;
- Expecting the best from others;
- Acknowledging feelings/harm done;
- Caring for others; and
- Taking responsibility for behavior/feelings.

The program was successful in creating an effective behavior management system that reduced suspension, built relationships and developed student conflict resolution skills (Varnham, 2005).

Implementation of Restorative Practices

Restorative practices embodies the need for skilled leadership in the schools. School leaders must empower others and authentically lead by letting go. The traditional authoritarian sense of leadership, i.e., “I am in charge and do what I say,” is ineffective with restorative practices. The new model of leadership prefers facilitating, guiding, and building leadership capacity in others, including students (McCluskey et al., 2008). In 2005, the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), in Oakland, California, started implementing restorative practices in one of the district’s 118 schools in response to concerns of a high

rate of suspensions and the racial disproportionality of the discipline incidents (Jain, Bassey, Brown, & Kalra, 2014). By 2014, OUSD expanded restorative practices to 24 schools, documented a 37% decrease in suspensions of African American students (Jain et al., 2014), and became a guiding school system for the implementation of restorative practices. The recommendations from OUSD to school districts nationwide are: 1) allowing 3 -5 years for full implementation of restorative practices, to include staff training and building of student capacity; 2) promoting a shift in the culture and climate of the school starting with the school leadership team to incorporate the acceptance of addressing student behaviors and rule violations with a restorative intent rather than punitive approach; and 3) emphasize that restorative approaches are a philosophy and set of values that supports youth development not just an alternative to suspension but an opportunity for engagement and achievement (Jain et al., 2014). However, beyond the study of OUSD, there is little literature that examines the process and nuances of restorative practices implementation in schools in the United States.

Conclusion

As the nation moves towards a trend to reduce out of school suspension and closure of the racial disparities in academics and discipline, there are a multitude of studies that support phasing out zero tolerance policies in favor of restorative approaches. The well documented school to prison pipeline has fueled a call for alternatives to using punishment in response to student misbehavior. The theory and premise of restorative approaches and restorative practices is also explored in depth in reviewing the literature. In general, schools

are beginning to implement the overall philosophy of restorative approaches to address school climate, culture and the social emotional growth of students (Fronius et al., 2016). There is little empirical evidence examining the advanced impact of restorative approaches and restorative practices on academic and school climate outcomes. Research needs to be conducted in the following areas: examining the challenges and affordances schools encounter during implementation of restorative approaches; longitudinal multilevel regression models and propensity score matching to further explore the benefits of restorative practices; outcome-based data on successful and sustainable restorative approach programs to uncover the conditions that lead to replicable examples; investigations into the integration of restorative practices with multi-tiered models such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI); and, exploration of training and professional development for school leaders that successfully enhances the ability of leaders to value and implement restorative approaches and restorative practices (Fronius et al., 2016; Jain et al., 2014).

Overall, the research supports that restorative approaches and restorative practices will have a positive impact on the culture and climate of our schools across the nation. As this shift in school climate changes from a punitive environment to restorative, educators will need to embrace the mindset that students need to be afforded the opportunity to learn from their mistakes, be provided with social and emotional support and learn to build strong relationships. With restorative approaches and restorative practices firmly in place in our schools, the climate of education will shift towards greater accountability, academic and

disciplinary equity, stronger relationships and restorative balance for all members of the school community.

Summary of Chapter 2

In this chapter, an extensive review of the literature was completed surrounding the history of school discipline, the consequences of zero-tolerance policies, restorative justice, and restorative practices within school settings. The literature clearly indicates that nascent restorative practices research shows promising results in decreasing the use of exclusionary discipline practices and reducing the disproportionalities that are tied to these practices. This literature review identified a large body of quantitative evidence to support the use of restorative practices in schools. However, despite the critical implementation component of shifting a school culture from zero-tolerance to restorative practices, there is a lack of descriptive analyses of school employees' lived experiences during restorative practices implementation. In Chapter 3, the researcher will detail the methodological design used to answer the research question, as well as the study's research population and sampling method, and the data collection and analysis procedures.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This phenomenological study examined the perceptions of high school administrators on the theory, implementation, and outcomes of restorative practices in a mid-sized urban school district. As Moustakas (1994) suggests, phenomenology examines the conscious experience of individuals from a subjective or first person point of view; this qualitative method was determined to be the best approach for this study. Components discussed in this chapter include the purpose of the study and research questions, research design, participants, setting, data collection and the treatment of data. Also included are the provisions of trustworthiness, an epoche and a chapter summary.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The common goal of a restorative approach in the school setting is to create an overall culture of respect, responsibility, and tolerance among the entire school ecosystem (Christensen, 2009). The adoption of a restorative approach demands staff, teachers, and administrators buy-in and learn new strategies to work with students committing to improving the educational structure (Gonzales, 2012). Rather than separating school discipline from the academic mission, restorative approaches must be “interwoven into every interaction in the building.” (Smith, Fisher & Frey, 2015, p.5). In order for staff to be fully involved in a completely new approach to school discipline, the administrators must first be fully invested in the benefits of restorative practices (Zehr, 2002). This includes a school climate in which school discipline is not based on punitive consequences but rather focused on repairing and restoring relationships. School administrators need to model how this restorative approach can be successful within the school in contrast to the preceding

model of exclusionary discipline. Thus, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to develop an understanding of the perceptions of high school administrators on the theory, implementation and outcomes of restorative practices. The following research questions guide this study:

1. What are the perceptions of high school level administrators at a mid-sized suburban school district in a Northwestern state on the theory of restorative practices?
2. What are the experiences of high school level administrators at a mid-sized suburban school district in a Northwestern state in implementing restorative practices?
3. What are the high school level administrators' perspectives on the outcomes of a restorative approach to school discipline?

Research Design

A phenomenological study seeks to uncover the essential elements of a phenomenon (Kafle, 2011). Husserl contends the task of phenomenology is to see the inherent logic of human experience and to articulate that logic or sense faithfully, without distortion (Husserl & Findlay, 1970). A phenomenologist's task is to understand by examining the subjects experience, rather than to explain a human phenomenon in terms of causal antecedent or subjective human experience (Dukes, 1984). This theoretical lens allows the researcher to interpret and explore the experience of individuals or groups about a particular phenomenon.

Further, Creswell states "It would be important to understand these common experiences in order to develop practices or policies, or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p.60). Moustakas (1994) adds the phenomenological approach allows for consistency in carrying out research for a

comprehensive analysis of the experience being studied. The phenomenon in this study is the concept of restorative practices guided by research questions on lived experiences of school administrators on the theory, implementation and outcomes to provide meaning and common themes to explain.

Accordingly, in Husserl's view, phenomenology is a form of inquiry that holistically describes the research participants' lived experience of meaning-making and informs us about their perception of the focal object or phenomenon (Dukes, 1984; Husserl & Findlay, 1970). To distinguish a phenomenological study in the area of human sciences, Moustakas (1994) suggests the following commonalities:

1. Human experiences cannot be formalized in quantitative research.
2. The meaning and substance of the experience that is being experienced creates explanations for a phenomenon.
3. Quantitative data does not have the ability to convey the meaning of human behavior.
4. Questions relevant to the difficulties and/or accomplishments of particular experiences create investigation.

These perceptions can provide researchers with the necessary conceptual tools to understand human behaviors and actions (Koopman, 2015). For the purposes of this investigation, a hermeneutical phenomenological method was used to interpret and describe shared participant experiences. Five high school administrators' perspectives were used collectively to gain an understanding of how they interpreted the theory of a restorative approach, in addition to understand their experiences in the implementation and outcomes of restorative

practices in a mid-sized urban school district. The intent was to find common descriptors among the administrators.

Moustakas (1994) indicates that to determine the experience of a participant in a phenomenological study, the researcher should provide a first-hand account of the participants experience with the phenomenon. The task of phenomenology is to see the inherent logic of human experience and to articulate that logic without distortion. The researcher must allow the subjects to speak, in their own way and their own time, about those aspects of the experience in question that seem relevant to them in open-end interview questions. (Dukes, 1984). Researchers using a phenomenological approach identify what the subjects have experienced and how they experienced it to draw an unbiased interpretation of the shared phenomenon.

Setting

This study was conducted in a medium sized urban school district (about 31,000 students) in a Northwestern state, aka ‘the district.’ The district comprises five comprehensive high schools and three high school alternatives. The ethnic breakdown of the student population for the district consists of:

- 68% white
- 13% two or more races
- 10.3% Hispanic/Latino
- 3.3% African American/Black
- 2.6% Asian
- 1.6% Pacific Islander

- 1.2% American Indian.

In 2018, 62% of the districts' students qualified for free/reduced lunch. The overall high school graduation rate in the district was 88.2% for the class of 2018. The decision to use this school district for this research study was based on the districts' participation in moving from zero tolerance discipline policies to a restorative practices model within the last four years. The decision to enact a restorative disciplinary approach was in order to comply with changes at the state level regarding exclusionary discipline.

Participants

When conducting a phenomenological study, and adhering to Husserl's theoretical framework, the sample size does not need to be large due to the goal of uncovering the necessary invariants of an experience and those invariants are fully discoverable in any individual case (Dukes, 1984). However, to avoid distortion of just one experience, more participants helps to facilitate a collaborative understanding of a phenomenon. This includes collecting a series of intense, full, and saturated descriptions of the experience under investigation. According to Patton (2015), selecting information rich cases for the purpose of the inquiry and sample size may be smaller. Five participants were purposefully recruited for this study based on their experience of enacting restorative practices in a mid-sized urban school district. Each participant has at least 15 years of experience as an administrator in a public high school setting and all have been administrators in the district for ten years or more. The participants were administrators from demographically diverse locations throughout the district and all in secondary level administrative positions directly involved with student discipline (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Demographic and Academic Information on Participants

Administrator	Academic Degree	Years in District	Past and Current position
Mack	M.Ed	12 years	teacher 10 yrs high school assistant principal - 3 yrs high school principal - 27 yrs
Jill	M.Ed	15 years	teacher 8 yrs high school assist. principal - 3 yrs high school principal - 5 years
John	M.Ed, Ed.S	13 years	teacher 7 yrs high school assistant principal - 3 yrs high school principal - 4 yrs director of secondary schools - 4 yrs
Ed	Ph.D	15 years	school psychologist 12 yrs director of secondary schools - 8 yrs
Bill	M.Ed	12 years	teacher 8 yrs high school assistant principal - 2 yrs high school principal - 9 yrs

Approval from the International Review Board to use human participants was secured to allow participant interviews. The interviews consisted of 13 open-ended questions asking participants to describe restorative practices, their experience of the implementation process, the affordances and challenges associated with implementation and the outcomes experienced. Participants were requested to consent to the study by signing a statement of consent form which includes the purpose of the study. The consent form contains a confidentiality statement to protect the identities of the participants.

Procedure

The procedures for collecting data through interviews was conducted by selecting multiple individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). As the researcher, I conducted the interviews with five participants using 13 semi-structured, open-ended questions (see Appendix A). Interviews were recorded and then transcribed for each interview session. Notes were also taken during the interviews to lend to the credibility of the data. Pseudonyms were given to each participant in the study to maintain confidential data collection. Interviews with the participants were then coded into themes to identify group experiences relative to the phenomenon. I then developed a rich textural description of the experiences for each participant as well as a structural description of their experiences (Creswell, 2013). From this, a combination of the descriptions from the discussions described and explain the human understanding of restorative practices, the essence of the phenomenological experience.

Given the philosophical assumption guiding this study is ontological, this assumption enabled me the opportunity to assemble multiple forms of reality into themes representing

the differences between each individual experience (Creswell, 2013). According to Polkinghorne (2005) collecting data for a phenomenological study provides evidence for the experience it is investigating. The information collected through interviews was assembled based on participants' individual views. In any research study, data collection, regardless of the type of methodology or study used, must be approved by the human object's review board (Creswell, 2013). After application to the IRB, approval was given to begin the data collection process. Only after IRB approval was granted did I contact the school district included in the study to gain permission to conduct the investigation. I reached out to high school level administrators that I knew from my own experience to have insight and direct experience in school discipline. Critical case sampling involves selecting a small number of important cases to yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge (Patton, 2015), thus seven administrators were approached and five agreed to participate in the study.

In 2015, the state legislature of the study site, began to change policies for the state's school discipline activities. In response, the school district chosen for this study also began changing student discipline policy to comply with legislative changes; this included a policy reflective of restorative practices. This creates an ideal district for this study on the theory and implementation process of restorative practices, in addition, there has been reasonable time over the past four years for outcomes of restorative practices to also be experienced by participants.

A hermeneutical phenomenological method aims to describe and fully understand participant experiences (Moustakas, 1994) in this study, the focus being the implementation

of restorative practices. The descriptive interview process enabled me to examine the conscious experiences of the participants in order to interpret the text to “achieve a fuller, more meaningful understanding” of the participant experiences with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 10). Van Manen (1990) suggests the interview process should be designed to gain a deeper understanding of the experience. This type of study intertwines the interpretations of both the participant and the researcher about a lived experience to uncover layers of meaning. Data was interpreted using thematic reflection (Van Manen, 1990). By using hermeneutical phenomenology, it was my role as the researcher to collect and interpret descriptions of administrator experiences to determine the structure that comprised those experiences.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with five high school level administrators directly involved in changing school discipline to a restorative practices approach. Interviews with all five administrators were held in person at a location suggested by the researcher and agreed to by the participants. Each participant signed an informed consent form prior to each interview. I also notified each administrator that the interviews would be audio recorded for transcription purposes. Throughout the interview process, I followed the 13 semi-structured interview questions, but probed deeper in areas to elicit additional information or clarification. During the interviews, I took anecdotal notes. Polkinghorne (2005) suggests, “Access to one’s experiences is not straightforward; it often requires assistance and probing to discover and explore areas of the experience that did not emerge initially” (p. 143). Confidentiality of information was stressed throughout the research process.

Treatment of the data in this qualitative phenomenological study included the recommendations, according to Creswell (2013), for the purpose of protecting the anonymity of the participants by assigning pseudonyms to the individuals involved. The handling of the data for storage, including the transcriptions and voice recordings, were secured using a password-protected computer file. Back-up hard copies of the transcribed interviews were created and stored in a locked file.

Identifying emergent themes were instrumental to this study to describe the common experiences of the administrators in their understanding of theory of restorative practices as well as their familiarity with the implementation and outcomes of a restorative approach. I transcribed and reviewed the interview transcripts for each participant. I then analyzed the comments, searching for patterns and threads of common themes to emerge. To provide consistency, I used a systematic process to code the information from participant interviews to look for emerging themes in experiences. I then categorized these common themes from the transcribed interviews in order to provide significant readable information. Similar comments from the administrators interviewed were used to examine the perceptions of the theory, implementation and outcomes of restorative practices in high schools.

Trustworthiness

This qualitative study followed specified strategies as the basis for the treatment of research to maintain credibility and trustworthiness of reporting of perception and process. I followed three of Creswell's (2013) identified formats for validation and evaluation to corroborate the evidence of the study. These include member checking, peer review and clarifying researcher bias in the form of an epoche. All interviews were audio recorded for

accuracy of statements and transcribed by the researcher. Participants were allowed to review typed transcriptions for accuracy as part of the member checking process. Allowing participants to review the transcripts increases the dependability of the data for this study because each individual is allowed the opportunity to verify their transcripts to check for errors, confirm critical observations and interpretations and to provide alternative language, if desired, to increase participant perspective.

To further the credibility and confirmability of this study, I requested that the study be reviewed from another educator's perspective. This educator has achieved an Ed.D. in education, has a working knowledge of restorative practices and is not currently working within the study school district. I provided emergent themes and interpretations of the statements from the interviews to the reviewer for review. This process allowed for further confirmation of the transcription process and for an outside view of the conversations collected without illustrating partiality to any of the participant's responses (Dukes, 1984).

Finally, the third method to increase the trustworthiness of the data collected is an epoche from the researcher to examine the possibility of bias. As the researcher, I am a high school administrator within the school district of study, although not at a school where any of the participating administrators are also employed. I have worked in the district for six years, throughout the districts' policy change from zero tolerance to implementation of restorative practices. In this research, I work as an assistant principal directly involved with school discipline and categorize the participating administrators in this study as colleagues. I have a similar experience to those I interviewed in the respect that I have also been asked by the district to gain understanding of the theory of restorative practices and to implement

restorative practices as a school discipline approach. In my personal experience, I find value in the methods of restorative practices for addressing student behavior as compared to the former theory of zero tolerance in which excluding students from school was the norm. The theory of restorative practices aims to help students change negative behaviors to positive behaviors that support academic success and a positive learning environment. As the researcher, I took care to be transparent, ensured that biases did not exist in the interpretation of the interviews and guarded against any preconceived notions that were brought from personal experience on the implementation and outcomes of restorative practices.

Summary

Chapter 3 describes the methodology for a phenomenological study on the theory, implementation and outcomes of restorative practices as lived experiences by five high school level administrators. The research design delineates the purpose of the research, the research questions, the participants included, and the setting in which the study took place. The data collection procedure is described, as well as the procedure for the treatment of information collected. Trustworthiness is also addressed with the inclusion of an epoche for the purpose of research bias. The analysis of the findings are detailed in Chapter 4 and the final chapter, Chapter 5, provides a summary of the research, conclusions of the findings, implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions of secondary level administrators on the theory, implementation and outcomes of restorative practices within one medium sized, urban school district. In focusing on subjective beliefs, I used a hermeneutical phenomenological design to interpret the participants' lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). This process allowed me to capture the essence of the shared experience by the participants. This chapter presents the key findings that emerged from five in-depth interviews on the theory, implementation and outcomes of restorative practices.

Six essential themes emerged from the analysis process that described the essence of the phenomenon: the experience of administrators at the secondary level in restorative practices. The six themes were: (a) why restorative practices should be our common practice; (b) implementation of restorative practices and the amount of resources involved; (c) building relationships; (d) repairing the harm to a damaged relationship; (e) staff climate; and (f) punishment and consequences.

As each theme emerged, the perceptions of each participating administrator reflected their lived experience managing restorative practices in their respective positions in the district. Using a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological design for this study, the following sections provide an emergent narrative of each theme and examines the similarities and differences of each participants' experience. The narratives are written with the participant's words as well as my own interpretation.

Themes

The six themes that emerged are reflective of the administrators experience in the implementation and outcomes of restorative practices in their respective buildings. The perception of theory of restorative practices is woven throughout their responses. The administrators had a similar understanding of the theory of restorative practices as they described restorative practices in their own words and experiences. Each participant works with students at the high school level in a different position in the district. Three administrators were principals at demographically different high schools (see Table 4.1), while the other two were in director positions at the district office. Despite each respondent being from a demographically different location in the district, the emergent experiences with restorative practices were similar in understanding and responses. These similarities show that a restorative practices approach is not heavily influenced by demographics of a school and imply the success of restorative practices is in the efficacy of the administrator to lead their staff in a change of mindset from zero tolerance to a restorative approach.

Why Restorative Practices

The first theme, *Why Restorative Practices*, provides insight into the research question on the administrators' perception of the theory of restorative practices. John, who works at the district level in a director position, has spent the past six years being a part of the district leadership team working to change discipline practice. When asked about the past discipline policy in the school district, which included zero tolerance policies, punitive approaches and high rates of exclusionary discipline, John shared on why the district moved towards restorative approaches:

This is the right thing to do, there has been advocacy from a number of groups (in the community) and from the leaders in our school district that believe philosophically that it is the healthier approach to schools addressing discipline and educating young people when they make a mistake. (John RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

John elaborated that in the 2013-14 school year, the district began to look for ways to reduce out-of-school suspensions. The driving forces for change came from a combined pressure of changing state legislature to reduce exclusions from the classroom as well as state and local advocacy groups, including the ACLU and NAACP. John explained that during the 2013-14 school year “*a community and district committee began to talk about our practices and our data and the restorative approach surfaced.*” District data indicated there was a disproportionately high exclusionary discipline rate for minority students and students in special education. John suggests that this was the original ‘why’ behind the district changing policy. During this time, John expanded his understanding of a restorative approach and his ‘why’ became more about the restorative philosophy as a healthy approach to changing student behavior.

I think a restorative philosophy is about relationships. All about community. The practices that then come out of that are things that work to develop and reinforce that philosophy. Healing the harm and mending relationships, that creates community, which philosophically, I believe, is how you reach true accountability. (John RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

Mack, a principal at a high school, also spoke about why restorative practices, but in a different light. “*The why, I think, that’s the biggest thing, beforehand I don’t know that we spent a lot of time doing the why.*” He was referencing taking a deeper look at how school discipline ultimately affects a student’s academic and behavioral performance. The ‘why’ refers to why do we address the issue of school discipline in the manner that we do, what is the end goal and is it effective? Mack explained, “*we need to sit down and tell the why of something that happened and how we feel.*” By examining why an event or action occurred, there can be a deeper understanding of what is going on with the student and allows for the restorative process to begin the cycle of repairing the harm. Mack explains:

There’s a movement that reflects the idea ‘how do we make a longer term effect’ in regards to changing student behaviors. Restorative practices is, I guess, a disciplinary term that’s used when a student gets in trouble that makes sure a full circle repair of the harm, repair of the damage (to the relationship) so that both parties are heard, a mutual understanding and agreement is made so that they can move forward in a positive way (Mack RP Interview, July 23, 2019).

Mack then went back into talking about the why:

It makes sense, we have more kids in trauma, more kids that don’t understand how to be a student and they don’t have the skills to repair the harm on their own. They haven’t been taught, they don’t know how to communicate very well. The real pull is to better communicate and understand the kids so that we can help them. To better understand what they’re going through so their

teachers have a better understanding of how to help them. (Mack, RP Interview, July 23, 2019).

Mack continues to see the benefit of his teachers building relationships with students and maintaining those relationships, even when a student damages the relationship through misbehavior in some way.

Bill, a principal at a different high school in the district shared a similar perspective: *“We haven’t figured out a solution to all the violence, I think we’re finally understanding the value of really understanding the behavior and we’re also recognizing the difficulty a lot of our kids are experiencing.”* Bill reflects on the philosophy of restorative practices in a similar train of thought as John: *“Restorative practices are more of a cultural belief system than a secondary building system where the work is not done centered around punitive discipline or punishment, it’s centered around understanding, repair and moving forward.”* When Bill started to understand the purpose of restorative practices, the philosophy made sense. Looking at the suspension data of his building, Bill started asking why; why are we suspending the number of kids that we do?

We had this magical sheet that was floating around and it had a matrix of the consequences for behavior, you know one day suspension, then three days, then five, then long term suspension... and that was driving our work. Nobody could ever answer where that sheet came from, it wasn’t district policy, it was just what everybody was doing. So we started asking ‘well if nobody know where it came from, why the hell are we doing it?’ I think we just took responsibility on our part to just finally change our response to

behaviors. We also spent time building in our adults to understand the value of understanding behavior (Bill, RP Interview, July 2, 2019).

Similar in response to the other principals, Jill, also a high school principal, reflected succinctly about the theory of restorative practices:

Restorative practices are those strategies that we implement at a school level that hold students accountable for behaviors that breach or break a relationship in some way. And a lot of things kids do are minor and corrosive acts to relationships, sometimes things have happened that actually break a relationship. But regardless of the depth of that breach, we try really hard to hold kids accountable. To say ok, so there's been something broken, you know, with a peer or trusted adult, and we want you to have a whole healed relationship so that you can continue to move forward with all of your support systems and network in place, so what do we need to do to put you guys back together? In a way that feels good and whole... those are restorative practices (Jill, RP Interview, August 14, 2019).

Jill started hearing about restorative practices 10 years ago. It struck a chord in her own practice because “*what we were doing wasn't working.*” Using exclusionary discipline was more of means to satisfy the adults and their need to see a consequence and punishment for a kid.

It wasn't great for kids and what we've learned, through a lot of brain research about why kids do what they do, that you can't punish that behavior out of a kid. You have to work with that young person, understand the

motivation as to why they did what they did and provide a whole social network around them with healed relationships (Jill, RP Interview, August 14, 2019).

Ed, the fifth administrator that participated in the interview, is a director at the district level. His perspective, similar to John's, reflects the overarching premise of restorative practices. His viewpoint stems from working with all of the secondary level schools in the district. He explains restorative practices is not a punishment but still disciplinary in nature: *“Punishment alone has not been seen to be effective in the long term, it often gets (a student) distance from the situation, and sometimes compliance, but that’s short term. We need to look long term.”* His reflection introduces the idea the discipline has become synonymous with punishment but that is not the origin of the word. He referenced an article from the Harvard Education Review that discipline has changed from addressing student behavior and helping students find self-control to punitive responses that demonstrate an intolerance to behaviors and reassure the public that schools are in control (Noguera, 1995). Ed is a proponent of addressing discipline models to help students make better decisions and be preventative of misbehavior.

Restorative practice is discipline but not meant to punish, it’s meant to teach, to improve and to repair when something happens. I see it as let’s take a look at the track you’re on, maybe direct you towards a different track and then give you help to go down that path (Ed, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

Ed also recognizes, as Mack does, that *“society has abdicated a lot of responsibility and placed it on the schools.”* He works with families that are frustrated with exclusionary

consequences. *“I see more of the families looking to schools saying ‘why didn’t you do something before it got her suspended.’ I think there’s a void.”* He sees families looking to schools to provide more than just academics, it’s becoming the role of schools to also teach social responsibility, accountability, community building and how to make lasting, effective relationships.

Overall, the five administrators echoed a similar theme, that exclusionary consequences aren’t making long term changes to student behavior and that the needs of students are becoming greater. This is the ‘why’ of restorative practices. Referred to as ‘soft-skills,’ schools are being held accountable to teach students more than academic content including social skills, civility, relationship and community building, and how to be a student. Ed reflected that *“restorative practices, when it’s done well, teaches students how to be civil.”* John paralleled that thinking *“We have to help educate young people when they make mistakes, teaching them how to re-engage and be successful so that they can be a better person moving forward.”* Bill also reiterates *“We have to teach these things (social skills) like it or not because just to expect that the child has all these things is false.”* The participants statements all reflect an understanding of the theory of restorative practices, that our schools need to focus on building relationships and when those relationships are damaged, we are helping our students learn to repair the damage, take accountability for their actions, and improve moving forward.

Implementation/Resources Time

The second research question examines the perceptions of administrators in the implementation of restorative practices. The prevalent theme that emerged from all five

participants was that the district rolled out a change in discipline policy without a consistent framework in place to facilitate schools in making a transition from a zero tolerance model to implementing a restorative practices model. The emergent discussion centered on a common agreement that moving to a restorative model was in the best interest of students, but the short timeframe to change the ingrained mindset of staff from exclusionary consequences to keeping students in classes sparked frustration and inconsistency in practice throughout the district. John explains what the district leaders were challenged with in terms of compliance, while the rest of the participants discuss the challenges that the district set before them in terms of complying with a new district policy on discipline and the resources it takes to fully implement a restorative model. Another emergent factor common to all of the participants is a reflection, in hindsight, on what could have made the transition smoother.

In 2013, the state legislature for the district in which this study was conducted started to make changes to the policies overseeing school discipline in public schools (“Student Discipline Task Force,” 2019). According to John, the data that really drove the decision for change in the district was the number of exclusionary discipline incidents overall and the disproportionately high number of students from a minority or special needs population. At the time, there were 204 districts in the state that had over 500 students and the data ranked the districts in numerical order, one being the district with the lowest number of exclusionary incidents. This district was ranked at number 200 (“Student Discipline Task Force,” 2019). One of the worst in the state in terms of high numbers of exclusionary discipline. John, a member of the district’s superintendent leadership team, began to

determine the process to implement restorative practices into the schools to lower the number of exclusions.

John recalls: *“We really began to start thinking about it as a system wide change and talking about changing our policy language, our procedures.”* Then in the 2014-15 school year, the district implemented trainings for administrators to address the changing language of the district discipline policy.

We tried to incorporate language that was coming from some of the other school districts in the nation that had gone down that road already, Oakland and Denver were two places we used as models, as well as an outside agency that we hired to look at our current practices and data (John, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

John was on the team to spearhead the specific method that the district would follow in the change to a restorative approach from a zero tolerance model.

In August of 2015, the district adopted the new policy and procedure language around restorative practices that is currently in place. The emphasis in the new language was based on a restorative philosophy and has specific restorative practices built in as alternatives to exclusionary discipline. However, John, reflecting on what that implementation process was, recalled that:

One of the challenges I had as a central leader around this work was that it wasn't necessarily a priority in the system, it was a priority to some of us in our roles but we were trying to do it parallel to other big work that we were doing. So it wasn't a big priority on our leadership agendas and in our

professional development plan. We were training our leaders to understand and meanwhile, staff was being left behind. We asked school leaders to carve out 60 minutes for restorative practices training for their building staff but that just wasn't enough time. School leaders began doing things and staff didn't understand it (John, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

Ed, whose district role is to work directly with building administrators in matters of school discipline, and the high school principals Bill, Mack and Jill felt the implications of the districts push for policy change without much foresight into actual implementation at the school level. Ed brought up the point that when the discipline policies and procedures were changed to reflect a restorative approach, each high school started to implement that in their own way and with an individual understanding of what that looked like in actual practice. Ed helped bring together a monthly meeting of high school administrators to discuss the concerns of discipline in each building and try to form consistency throughout the district with that group.

People were not delivering it (restorative practices) well or being clear as to what they're doing, it takes a bit more time. We had to have discussions like, what is a restorative conversation, what does that look like and how should that work (Ed, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

Ed finds there is still a lot of inconsistency in how each school at the secondary level is implementing restorative practices. However, he also expressed, that in the past four years since this was put into place, each building has come a long way and overall the district as a system is starting to find consistency.

The building principals each had different versions of their process of implementation. The emerging theme still centered on a lack of a consistent methodology or framework and an extreme lack of the resources needed to implement a fully effective and efficient restorative model. Each building principal, without definitive guidelines from the district, began changing the way discipline was handled in ways that they felt would be best for their staff and the demographic makeup of their student body. In Table 4.1, the demographics of each of the three high schools is shown.

Table 4.1

Demographic and Suspension Data

High School Administrator	Total Student Population	# of Out of School Suspensions 2018-19	% Low Income Family	Demographics
Mack American	1749	118	44.4%	73% White 9.8% Two or more races 3.5 % Black/African 4.2% Asian 8.6% Hispanic/Latino 0.6% American Indian 0.4% Pacific Islander
Jill American	1870	176	37.8%	68.3% White 10.3% Two or more races 3.6 % Black/African 4.3% Asian 9.7% Hispanic/Latino 1.1% American Indian 2.6% Pacific Islander
Bill	1510	33	55.8%	67.7% White 13.3% Two or more races 3.6% Black/African American 2.5% Asian 10.1% Hispanic/Latino 1.5% American Indian 1.3% Pacific Islander

Bill reflects that when he first started looking at his discipline data he hadn't allocated enough resources to alternatives to exclusionary discipline. These resources needed to include an in-school intervention room that could be used for students that were not able to rejoin a regular classroom due to a behavior incident that occurred. For Bill, "*It's a matter of transitioning resources for more appropriate interventions.*" Ten years ago, when Bill was a new principal to his building, he started to look at his data in relationship to how well his students were succeeding:

We looked at a lot of data to see what was working and what wasn't working, it was to get a sense of and to look at how we were responding. When we first got together here, our on-time graduation rate was 68%. That was terrible. That was 10 years ago, and really when you think about that for our population, that was three classrooms of kids, gone. When we got in and started doing the work, we were not dedicating the resources to appropriate discipline and building a culture in your school. We found that our kids behave better now as a result of making the investments in them, they get that we don't give up on them. We are not just booting them to the street. When you finally get a suspension out, you truly earned that (Bill, RP Interview, July 2, 2019).

He began to find resources for his staff to increase their level of understanding of restorative practices.

We had some pretty traditional PBIS¹ material, we looked at some research from Ruby Payne and read another book just on the socialization of kids, plus

some brain research, then we really just worked together (as a building staff) to understand (Bill, RP Interview, July 2, 2019).

Bill's approach to look at data and to determine the biggest areas of concerns, in regards to which students had the most discipline incidents and which students were failing. He saw a sharp increase in the number of freshman students: *"The general idea was to take our most frequent behaviors and deal with them differently, keeping the kid in school, getting them their class work, getting them productive."* He saw the impact that an out of school suspension could have on a 9th grade student. *"It set them back and that wasn't what was best for them."* Starting the 2015-16 school year, when the district policy and procedure changed language around suspensions, Bill allocated funds to create an in-school intervention room, a room that removed a disruptive student from a class or the halls but kept them in the building. *"We started socially isolating kids from their peers that were causing problems, engaging them with their counselor, engaging them with a mental health counselor, engaging them with people that were willing to take the time to work with kids."* From this they formed grade level teams with a specific caseload and started to communicate with intentionality on helping difficult students find success. He made sure he advocated for as many services as he could to be in building, including a mental health therapist, a chemical dependency counselor, and community mentors.

Bill's method of implementation, although not tied to any specific framework, proves to be successful in reducing the number of out of school suspensions. In the 2013-14 school year, when the district started to really look for alternatives to exclusionary discipline, Bill's school had 169 suspensions. This past year, 2018-19, his school had just

33. The lowest number of suspensions of any of the five high schools in the district. He credits his team and their work looking at data.

The 2014-15 school year, the district began to discuss with school leaders the changes in discipline policy that were on the horizon, Mack decided that his best approach would be to create a small team of teachers to train in restorative practices and then that team would present the concepts to the staff at large and be the support as teachers worked through what this transition in student discipline looked like to classroom teachers. Mack felt strongly that he did not want restorative practices to be presented from the administrators as a 'top down' process, he knew buy-in from the staff would be key. He reflected:

We used a couple books to guide our practice so that we had a basic understanding of what restorative practices was. We got some teachers that were trained a little bit and we had them give an in-service training to the rest of our staff. That was our key to initiate it (Mack, RP Interview, July 23, 2019).

Mack knows that some of his staff would have a hard time accepting restorative conversations in lieu of exclusionary discipline. He knew that changing the culture of his building, and his community, to be more inclusive of students that make mistakes would be a tough sell. What was in place was a system where the teacher would send a student out of class and it was dealt with between student, administrator and parent. *"There was discipline and hope that discipline changes the behavior. If it doesn't, we go back to square one. But we were missing the communication piece and the opportunity for the student to repair the*

harm.” Mack knows it’s been a tough transition. The biggest impediment to restorative practices being more successful in his building is the lack of resources:

I would just say if a district's going to do it (implement restorative practices)... great.. they have to put the resources in it and I feel right now our team is stretched as thin as they can be and I'm sure that's the same way at every high school, middle school, and elementary school. If you're doing restorative practices, it takes a lot of time to do it right and the resources are people, not more training. I think if you're going to do it right, you have to say 'we'll do restorative practices, give me the people to do it.' That's where I see us when we fall short on it, it's just the time. My people are running all day long and sometimes we just can't handle the volume. And sometimes you'd like to get ahead because you know some relationships are already frayed and think that you can get there, but then ok I'm going to head that way and boom, something else happens (Mack, RP Interview, July 23, 2019).

Mack’s thoughts reverberate with the other two principals. It takes a lot of time for a conversation with a student to determine what is going on that is creating a disruption, why that is occurring and how repair can be facilitated. He comments that the resources he needs are people. Jill feels the same way. Both Mack and Jill have fewer resources than Bill because they do not have high poverty schools. Bill is entitled to LAP funds. LAP refers to the Learning Assistance Program, a state-funded program that offers supplemental services for K–12 students scoring below grade-level standard in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. These services focus on accelerating student growth to make progress towards

grade level. Each district is awarded LAP funds from the state and distributes these funds to their schools as determined by the level of need. Most of these funds are focused on Kindergarten - 4th grade students. There is also a LAP High Poverty School Allocation -- Funds are generated by a formula and distributed to eligible school buildings. A school is eligible if it has at least 50 percent of its students qualify for Free and Reduced Price Lunch, based on the previous year's data. These funds can then be used to hire more certificated staff to support learning. Jill and Mack's schools do not qualify for these programs. Yet Jill has the high school with the biggest population, over 1800 students. She is allowed one substance abuse specialist four hours a week and one mental health counselor that can only see kids on Medicaid and has a caseload of 30.

I get no help. I don't have LAP money, I don't have high poverty LAP. I didn't get new staffing when they implemented restorative practices, no one said you're gonna need 3 FTE. It takes time to build the relationships that can implement this kind of model and I got no new adults to put in the time. We can't keep up frankly, I look at my admin team, my counseling team and go, we can't do this work. We're gonna just collapse on one another here, and until, and unless they give us the kind of help that we need, we're gonna have to half-ass it as best we can... and we're doing a pretty good job, but I can't get anything more out of the people I've got. So what's going to happen is that, I don't think we're going to have excellence with it. I think we're going to do better than we were doing but we're trying to hit excellent. I just

have insufficient resources to get to excellent (Jill, RP Interview, August 14, 2019).

As for the process of implementation, Jill knows it wasn't 'tidy.'

I wish I could say that we had a toolkit. We don't. We were trained as administrators. And I think we maybe got ahead of staff too far because I think staff were trying to figure out what the heck is happening... had we recognized the ground shift that this was, we would have been really smart to have said, ok so here's what year one is going to look like, here's what year two's gonna look like, we were not that organized (Jill, RP Interview, August 14, 2019).

Jill resorted to learning from the brief training she received as an administrator in the district and sought out independent training through the local Educational Service District and local university offerings. She also sent her administrative staff to trainings to get brought up to speed on how restorative practices can be used in a school building. Then she started bringing in outside resources to talk with her staff:

Where the huge challenge is, is that this is not just a practice that has to change, it's really philosophy. All of a sudden I'm trying to do some major philosophical shifting, cultural shifting, and I got nothing in terms of time. And I think that was, as much as anything, what screwed up some implementation that we're doing with restorative practices is we really don't have community building time. We are all independent operators and it's

pretty hard to change philosophy that way (Jill, RP Interview, August 14, 2019).

Her thoughts are reflective of what the other participants referenced. Restorative practices takes time, it's a complete change in philosophy. Each administrator reflected on a different aspect about their perception of the implementation process. John's lens from the district office position centered on the need to change philosophy due to pressures in the community and at the state level but the time needed to truly manage an overhaul of the previous policy hadn't been the utmost priority, which translated to an incomplete framework for implementation. This lack of thoroughness is echoed by the others. Ed frames his experience with the implementation of restorative practices as supporting building administrators while they navigate independently through the change in discipline philosophy.

The building administrators all reference the amount of resources that are needed to truly implement an effective restorative practice in a high school. Bill embraced the change by looking at the data and what positive impacts this had for students. His entire lens that he answered from was of student perspective and student achievement. He spoke very little about how his staff adjusted but implied that they went along with his lead. Of the administrators, he seemed to feel the most confident that his approach had led to the most consistent and effective practices. And he has the data, his extremely low suspension rate, to back his claims. Jill and Mack both embraced the impact that this would have on staff as they implemented restorative practices. Mack's decision to allow teachers to lead the change helped bring understanding to his staff that this was a philosophy change, not an

administrative directive. Jill also wanted to be clear in leading her staff for this shift in culture change. However, it should be noted that because Jill and Mack are not in high poverty schools, they are limited in terms of people resources. They are not staffed with support personnel, unlike Bill, who benefits from the added staffing he gets for the level of poverty in his building through high poverty LAP and Title I funding.

Building Relationships

The third theme that emerged from the participant interviews examines the perception of two research questions, the implementation and outcomes of restorative practices. Each administrator talked about relationships in their responses. Part of their responses addressed the need for staff and students to build better relationships through the implementation of restorative practices, however, each administrator also talked about the increased relationships that were an outcome of restorative practices. Each participant had similar experiences in observing staff and student relationships become stronger; as well as how important relationships are in having restorative practices be effective within the school buildings.

Bill, whose school has the lowest number of exclusionary suspensions out of all the high schools in the district, credits much of that success to *“getting better at how to counsel and kid and honestly meeting with a kid, spending time with them.”* When his team of administrators and building leaders were looking at best practices for implementation of restorative practices, they asked the question: *“How can we do a better job intervening with the kids? How do we keep them in school and support them? How do we help them pass their classes?”* He found that the investment in building rapport and relationship with

students paid off. Combining additional supports such as mental health counseling and academic counseling sent the message to students that the staff was committed to taking the time to help them. *“We found that our kids behave better now as a result of making investments in them, they get that we don’t give up on them.”*

In one of the other schools, Mack responded that his staff experienced, through the implementation process, *“a pull to better communicate, to better understand the kids, so that we can help them.”* This was achieved by facilitating staff - student relationship building. Mack helped create opportunities for staff to work with students when issues of discipline arose.

Before, we were missing the mark, we didn’t bring the teachers in on the discipline process, now we have them as an active part of getting a student back to class. This is helping staff build relationships. There’s been some real positive relationships built between a kid and a teacher that you would think would never happen (Mack, RP Interview, July 23, 2019).

Mack credits both the process of implementing restorative practices led by teachers to help bring other teachers on board with the idea of really getting to know students: *“The relationships with our at-risk population, they (staff) are really getting to know our kids better and most importantly, our kids that have issues.”* In terms of what he would’ve done differently, he states that he should’ve asked for student voice sooner. *“Adding students to the leadership group that led our staff into more restorative thinking, we should have had students involved.”*

Moving forward, Mack sees the benefit of the improved relationships, “*They (students) have a little ownership in being listened to, we’ve been able to usually get them to at least communicate some by finding a trusted adult that they will confide in if they won’t confide in an administrator.*” Although Mack still feels the resources, in terms of people available, are limited, he knows that his staff is becoming trained in looking for frayed relationships to try to spearhead disruptions amongst students before a major issue occurs. It’s because of the limited resources that he feels restorative practices will reach full implementation, which would be measured by exclusionary discipline getting reduced to near zero incidents per year, but he is appreciative of the relationships that his staff has been able to establish in this process.

At the third high school, Jill has experienced a lower suspension rate and keeping students in the building, in classes.

I think the primary reason for that is as much the (restorative) practice but the relationship building that happens as a result of engaging the practice, either with an administrator, counselor or teacher. I think it’s good for our staff, they’ve had to really, um... (our school) has always had some real shiny kids and you know when you’ve got 70% of your kids who are like knocking it out of the park, it’s easy to go ‘we’re all that and a bag of chips.’ But really it, it’s pulled focus on kids who are super challenged, and we have a pretty significant population of kids with trauma and it’s been good learning for staff (Jill, RP Interview, August 14, 2019).

She sees relationships as the basic tenet that the entirety of restorative practices is built upon. Her experiences in her building focus on getting to know students as individuals, listening to their story and then adding the perspective of the teachers of how they are viewed as students in the classroom. This creates the feeling that each student is cared for because each individual relationship is valued. She has staff members happy to see the focus shift to caring about all kids in the building, not just the ‘good’ ones. *“I think there are a ton of teachers who are thinking, ‘it’s about damn time we started talking about these other kids, who for years have just been the forgotten children.’”*

From the district administrators’ perspectives, they were less focused on staff - student relationships because that is not what they necessarily deal with or focus on in their positions. Both Ed and John reflected on the building of relationships in terms of building community. Ed’s experience includes his observations that administrators in the buildings need to have a good relationship with their staff because the staff is being asked to trust that a restorative process is going to be enough to change behavior. This stems from the cultural shift in philosophical mindset from a majority of staff members used to exclusionary discipline as the common practice. Ed adds that from both the staff and student perspectives, a violation of trust or a break in a relationship takes time to repair, and it may not get back to where it was, so administrators need to be skilled enough to guide that relationship in a new direction.

John also has a perspective based on a larger community relationship. Since John was part of the original committee in the district putting restorative practices into place, his lens is from the broken relationship the district had with members of the community. This

relationship has been stressed because of the disproportionately high numbers of exclusionary discipline, especially for minorities and students with disabilities. John states *“We have to be open and honest with each other and let the community know that we’re on the same team.”*

The complexities of balancing support of building needs and building relationships with the community frames John’s perspective. He knows that often buildings are looking for support in finding an alternative schooling option for an egregious student that endangers the safety of the building or seriously disrupts the learning environment. At the same time, he wants to ensure the relationship with the community is preserved which means exclusionary discipline isn’t the best means of approach. This balance is reflected and further examined in the following section on the perspective of consequence and punishment

The overarching emergent theme of this section is that relationships between staff, students, parents and community are vital to the efficacy of restorative practices. These relationships are building trust within the system that all students will be held accountable for their actions yet allowed to continue their schooling without exclusionary practices. While the administrators all recognize the need for relationships, this also ties into the previous emergent theme of the need for more resources. Healthy relationships take time to build, time that administrators in the buildings often don’t have time to dedicate to each student.

Repairing the Harm

Another emergent theme from the perception of the administrators is the concept of ‘repairing the harm.’ Through this theme, the administrators address their perception of both

the theory and outcomes of restorative practices. 'Repairing the harm' refers to how a student is held accountable to their actions that caused harm to the learning environment or to a relationship within the school community. In restorative practices, anytime a student creates a disruption to the learning environment, whether that is being non-compliant in class, getting into a fight, or any other misbehavior, they have harmed a relationship in some way. That relationship could be with another student, with a teacher, with the school as a whole or any other way that the student relates to the school. A restorative approach helps the student understand what relationship has been damaged and guides the student to repair that harm. Each administrator recognized the importance of this step in restorative practices because when a student is asked to repair the harm they have to first take accountability for their actions and then actively be engaged in solving the issue. This is in contrast to exclusionary discipline, where a student is removed from a situation for a period of time and then goes back without repair occurring and expected to change behavior.

Ed and John, again from a district perspective, have a lens of the more philosophical aspects of repairing the harm. As Ed explains, "*we take the opportunity to say 'something happened and we to improve, repair and teach you (the student) how to move forward on this.'*" What Ed really likes about the process is that this is when you give a student the opportunity to examine what they did wrong, how that impacted the others around them and what needs to occur in order for the student to return to that environment and be successful.

I think it's a positive when we get to say to a kid 'what you did was wrong and we're going to work on it.' It gives the student the idea that they made a

mistake, but they're going to get help to fix it and we are going to support them, yet still hold them accountable (Ed, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

John felt strongly about repairing the harm as the philosophical center of restorative practices.

In response to a situation, it's about healing the harm that's been done so that you mend the relationship. Having to own your behavior is more painful. I think when you have to face the people that you have harmed, that's how you truly own it. What the student often has to do is apologize. And I think it makes students think 'well I'm not going to get myself in that situation again because look what I had to do.' They have to work to heal that harm they created and maintain the relationship (John, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

He realizes that repairing harm in this manner takes time, and resources, but that it is essential for restorative practices to work. He truly believes that this really is a better way to hold students accountable for their actions because they are required to be a part of the solution.

Jill, Mack and Bill all share the view of repairing the harm from a more practitioner lens as they are directly involved with guiding students, and staff, through the process of repairing the harm. Jill's perspective was to process through how they handle a student that gets sent to the office from a classroom:

Kids are brought down to us and we go through a process that's not so much about 'ok so let me tell you what happened,' we sit with the kids and say 'tell me what you think occurred?' We ask our students 'the teacher isn't here, tell

me what the teacher thought was happening... what is the teacher going to tell me happened?' Because we want the kid to immediately get in the teachers perspective and they'll say things like 'well they thought I was doing this but really what was happening ... so even that, that kind of mind shift, where we get a kid to say well, yeah, they thought I was being rude but really I was..... so you can say ok so what we need to do is make sure that the teacher understands really what was occurring, and even that gets the kid to that sense of 'oh I don't' need to challenge the teacher as much as I need to explain (Jill, RP Interview, August 14, 2019).

She goes on to explain that their process involves 'trying to put the pieces back together' so that the student can re-enter the classroom. She's trained her administrative team to follow a process and ask:

How long is it going to take you to be in a place where we can really have a conversation with this peer or with this adult? Let's set some ground rules because we want this to be productive. Who do you want with you when we're having this conversation? It can be an administrator or counselor... and what we like to have is an outcome that is... reaches some kind of agreement, sometimes it's just a simple here's what was really going on, I apologize that it felt to you like I was attacking you, here's what was really happening... and it's a conversation clarity. And, you know, a teacher will shake a kids hand or its a, ok so moving forward, let's do this... sometimes it

gets to a place where we're actually writing out agreements (Jill, RP Interview, August 14, 2019).

By doing this, Jill is having her team repair the harm to the damaged relationship by guiding the students in a process. She uses the word 'restores' in place of repair. She wants to restore relationships and restore order so that the school or classroom environment can function. In some situations, she explained that restoring order involves separation. She's experienced times when students just cannot find a way to fix a relationship with a peer or teacher, either after repeated attempts to do so or maybe just one incident where the student cannot agree to find a common ground with the other person. At that point, removing the student from the relationship becomes necessary. She was clear that didn't imply removing the student from the school but putting an agreement in place that the student is moved to a different class or is asked to eat lunch in a different area, away from a conflicting peer. Jill went on to say that determining the best way to restore order was time consuming and often doesn't sit well with her staff. This perspective is further examined in the next emergent theme of staff climate.

Mack, similar to Jill, explained his perspective on repairing the harm through examples of process he's dealt with. His end goal is that "*whatever damage is done, whatever it was, gets repaired to where there's a mutual understanding and agreement between the parties.*" He reflected that previously, when there was a conflict between a student and a teacher, there was discipline, a parent and student meeting where we tried to repair the harm and then relay that information back to the teacher but many times there wasn't a direct repair with the teacher. Now, with a restorative lens, he's much more focused

on repairing the damage and completing a ‘full circle’ of repairing the harm. By full circle, he’s talking about the process:

We get into the why, we unpeel the onion a little bit and find out the particulars of what occurred. Then we can move forward with repairing the harm, holding conversations between students and teachers, allowing that relationship to get repaired so that we feel the student has restored with the teacher and we’re pretty confident that it’s not going to happen again. That is coming full circle (Mack, RP Interview, July 23, 2019).

Mack went on to describe a specific incident that was extremely egregious in terms of violent behavior by students that then involved a resource officer. He spent countless hours working with the district, with parents, with the court system and with the resource officers to find a way to repair the relationship. *“When it’s many people that have been harmed by the actions of one, it’s sometimes hard for that individual student to restore, because you’re trying to restore things with 20, 30, 40 people and that’s hard to do.”* But he was actually able to restore the incident, after working with the resource officer to understand the restorative process. *“The most powerful thing was the kids talking to the resource officer. We were able to go full circle, even working with the court system about the charges filed.”* His reflection was positive that the repair to the harm done has been complete for the students, however, in echoing Jill’s concerns, he wasn’t sure his staff was entirely supportive, nor was his community that included parents of other students afflicted by the damaged relationships. These emergent themes are later addressed in this research.

Bill voiced, through his process of restoring relationships, a similar emergent reflection on how harm was repaired in his building. *“It’s centered around understanding, repair and moving forward.”* He talked about the value of restorative conferences and what that looks like. It’s about building a relationship and then making sure each student has access to the person they have a relationship with. That trusted person then helps each student repair their relationships with others in the building.

All five administrators agreed that repairing the harm is the central premise of restorative practices. This is the root premise that allows restorative practices to be successful in terms of changing student behavior. This is also the piece of restorative practices that staff have the hardest time adjusting to, because it is not a hard and fast punishment, but a conversation and agreement. The concerns of the staff are reflected in the next two sections.

Staff Climate

In the process of implementing restorative practices, the five administrators have had to work with their respective staff to accept the restorative approach. The emergent theme from this experience had similar reflections from all the participants: some teachers full embraced restorative practices and some staff are having a very difficult time, in fact, completely disagree, with changing their mindset from a punitive framework to a restorative framework. This has added an additional element of time and resources, that were not fully vetted prior to implementation, that administrators have had to incorporate into their process of changing the climate about school discipline in the district.

Not everyone loves it right now. There are some (staff members) that'll wait and stew. They have a kid that hasn't been very good. But they won't follow up, they won't ask for help, they won't call parent and then, BOOM, they'll want the kid gone. Those are the staff members struggling with restorative practices (Bill, RP Interview, July 2, 2019).

This is Bill's perspective. These are the staff members that he has that don't like the system and refuse to embrace it. And by doing so, create more of a problem, because the animosity builds in the relationship between the staff and student so that when the restorative process is followed and the student goes back to class, Bill worries that the kid "won't get a fair shake." When Bill sent out a staff survey to get staff feedback on restorative practices, he found that 85-90% of his staff were on board with his buildings' process of restorative practices. He was a bit surprised at that. It was really only a few staff members that wanted punitive consequences in response to student actions. He accredits this to taking the time to explain the data to his staff, why there was a need to move to a restorative approach and that it all centers around student success.

Mack also had surveyed his staff and echoed that most of his staff have taken it on positively. His implementation approach, of training a small group of teachers to then train the rest of the staff helped smooth over the transition from the previous zero tolerance policies. His view is that "the climate has changed, it's just a different time, so our staff has to learn to work through these things as well." He went on to state that "it's tough to change all staff." The biggest pushback is that there isn't enough discipline occurring.

It's not accepted by everybody yet. We've got our early adopters and we've got some people, you know, at the end of the wagon pulling back a little bit. But I think overall it's been fairly positive and taken on by staff. They are really getting to know our students better (Bill, RP Interview, July 2, 2019).

Jill has a small, but significant, portion of her staff who don't 'buy it.' *"It's been rocky."* She's held a lot of conversations, meetings and professional development trainings working with staff to change their perspective about what discipline should look like. Due to the demographics of her school, she has a relatively high percentage of students that do not come from a trauma filled background. So her teachers work with a majority of *"pretty dreamy creamy kids"* all day and don't understand that not all students are like that. Her perception speaks to her experience that the students most needing restorative practices are under-served minority populations and students from poverty. She's got a teaching staff that wants more conversations about instructional strategies instead of focusing on trauma. It's not lost on Jill that these same staff members would like to not have to deal with students who aren't 'top tier.'

They're the ones that view this as mollycoddling. 'We just need to give kids the lane and it's their job to stay in it and if they step out we should give 'em a couple of whacks and put them back in the lane.' There's an amount of research around that, showing that doesn't work, but they're just kinda entrenched there (Jill, RP Interview, August 14, 2019).

As for the district administrator perspective, John feels there's been some great success stories coming out of the schools and it's changed the climate. The successes are

helping get a whole building staff behind the concept and he attributes that success in large part to the principals.

The success that schools have is in large part because of the principal, with their staff, getting their staff to agree that suspending a kid so that he can go home, is not a consequence that holds a student accountable. When you can get the principal to change the staff mindset and say 'no they're going to come here and we're not suspending them because there's no safety concern so we can have them in school. And they're going to be in their classes and they are also going to do this, this and this as a consequence.' That's when you get the staff to go 'yeah, that's what we need to do to hold them accountable.' If you can get the staff behind that, that's the shift (John, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

John continued that the principals experiencing difficulty in changing staff perspectives are due to a lack of training by the district.

People are interpreting administrator actions that we're not doing any kind of discipline, that comes back on us (at the district) in terms of training. Not everybody is philosophically in favor because there's a feeling that you need to do X and the philosophy is to do Y (John, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

John recognizes that in order to change the philosophy, there needs to be more training, a more cohesive approach, consistency in the schools and more success stories. Once those pieces are implemented, he's confident that staff will more fully embrace the restorative process. Ed realizes the struggle of staff members as well. From his experience,

he describes the frustration stems from continually allowing a student the opportunity to ‘try again.’

Philosophically they really like it, it makes a lot of sense. They, people in schools, are truly wanting the best for kids, they’re educators. Not just in academics but they believe in learning, teaching, moving forward. But, I’ve heard several teachers say I went to school to be a teacher not an interventionist. Why do we keep bringing this kid back, over and over, and there’s no change. It’s opened up the critique that we’re not doing discipline at all (Ed, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

Ed also reflected that the perception he’s gotten from staff feedback is that there is an impact when one student seeming has more rights than the greater group. He explains:

The way I would explain that is: if I am misbehaving in class, I’m impacting the 24 others in my classroom, but because of the restorative approach, I may come back into that classroom, after my restorative intervention, and continue to get in the way of the 24 other students (Ed, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

He feels this is the biggest hurdle he sees staff trying to overcome; meeting the needs of the one, without letting it impact the needs of the class. This is where an exclusionary consequence gave the teacher a day or two of respite from a disruptive student and allowed the other students respite as well. That’s where Ed sees the pushback from staff. Teachers are constantly doing interventions, in addition to teaching. Again, he brings his perspective back to the amount of time and resources that it takes for restorative practices to be

successful. That emergent theme continues to arise within all the other themes. All of the administrators are feeling the constraints of time and resources fully implement restorative practices with the utmost efficacy.

Punishment and Consequence

One of the emergent themes that all of the administrators shared a negative experience in is the philosophical shift in thinking from punitive consequences and direct punishment to restorative practices. This theme is where most of the push back that the administrators receive about implementing restorative practices stems from. Teachers that aren't cohesive with restorative approaches want exclusionary consequences for student misbehavior. They all shared that it isn't just teachers looking for a return to more punitive framework but the community at large. All five administrators referred to a pendulum of educational theories. This conceptual pendulum was described as an explanation of how major philosophical shifts in education have occurred in the past. The pendulum swings in one direction on a certain philosophy until it reaches a maximum and then it starts to swing the other way.

Over the last 150 years, the history of school discipline in the United States has swung from corporal punishment to more restorative approaches with student-centered concepts to zero tolerance policies. The administrators each shared a perspective that the pendulum is swinging away from zero tolerance towards restorative approaches, but the underlying premise was that it will hit its maximum and start to swing back the other way. Mack gave his perspective within the context of his 27 years as a principal.

When I first started, it was no tolerance, zero tolerance, and we suspended kids immediately for issues. We did not tolerate any misbehavior. And now we see that shift going the other way. But we will see it shift back. Pretty soon it will go too far and conservative people will say 'enough' and they'll yell loud. Then we will be back to not tolerating things in schools any more and you're going to be out of school for those things (Mack, RP Interview, July 23, 2019).

He then circled the conversation back to the example he used when he was talking about repairing the harm. For the students directly involved in that situation, there was repair and forward movement. However, he received many concerns from his teachers and parents in the community that don't understand 'the why' of restorative practices. They see a student misbehaving in an egregious way and they think the kid should have felonies and be in jail, not back in a classroom. He's had parents ask "*why is that kid even allowed to be here?*" It made him realize that parents and his community need education on restorative practices. If that education and outreach don't happen, he feels that pendulum is going to start swinging towards zero tolerance again soon. Mack also commented that on that same notion, there have been serious incidents in his building when the district pushed for a restorative approach and he felt that there should be a time when a harsher consequence is given so that students know you cannot do that.

Along the same train of thought, Jill lamented that there are times when restorative practices, and the limited resources she has in her building, are just not enough.

We have hung onto kids a few times that I thought we probably should have worked sooner to get that kid to a location that isn't so triggering. And it's just hard in this climate, we don't have a lot of places for kids. I think that's a little bit negative that we're working so hard and we can't get the student to make it, it's a huge failure. And we can't view that as a failure for getting a kid into a place where they're better suited (Jill, RP Interview, August 14, 2019).

She feels that continually bringing back students to an educational environment that isn't working from them has eroded some relationships between teachers and administrators. The teachers *"sometimes feel like they need to see a kid dragged out by their hair, that's what they need to feel supported."* And when that doesn't happen, teachers challenge the restorative practice. Jill supports those teachers with encouragement and depresses her belief in their ability to do this work, but for some teachers, that isn't enough. This is the debate that Jill faces, how to support her staff and support students through restorative approaches.

I'm not really interested in punishing because I want to change the behavior and I also think some kids come to us with such empty cups, there's... they just have a big empty cup. And every time we punish them, we're a little more out of it and confirming for them that, 'yep, I knew they didn't care about me and here's confirmation.' I mean our job as educators is to educate kids and when we pull a kid out for 3 days, 5 days, it's just absurd... what do we expect in terms of their learning? Yea I'm going to come back to class and

really hit it hard and give it my all and get all caught up, ya know? (Jill, RP Interview, August 14, 2019).

But that philosophy can be a hard sell to her staff. Her perception of the pendulum swing isn't that it's going to back towards zero tolerance but move in a new direction that develops a partnering process with more alternative settings for students.

The notion that with the right practices we can make every kid successful in a 1500-2000 kid high school is stupid. Out of the almost 2000 kids that I have here probably a good 5% of them, maybe 5-10% of them, would fare far better in a much different model and I think that's going to be what the pendulum swings over to is that acknowledgement. We can make a school like this work for a whole crap tons kids but there are those kids who walk in here and think this doesn't look like anything that is a part of my life... They're like F me. And I think those kids need to be in daily therapeutic situations, they need to be built up, loved on, get lots of services. I mean so I think that would be where it swings to. I think people are kinda done with zero tolerance. People recognize all that did was incarcerate. And push kids out. But I do think there's a growing sense that we can't make this stick for all kids (Jill, RP Interview, August 14, 2019).

Bill's perception was that there is a small portion of students that bring drugs, violence and weapons into the school. Those students need to be held accountable in a different manner with community connections and services put in place. Bill's echoed Jill

and Mack in that there are some students that are just not appropriate for a large comprehensive high school setting:

The dark side, there are some kids that we work with that mental health issues are so significant that we continue to cycle them (bring them back). And we know the district doesn't have resources and we don't really have the resources so we continue to cycle those kids. I think that really doesn't do restorative practices any favors. I think it makes us look bad, for lack of a better term. But then again, where else are these kids going to go? I think as long as you can mitigate safety and disruption, then I think you're onto something (Bill, RP Interview, July 2, 2019).

Looking for more options to help struggling students, Bill described an evening school program that his building created to address the students unable to function inside a normal school day. This program works with a small number of students using an online curriculum that goes at the students' pace. There is a certificated teacher available to support the students academically, they also have access to mental health and substance abuse counselors. This program has helped get the 5% that Jill talked about, out of the normal day and into a more supported environment. The results are two-fold, the school staff has been alleviated of some of the toughest students with high levels of need in both academic and social/emotional areas and the students are seeing success at a pace they can manage. This contributes to Bill's low rates of suspension and staff buy-in to restorative practices. As a side note, since these interviews were conducted, Mack's school has now started a similar

evening program to address the same 5% of students that his staff were continually struggling to meet the needs of.

Ed's perception circled back to his understanding on the theory of restorative practices; that restorative practice is a consequence, it's just not a punishment. *"If it's done right, it's really clear... you're (the student) here because of this, and this is what we're going to do... so I don't buy the critique that it's not a consequence."* He expanded his thinking and added that *"punishment alone has not been seen to be effective in the long term, punishment gets distance or compliance, but not a change in behavior."* He recounted his experience in talking with parents and how those conversations have changed.

It was hard to say to a parent 'what your kid did was wrong and we're going to kick them out for a semester versus what your child did was wrong, but we still want to educate, we want to help them fix this, here's what we're going to do (Ed, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

That type of conversation has been much easier for parents to accept and he brought it back to the concept that when done correctly, restorative practices is a consequence and brings discipline but it isn't punitive.

Ed's biggest struggling, that is similar to the voiced experiences of the building principals, are certain egregious acts that he feels are deserving of a punishment. Ed also referenced a pendulum swing that will take restorative practices to a point where there are negative outcomes. He used the following example:

One of my fears is that the pendulum will swing too far and we will put handcuffs on ourselves and limit our ability to send clear messages. And I

think the clarity of right and wrong can sometimes be blended if there isn't a clearly defined line. And that's where I really dislike the practice and worry that we won't be able to protect victims on behalf of restoring perpetrators (Ed, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

Ed's point is that there are certain offenses that do seem to warrant an exclusion from school. A move to a fully restorative approach would require that an offender has to complete certain steps to repair the harm but at what cost to the victim? As in Mack's example of the conflict with a student and resource officer, at some point, the resource officer had to be willing to hear out the offenders. Ed's perception is that for a victim, that isn't a fair system.

John, in his experience, agrees with what Ed and the other administrators voiced, that there are certain situations where the school community needs to be a priority, but that those situations are 'few and far between.' He had an example of one student in particular that the district has tried to work with, and while they haven't given up, John laments:

We've had to continually weigh the cost of meeting the needs of the individual, meanwhile holding our responsibility to the whole, trying to determine where the safest learning environment is... and to this day, the student still hasn't changed after three years of process. Unfortunately, it's students like that people use as ammunition as to why restorative practices are ineffective (John, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

For most situations, John feels that a restorative approach can be used to address and change behaviors. John's experience has also seen a pendulum swing:

When we started zero tolerance policies back in the late '90's, when a student did something, said something, it was off with their head and that student's life was changed forever instead of a process that really helps them own that, grow from that, change that. I think our society as punitive oriented so when there's a serious threat to student safety, they want a pound of flesh. The school shooter (of a local shooting) is on trial today and you look at those indicators that he had, and those are the same indicators we deal with every day. So it only takes one situation like that to swing the pendulum back the other way. So out of a hundred cases where we see a lot of success and one failure, people will harp on the one failure and want to go back to punitive approaches. So I think the pendulum will swing (John, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

John continued with more anecdotal examples of students that present difficult situations for schools to deal with. He wants to be supportive of his staff but he also continues to change their thinking and philosophy to change the traditional, more punitive, approach. The other challenge, that John feels not enough staff members in the district are aware of, are the changes in the state legislature towards restorative practice. The state legislature has changed in the past two years towards an even more restorative approach that greatly limits exclusionary discipline. Even since 2015, the district has had to revise the policy and procedures. John knows that the district has not done enough training with staff on the re-calibration of school discipline set out by the state. And this is causing some confusion because there is a lack of understanding that the push for restorative practices is at

the state level, not the district level. *“So at the end of the day, we can talk about suspension and we’re not saying that there isn’t discipline, but we need to combine all discipline to include a restorative practices component.”*

Overall, John believes the district’s exclusionary discipline data is at a much more acceptable level. Instead of being one of the worst districts in the state in terms of highest numbers of exclusions, the district is now on par with the state average. For the district, this data is welcome news.

Summary of Findings

Through the analysis of the interviews and interpretation of the emergent themes, the research questions were addressed in this study. The following research questions were explored:

Research Question One. What are the perceptions of five high school level administrators at a mid-sized suburban school district in a Northwestern state on the theory of restorative practices?

Research Question Two. What are the experiences of five high school level administrators at a mid-sized suburban school district in Northwestern state in implementing restorative practices?

Research Question Three. What are the high school level administrators’ perspectives on the outcomes of a restorative approach to school discipline?

Research question one explored the perceptions of the theory of restorative practices as experienced by five high school level administrators. The question yielded emergent themes of why restorative practices are needed, the positive relationships built between staff

and students, the process of repairing the harm and the theme about punishment and consequences. The participants' experiences with restorative practices led them to an understanding of the theory. The overarching perception of a restorative approach to school discipline was positive. All five administrators have lived experiences that demonstrate a more beneficial and collaborative effect between staff and students as they navigate the philosophical mindset shift from zero-tolerance to restorative practices. Every administrator shared a positive experience about how a damaged relationship with students had been repaired and was in the best interest of all involved parties versus a punitive consequence. However, there was concern voiced that a restorative approach may not be the most appropriate approach in all situations nor was it effective in dealing with disciplinary actions for every student.

The second research question asked about the implementation of restorative practices. Each administrator voiced commonalities about the way the district had gone about implementation in a non-linear approach that lacked consistency, was poorly presented to staff, and left each building to their own devices to determine the best method of implementation. The theme that emerged was the need for more resources for restorative practices to truly be implemented with the most efficacy. Each administrator spoke about their experiences of implementing restorative practices at their schools and each had a different story of how they went about it. All administrators echoed that the most needed resource at every building was in the form of more people. Restorative practices takes time because the foundation is built on forming relationships and then helping students repair those relationships when they are damaged. This takes a lot of time that busy administrators

often do not have. However, each building has seen success because of the strong leadership that each administrator has brought to their staff.

The third question examined the perceived outcomes of restorative practices. This question was addressed through an examination of the themes of relationship building, repairing the harm, staff climate and punishment/consequences. The outcomes of restorative practices were woven through the experiences of the administrators and there is not a definitive agreement for how those experiences impacted the outcomes. Overall, the administrators believed restorative practices are effective ways to attend to discipline for most students and a better disciplinary practice than the previous mindset of zero-tolerance. Within the theme of punishment and consequence, the concept of a pendulum was mentioned by all the participants. A pendulum swings in one direction, hits a maximum point and then starts to swing the other direction. All of the administrators stated that in education, the pendulum, while still swinging towards more restorative measures, will reach a point where student safety and community advocates force the pendulum to swing back toward punitive accountability.

At this point, the state legislature continues to 'swing the pendulum' towards even more restorative approaches and fewer exclusionary consequences. This study revealed many of the underlying nuances in implementing restorative practices as well as the resultant outcomes in terms of impact on staff and individual student success. All of the participating administrators expressed similar experiences in the positives and negatives of changing the philosophical mindset from punitive to restorative. Their experiences will help

drive the future direction of restorative practices as the district looks to calibrate restorative approaches at all schools.

Summary Chapter 4

This chapter detailed the data analysis procedures and results of this study. The chapter included a description of the study's sample, which included target population and purposeful sampling, as well as participant demographics. This chapter also included the identification of six emergent themes, a presentation of the data, and a summary of the findings. The next chapter, Chapter 5, will provide a discussion of the results and a study conclusion.

Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of secondary level administrators on the theory, implementation and outcomes of restorative practices in an urban mid-sized school district. This research explored the lived experience of the participants and captured their experiences in emergent themes. Five administrators from one school district in the intermountain north-west, composed of three high school principals and two district level directors, each participated in one semi-structured interview consisting of 13 open-ended questions and a demographic survey. All of the participants interviewed had an understanding of the philosophy and theory of restorative practices. In addition, all were involved in the district-wide implementation of restorative practices over the past four years and just beginning to observe outcomes. In this chapter, are the results of this qualitative exploration of the administrator's perceptions. I include a discussion of my findings, the limitations, implications of those findings on policy, implementation, and the conceptualization of restorative practices in the discipline procedures in schools. I conclude the chapter with recommendations for future research and final thoughts.

Through this study, the experience of shifting from a zero-tolerance discipline policy to a restorative approach was examined and provides information to guide the implementation of restorative practices in school systems. Additionally, school leaders can use this information to develop a process for supporting staff and students to lead to increased staff buy-in, a more cohesive implementation process and a reduction in disruptive student behaviors. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the perceptions of five high school level administrators at a mid-sized suburban school district in a Northwestern state on the theory of restorative practices?

2. What were the experiences of five high school level administrators at a mid-sized suburban school district in a Northwestern state in implementing restorative practices?

3. What were the high school level administrators' perspectives on the outcomes of a restorative approach to school discipline?

Table 5.1 shows the six emergent themes related to the research questions as well as the sub themes with an exemplifying quote from the participant interviews:

Table 5.1

Emergent Themes

Emergent Themes	Sub Themes	Specific Examples from Interviews
Theme 1: Why Restorative Practices	benefits of using a restorative approach positives outcomes for students why punitive consequences aren't the best for kids	"This is the right thing to do..." (John RP Interview, July 18, 2019).
Theme 2: Implementation	amount of resources needed to implement restorative practices how each administrator met the resource need additional need for more resources	"The general idea was to take our most frequent behaviors and deal with them differently"(John, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

Theme 3: Relationships	<p>staff and student relationships have improved</p> <p>restorative practices is founded on relationships</p>	<p>“They (staff) are really getting to know our kids better” (Mack, RP Interview, July 23, 2019).</p>
Theme 4: Repairing the harm	<p>restorative practices focuses on repairing relationships</p> <p>students learn in the process of repair</p> <p>students take responsibility for their actions</p>	<p>“It gives the student the idea that they made a mistake, but they’re going to get help to fix it” (Ed, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).</p>
Theme 5: Staff climate	<p>some staff embrace the change, others are struggling</p> <p>implementation did not have clear focus</p> <p>staff are worried there isn’t a consequence</p>	<p>“It’s not accepted by everybody yet” (Bill, RP Interview, July 2, 2019).</p>
Theme 6: Punishment and consequence	<p>difficult to change from punitive to restorative</p> <p>staff question if students are actually being held accountable</p> <p>are students benefiting without punitive consequences</p>	<p>“Punishment alone has not been seen to be effective in the long term, punishment gets distance or compliance, but not a change in behavior (Ed, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).</p>

These themes, and how that are connected to topics in the literature review, are addressed in the following section.

Discussion of Findings

Why restorative practices

One of the three components of the research questions was to examine the perceptions of secondary level administrators on the theory of restorative practices. The emergent theme from the study participants that addressed the concept of restorative practices theory focused on the ‘why.’ Each of the administrators were consistent in their responses that a restorative approach to school discipline guided a focus on helping students build, maintain and repair relationships; and this practice held students more accountable for their actions than the exclusionary discipline associated with zero-tolerance policies. Embedded in each administrators’ perspective roles within the school district was an understanding of the importance of developing relationships with students in order to engage them in the process of repairing and restoring the harm. Aligning with the ‘why’ of restorative practices, as noted in the scholarly literature, repairing relationships helps students build social capability and lowers the recidivism rate in student behaviors that disrupt the learning environment (Costello et al., 2010; Fronius et al., 2016). The administrators in this study all valued the positive outcomes they had observed in individual students that had repaired a relationship damaged by the students’ actions. There was also a sense of accomplishment that students could turn their behaviors around and be successful in the school environment, thus avoiding exclusionary discipline and possible repercussions that accompany youth that are not in school.

All of the participants had been in education long enough that they were very familiar with the zero tolerance policies that preceded restorative practices. This prior practice of using exclusionary discipline as a consequence for student behavior worked insofar that it removed offending students from the rest of the student body, thereby allowing the protection of the educational learning environment. It was recognized by each administrator this process did not produce effective change in the offending students' behavior, rather it just moved the 'problem child' to a different location. This practice, in combination with disparities in the number of minority and special needs students that experienced exclusionary discipline, leads to a school-to-prison pipeline (Mallett, 2014). As the theme of 'why restorative practices' emerged, it was clear the administrators, as educators, felt that restorative practices were much more focused on helping individual students learn and grow from their mistakes in the school setting. Every participant recognized restorative practices helps to strategically build relationships with and between students within the school setting.

Implementation

There is limited research on best practices for the implementation of restorative practices. There is not one guiding framework from which school districts can use to guide how to transition school discipline from punitive zero-tolerance policies to restorative practices. Each administrator interviewed reflected on the implementation process within the district. The theme that emerged was the lack of planning and an incohesive effort by the district. Each building had to find their own process for implementation. The district

provided some guidance and training, but building administrators were left with guiding the process by themselves.

The literature suggests the shift from zero-tolerance to restorative practices has been occurring over the past 15 years (Bevington, 2015). However, the driving force for the school district in this study to change a more restorative philosophy with regard to school discipline was due to mandated changes at the state level. As the state changed their policies to reduce exclusionary discipline, the district responded by changing the district discipline policy without consulting the individual schools. Once the district adopted the new policies, only then each school building adapted by implementing restorative processes without a framework or guidelines in place.

The challenges the administrators faced were teacher buy-in, misunderstanding/misconception of restorative processes and lack of training. All of these challenges require access to resources and time for implementation, the two things that the study participants felt the district did not adequately provide. Both Mack and Jill, who are not in high poverty schools as measured by SES, commented the lack of resources they experienced was in the form of people. The time it took to complete a restorative process and help a student repair the harm can be lengthy, without additional staffing, this means current staff members who are already over-worked cannot manage to effectively work with every situation to a complete restorative process. As Mack stated “my people are running, all day, they just start to put out one fire and another one starts,” (RP Interview, July 23, 2019). Jill also noted that to fully implement restorative practices to be a working model, she would need more staffing. Two other district administrators, Ed and John, also recognized

the need for additional resources for implementation to be feasible, however, noted budget restraints have limited their ability to hire more staff, leaving the district with providing more training to existing staff. This challenge will continue to be difficult as school districts look to restorative practices models.

Relationships

Every participant in the study agreed that the basic premise of restorative practices is founded on relationships. When relationships are damaged in some way, that is where restorative practices can guide students on how to repair those relationships. And in the process, staff are tasked to be accountable to repair the relationship as well. As Mack noted, “I’ve seen the most positives come from the relationships that staff have formed with students, relationships that wouldn’t necessarily have happened if we weren’t pushing the restorative approach,” (RP Interview, July 23, 2019). When considering concerns for resources, the emergent perception of the administrators was to build authentic relationships it takes time to frame and hone, the additional time is one thing school staff doesn’t have.

Throughout the interviews, participants consistently emphasized the importance in cultivating a sense of belonging and emotional safety through building relationships. Focusing on healthy relationships, both student to student and staff to student relationships, helped the participants create staff buy-in. This was due largely to staff members seeing the benefit from positive relationships as well as seeing students take responsibility for their actions when a relationship was damaged. Researchers and restorative practices advocates assert that restorative practices provide a culturally responsive approach to repairing relational harm (Brown, 2015). This is based on the inclusive ‘culture of care’ that is created

through the use of restorative practices and the voice given to all involved in the restorative process (Cavanaugh et. al., 2014). Each administrator, through their lived experience of implementing restorative practices, has guided their staff and students to create better relationships. “When both staff and students see the benefit of a relationship, there is a change in mindset” (Bill, RP Interview, July 2, 2019). Building relationships is what is changing the mindset of staff to a more restorative approach. All of the administrators echoed similar experiences in staff members who refused to build relationships; “those are the teachers that are having the most difficulty in accepting restorative in lieu of punitive,” (John, RP Interview, July 18, 2019).

Repairing the Harm

The perception of Ed and John, administrators in the district office, both focused on the importance of repairing the harm caused when a student damages a relationship. “This is how students are held accountable for their actions,” Ed states (RP Interview, July 18, 2019). When students go through the process of acknowledging that repair is needed and then guided through that process, then behavior can be changed. Both John and Ed agreed that requiring students to be a part of the solution holds them more accountable for their actions than any punitive consequence would. From a practitioner’s view, Jill, Mack and Bill, each a building level administrator, felt a restorative lens helps guide students to repair a relationship, rather than rely on consequence to change behavior. By connecting with students in this manner and restoring relationships, all parties involved can move forward. According to Gonzalez (2012), instead of depriving students of opportunities to learn by

using exclusionary discipline, restorative approaches work to build healthy relationships, which in turn, create a positive learning environment.

Staff Climate

In her response, Jill recognized that teachers and administrators need more training and modeling to increase their understanding of restorative practices when it comes to implementation and discipline. The administrators perceived their respective staff members as having mixed feelings about restorative practices. While some staff members “jumped at the idea of working restoratively with kids” (Jill, RP Interview, August 14, 2019), others were resistive because they held deep beliefs that punitive consequences are more effective to hold students accountable for their actions. A consistent experience from the participants was that of teachers wanting disruptive students out of their classrooms.

Restorative practices focus on relationship management instead of behavior management, challenging the mindset of staff beliefs around the notion of discipline. When the participants discussed implementing restorative practices in their respective positions, they said staff members need to examine their attitudes and beliefs towards student discipline, often resulting in wanting punitive measures. As Jill responded about teacher buy-in “some were on board (with restorative practices) instantly, others liked the idea until something happened, then they’d resort to wanting more traditional punitive measures,” (RP Interview August 14, 2019). Morrison and Vaandering (2012) suggests, it often appeared that educators embraced the restorative justice premise that relationships were more important than the behavioral incident, yet would still be reluctant to let go of punishment. This is one of the biggest impediments that all the administrators experienced in the

implementation process was the contrast of teacher beliefs to address student discipline in a punitive manner versus a relational manner. It was clear from the interviews that teachers often felt restorative practices were not strong enough when dealing with student discipline. Shifting this mindset has been an obstacle that, over time, is beginning to swing (Alexander, 2017). However, it was also clear that each administrator recognized this shift from punitive to restorative as a swinging pendulum, often recognized in education, as one policy takes over in direct contrast to an existing policy, without lasting effect.

Punishment and Consequence

The literature indicates that punitive, exclusionary discipline does not deter problem behaviors and can actually increase or intensify behaviors (Kline, 2016) due to the fact many students are disengaged from the school community. A punitive consequence for behavior, like exclusion from a school, just further distances the student from the school community and does not hold the offender accountable to the offense (IIRP, 2018). The administrators in this study have experienced the most resistance to a restorative approach because of staff perception that restorative practices are not punitive enough. The mindset is still entrenched in the concept that disruptive behavior must be managed by consequence resulting in exclusion from the classroom. While every administrator agreed, removing a disruptive student is a necessity to preserve the learning environment, it is the restorative conversation, repair of the harm and building of relationships that can actually change behavior (Zehr, 2002). The pushback from staff that the administrators experienced centered on a lack of understanding of how having a student repair the damage they caused actually holds the student more accountable than a punitive consequence. There is limited research on the

factors that influence teachers' ability and willingness to not only implement but also to sustain the utilization of restorative practices in schools. As Bill describes "finding a way to get each staff member to buy in has been difficult, some teachers are just set in their beliefs, and that belief is in punishment," (RP Interview, July 2, 2019).

Summary

Each of the five administrators in this study brings valuable insight into the logistics and plausibility of restorative practices. All agreed a restorative approach is a more effective way to change student behaviors because the focus remains on building and maintaining positive relationships while creating the opportunity for the student to be held accountable. Restorative practices aim to create a path in which administrators and teachers directly work with students, keeping them engaged in school while working to change unacceptable behaviors. Echoed in their responses, each administrator noted that education must be about educating students, even in their social-emotional needs. Restorative practices is a call for educators to help regulate the behaviors of students to be cognizant of the importance of relationships and how to maintain them.

Limitations

This study examined the perceptions of high school level administrators that have lived the experience of implementing restorative practices. It is important to note this study was limited to the experiences of high school level participants. According to Patton (2015), the lived experience of five administrators provides a rich in-depth for a phenomenological study, however, the addition of other school staff members, such as teachers, supporting

staff, and student experiences could provide additional information on understanding restorative practices.

As this study was limited to high school level perceptions, an expansion of research into the perceptions of elementary, middle school and post-high school would also add to the comprehensive body of knowledge on the efficacy of restorative practices for students in all age groups. This research purposefully focused on the lived experiences of the administrators to keep bias minimal in the data collection process.

Other limitations include this research was conducted with administrators from one mid-sized urban school district. This does not address information that may be pertinent from larger or smaller districts. Another limiting factor is that the demographic diversity of this school district in the study is not ethnically diverse with 68% of the population being Caucasian. These factors may have an impact on the implementation and outcomes of restorative practices that are not examined.

Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy and Theory

This study sought to explore the meaning in administrator's lived experiences in changing the discipline practices from a zero-tolerance approach to restorative practices approach. The findings illustrate there are many similarities in the experiences of all five administrators. All of the study participants included positive descriptions in their perception of restorative practices and the 'why' behind the change in culture from exclusionary to restorative. The emergent themes of the experiences of the participants are transferable in that the implications speak primarily to ways in which school administrators can prepare for and/or navigate the implementation of restorative practices. Each participating administrator

noted the lack of organization or formalized approach to implementing restorative practices within the district had left many gaps. This includes minimal professional development, a lack of staff buy-in, not being prepared with enough resources, and inconsistencies in how student discipline is handled across the district.

Administrator efficacy plays a role in how well a shift to a restorative approach is received by staff, students and community members. This study provides insight into the importance of the role of the school administrator in the implementation process, the need for a strategic planning of restorative processes and the necessity for staff buy-in. The experiences that are examined in this study provide a deeper understanding of staff perceptions, hesitations, and misconceptions that could be used by school leaders to determine adequate professional development and training opportunities to transition to a restorative practices model of school discipline.

School leaders and policy makers may utilize the data collected in this phenomenological study to assist in strategic planning efforts for the implementation of school-based restorative practices. The impetus to move toward restorative approaches in school discipline in this study stemmed from state legislative mandates that were implemented without appropriate funding for resources or a strategic implementation framework. Policy makers should enact guidelines for the shift from zero-tolerance policies to restorative practices. With an emphasis on reducing rates of suspensions and expulsions and addressing disproportionality in discipline to diminishing the school to prison pipeline, the state has well-intended purpose to mandate this change. However, mandating policy change without proper implementation frameworks or funding in place has led to

misunderstanding and confusion among school staff, students and communities. The fundamental goal of restorative practices is to help build relationships between staff, students, and community (IIRP, 2018) and allow students to repair the harm they cause to those relationships. However, this concept of building student capacity *with* staff has been undermined by the impression that this is yet *another thing* for staff to do. This study brings light to the importance of the manner in which restorative practices are introduced to staff, how staff needs to be supported for buy-in to occur and the impact on school climate and culture.

This research is grounded in a theoretical framework of social justice within the school system. Social justice has parallel concepts to restorative practices in that both aim to provide a way for reparations to harm done to be repaired in a just and equitable manner. The restorative practices framework includes the history of how theories in education have impacted the treatment of students over the past century. Restorative justice is based in social justice theory, originating in the criminal justice system, and aimed to reduce the recidivism of student behaviors that impacted the educational learning environment. The implementation of restorative practices allows for a translation of restorative justice from a macro view of social responsibility to the micro level, a transference from abstract theory to everyday practice (Alphen, 2015). When aligning this phenomenological study's results with the foundational components of restorative practices, it becomes clear school administrators should strategically plan the implementation of restorative practices with their staff, secure adequate staffing and resources, acknowledge the resistance to changes in school culture and climate, and model best practices in restorative approaches.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings from this study, there are topics that require future investigation in order to expand upon the literature on restorative practices. First, since the emergence of restorative practices as an educational practice to address the negative impacts of punitive discipline policies is a more recent phenomenon, further research is needed to be conducted on the efficacy of restorative practices and restorative justice in the school setting. Most of the research that has been produced is in the form of evaluating reports on isolated outcomes (Evans & Leister, 2013). There is limited research on the impact restorative practices have had on teaching staff, the social-emotional well-being of staff and students, the effect on school climate, the implications for school safety, and the overall outcomes of student success rates.

Second, from both the administrator interviews and the scholarly research, there appears to be a lack of conceptual clarity in the implementation process of restorative practices and the resources needed for schools to be exclusively restorative. There are conflicting beliefs about the efficacy of restorative practices and why restorative approaches should be used in lieu of punitive consequences and exclusionary discipline. More research and discussion are needed for educators to understand what constitutes restorative practices, how to effectively implement them, why restorative approaches are preferable to punitive approaches and how these practices can vary based on relationships without a consistent framework that can be applied in all contexts.

Third, there is no existing data that correlates if there is a relationship between restorative practices and improved student academic performance. The current research

focuses on the theory that using restorative practices as an alternative to exclusionary discipline is in the best interest of students. However, there has not been a correlation made to link the potentially improved social-emotional well-being of students that is the outcome of restorative practices to academic success. This topic needs to be further examined to determine if restorative practices need to be refined to also incorporate academic strategies and the possible implications of effect on standardized test scores, high school graduation rates and college or technical school preparedness.

Last, research should be conducted to include the voice of school staff, students and the community. Limited studies examine the perceptions and experiences of school staff as they are tasked with transitioning their practice to a restorative approach. Student voice should also be examined to determine the impact that restorative practices are making in their lives, if lasting behavior changes are occurring and students are finding value in building and maintaining relationships. By investigating student perceptions of restorative practices, a consideration of student 'buy-in' could be explored and deepen the understanding of the impact of restorative approaches. Additionally, research should be conducted to determine the perceptions of local school communities to further the body of knowledge about the efficacy of restorative practices.

Concluding Thoughts

The most relevant findings from this study about administrator perceptions on enacting restorative initiatives in a school district were: 1) focus should be on the 'why' of restorative practices, recognizing that restorative practices are found to be a positive alternative to move away from exclusionary practices and towards building relational

capacity within students; 2) the relationship between staff and students are essential to restorative practices being an effective method to change student behavior; 3) there must be a clear consistent framework for implementation to build a better foundation for restorative practices; 4) there should be opportunities allowing students to repair the harm caused to a relationship, to take ownership of their actions and thus be held more accountable than if they were excluded from a classroom or school; 5) there needs consideration of staff values and beliefs must be taken into account and addressed appropriately for staff to buy-in to the restorative practices model; and 6) there must be the understanding that restorative practices does not have the same effect as a punitive consequence will be difficult to change, more time is needed for to determine if restorative practices is effective in deterring recidivism. The scholarly research is not saturated with enough data to show a quantifiable success rate for the benefits of restorative approaches.

Restorative practice initiatives are being enacted in many public schools across the U.S. as an effort to decrease the use of exclusionary discipline. The question of whose job is it to guide the behavioral regulation of children remains a debate, but in the meantime, schools are being held accountable for the behaviors of young people leaving educators in a position to teach and build student social-emotional capacity. Restorative practices will build that capacity by holding students accountable to taking ownership of their actions and repairing the harm they have caused. The implementation of restorative practices requires a dramatic shift in how educators view discipline; this includes a change from behavior management to building relationship capacity in staff and students. A change in culture is required to shift the mindset of educators from punitive to restorative is not a straight and

narrow path but is a path worth taking. Educators looking to make a difference in the lives of young people will find restorative approaches yield more meaningful and positive relationships with students that can lead to student success. The current divisive and combative culture in leadership, politics, media and education are all trends that are impacting the lives of students. In order for our future generations to be able to be productive members of society, they will need to have skills in finding ways to reconcile differences and build positive relationships; restorative practices will be a building block for our future.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Research: Perceptions of restorative practices from secondary administrators on theory, implementation and outcome.

Participant Name	
Alias Name	
Interview Date	
Interview Location	

These questions will be asked directly by the interviewer to the participants. Answers will be scribed by the interviewer and verified for accuracy by the participant.

1. Describe, in your own words, restorative practices.

2. Why do you think the culture of schools across the nation are in a movement towards restorative practices?

3. How many years have you been transitioning to a restorative practices model in your building/district?

4. What information have you used as a guide for implementing restorative practices?

5. What types of processes did you have in place prior to implementing restorative practices?

6. What does restorative practices look like in your building?

7. What positive results have you seen from restorative practices?

8. Negative results?

9. How is your staff adjusting to a restorative practices model?

10. What concerns/praise have staff brought forward in your transition to a more restorative model?

11. A critique of restorative practices is that there are not consequences for student misbehavior, what are your thoughts on that?

12. What are the outcomes, positive or negative, that you foresee in moving towards full implementation of restorative practices?

13. Would you like to add any other information on your perceptions of restorative practices?

Appendix B

Demographics Survey for Research: Perceptions of restorative practices from secondary administrators on theory, implementation and outcome.

Participant Name	
Alias Name	
Interview Date	
Interview Location	

1. How many years have you been in education?
 - a. years teaching?
 - i. what subject/content area/grade level?
 - b. years as an administrator?
 - c. any other time in education?
2. What educational degrees and certifications do you hold?
3. How long have you been in the district?
4. How many buildings have you taught in?
5. How many buildings have you been an administrator in?
6. What training or professional development have you received on restorative practices?

Appendix C: IRB Approval Letter

University of Idaho

Office of Research Assurances
 Institutional Review Board
 875 Perimeter Drive, MS 3010
 Moscow, ID 83844-3010
 Phone: 208-885-6162
 Fax: 208-885-5752
irb@uidaho.edu

To: Anne Mary Kern

Cc: Krisha Charbonneau

From: Jennifer Walker, IRB Coordinator

Approval Date: September 26, 2018

Title: Perceptions of administrators on the theory, implementation and outcomes of restorative practices in a medium size urban school district.

Project: 18-170

Certified: Certified as exempt under category 2,4 at 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2,4).

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Idaho, I am pleased to inform you that the protocol for the research project Perceptions of administrators on the theory, implementation and outcomes of restorative practices in a medium size urban school district, has been certified as exempt under the category and reference number listed above.

This certification is valid only for the study protocol as it was submitted. Studies certified as Exempt are not subject to continuing review and this certification does not expire. However, if changes are made to the study protocol, you must submit the changes through VERAS for review before implementing the changes. Amendments may include but are not limited to, changes in study population, study personnel, study instruments, consent documents, recruitment materials, sites of research, etc. If you have any additional questions, please contact me through the VERAS messaging system by clicking the 'Reply' button.

As Principal Investigator, you are responsible for ensuring compliance with all applicable FERPA regulations, University of Idaho policies, state and federal regulations. Every effort should be made to ensure that the project is conducted in a manner consistent with the three fundamental principles identified in the Belmont Report: respect for persons; beneficence; and justice. The Principal Investigator is responsible for ensuring that all study personnel have completed the online human subjects training requirement.

You are required to timely notify the IRB if any unanticipated or adverse events occur during the study, if you experience and increased risk to the participants, or if you have participants withdraw or register complaints about the study.

Appendix D: Perceptions of Restorative Practices Study Consent Form

(Perceptions of restorative practices from secondary administrators on theory, implementation and outcome)

The University of Idaho Institutional Review Board has certified this project as exempt.

The purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions of secondary administrators in a medium sized urban school district on the theory, implementation and outcome of restorative practices.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will:

1. Complete a demographic survey that outlines your experience in the field of education.
2. Complete an online survey.
3. Participate in an interview on restorative practices.

This study has minimal risk but participating may make some administrators uncomfortable for fear that their responses will be used in conjunction with performance evaluations or conflicting perceptions. Collected data will not be used for evaluation of your personal practice and will not be made available to school officials. All data will be held confidential. All identifying information will be replaced with codes that only the primary researcher will know. All hard copy data will be stored in locked file cabinet and all electronic data will be stored on password protected electronic devices. The key and password will be held solely in the possession of the primary researcher.

A potential benefit to you for participating in this study would be the opportunity to gain an understanding of your personal knowledge of restorative practices and how that is used to inform and instruct in your building. This study will contribute to the educational body of knowledge and professional development initiatives stemming from restorative practices.

If information arises during the course of the study that may impact your willingness to continue participation, that information will be provided to you. Participation is completely voluntary. During the course of this study, you may stop at any time with no consequences. If you would like to stop your participation in the study, simply contact me and ask me to remove your information.

If you have questions about any portion of this study, you can ask me now or at any time in the future.

Krisha Charbonneau Primary Researcher Graduate Student and Assistant Principal 1622 E Wellesley Ave Spokane, WA 99207 Phone: (509) 354-6566 Char123@vandals.uidaho.edu	Anne Kern Faculty Advisor Associate Professor, Science Education University of Idaho Department of Curriculum & Instruction Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814-5497 Phone: (208) 292-1402 akern@uidaho.edu
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I am 18 years old or older and have reviewed this consent form and understand and agree to its contents.

Participant Name _____ Date _____

Researcher Name _____