Teacher Perceptions of Restorative Justice Practices in a Classroom Setting

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine how 12 middle school teachers in the Midwest perceive the effectiveness of restorative justice practices within their school and classroom across discipline and building stronger relationships with their students. The researcher used an adapted teacher and administrator instrument from Dr. Hillary Lustick. Data analysis was completed using Provisional Coding, Descriptive Coding, and In Vivo Coding. Using a phenomenological approach, Norm Theory theoretical framework, and semi-structured interview questions, the researcher gained a deeper understanding of teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of restorative justice practices. Participants shared that their perceptions were primarily positive. Participants predominantly viewed these practices as productive and beneficial when handling discipline issues and an excellent way to improve building relationships with their students. Additionally, teachers in this study felt that restorative justice practices are necessary because post-COVID-19 is a new era in education, and student voice needs to be included more frequently across all areas in school. The primary negative teacher perceptions focused on frustration with lack of proper training, insufficient time to run restorative practices while balancing classroom content, and lack of consistent buy-in from students and staff members. This study suggests teachers perceive these practices as worthwhile, and with proper extensive training, more schools can see the benefit of using restorative justice practices.

Dedication

To my mother and father, who always knew I would take on this challenge and complete it at some point. Who are incredibly proud of me for this accomplishment but have made it known my entire life that I did not need to do this for them to be proud. Thank you for the 38 years (at this moment) of love and support. No child could ever hope to have better parents than you two.

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I love the seven of you more than words can describe. Unfortunately, I know that if I lived to be 200, I could never come close to paying all of you back, but in your own ways, you have let me know that giving you love back and being happy is more than enough.

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Finally, to every teacher and coach I have ever had, I know I was not the easiest student and was a pain many days, but I genuinely appreciate that you never gave up on me. Without all of you, I would not be here today. Without our teachers, none of us would be.

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Chapter I. Introduction

Background of the Problem

   This dissertation aims to identify the existing perceptions of teachers being asked to use

restorative justice practices in their classrooms. Restorative justice and restorative justice

practices have many definitions and interpretations but lack a universal definition (González,

2016). For this study, the researcher will use González's (2012) definition of restorative justice

and King Lund et al.'s (2021) definition of restorative justice practices. Restorative justice is

defined by González (2012) as:

   An approach to discipline that engages all parties in a balanced practice that brings

   together all people impacted by an issue of behavior. It allows students, teachers,

   families, schools, and communities to resolve conflict, promote academic achievement,

   and address school safety. (p. 281)

Additionally, González et al. (2019) added to the definition that "it is grounded in Indigenous

traditions that emphasize interconnectedness and relationality to promote the well-being of all its

community members" (p. 208). Restorative justice practices are a process used to handle

wrongdoing within a school or community; this practice allows the victim, the offender, and the

surrounding community to discuss the hurtful action, look to heal the harm, and enable the

offender to learn from their actions while remaining in the community (King Lund et al., 2021).

Further, King Lund et al. (2021) state that restorative justice practices help students develop their

social-emotional skills, and these practices "contrasts sharply with traditional punitive, zero-

tolerance discipline models which perpetuate systemic inequality in schools, especially for

students of color" (p. 15). These practices can also be used to develop a sense of community

within a classroom or school setting. This study is interested in how teachers perceive the use of

restorative justice practices, its effectiveness for building teacher and student relationships, and learning from discipline issues.

Educators and educational leaders around the country are given a perplexing question regarding classroom management, student equity, and overall school discipline: how can schools provide a safe and conducive learning environment for all students while not excluding students with behavior issues? Simmons-Reed and Cartledge (2014) stated the purpose of "discipline in schools may be: (a) disproportionately delivered to obtain a desired effect or (b) be used to master a desirable end; that is, used to control a group or behaviors by maintaining predictability" (p. 95). Punitive, or punishment-based discipline, has been the traditional and primary means of handling student misbehaviors (Chu & Ready, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Fabelo et al., 2011; González, 2012). Still, a shift towards the practice of restorative justice has been happening more frequently in schools around the country to combat the adverse effects that students have encountered through punitive discipline measures, such as student disengagement with their learning, tardiness, absences, dropping out of school, and potentially becoming involved with the legal system (Darling-Hammond et al. 2020; González, 2012; 2016; Gregory et al., 2016). González (2016) stated that the first use of restorative justice practices in a school setting started in the 1990s in a small number of schools. She followed with data from a 2016 national survey that found schools in more than half the states, including Washington DC, have either implemented or are in the process of implementing restorative justice practices as the primary discipline model. Further, González et al. (2019) outlined that the following:

> The most commonly used terms for school-based restorative justice include: restorative
>
> interventions (Anyon et al., 2016), restorative practices (Jain et al., 2014; Kidde, 2017;
>
> Schumacher, 2014), restorative measures (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011),

restorative approaches (Fronius et al., 2016), restorative discipline (Amstutz & Mullet,

2014; Armour, 2016), and restorative justice (González, 2012). (p. 207)

While these other terms for school-based restorative justice may arise within research studies

outlined in the literature review and this case study, this dissertation will refer to all of these

terms as restorative justice practices to maintain consistency. Moreover, restorative justice

practices have expanded beyond just discipline; it is also being used to address cultural relevancy

within school curriculum for traditionally underrepresented populations, build more positive

relationships with peers and teachers, and increase student resiliency and engagement (Durlak et

al., 2011; Gholson & Robinson, 2019; González et al., 2019; Knight & Wadhwa, 2014; Lustick,

2022). However, Teasley (2014) states, "there is limited research on school-based restorative

justice programs" (p. 132). As more schools throughout the United States are making cultural

shifts to restorative justice discipline procedures, it is vital to understand how this shift impacts

school culture in the eyes of educators, especially in a post-pandemic world where teachers and

students are facing new challenges.

Punitive discipline measures have been the traditional model used by schools for

hundreds of years; this is a reactive form of punishment. When a student misbehaves or acts out

in a manner that breaks a school rule, that student receives a form of punishment but does not

typically have a voice in the process. Based on the severity of the student's action, the

consequence for the student could be loss of recess time, having their seat moved, a phone call

home, being removed from class for a period of time, suspension, or possible expulsion from

school.

The foremost action with punitive discipline emphasizes punishing the individual who

acted out rather than helping the student learn from their behavior or repairing the harm done to

another student. By the time the student receives their punishment, they may not fully

comprehend what they did to be in their current situation. This discipline system can have

various negative consequences that impact student learning. Additionally, Mayer (2002) holds

the position that specific attributes "appear to contribute to punitive school environments that

promote antisocial behavior" (p. 85). Those attributes are:

- an over-reliance on punitive methods of control

- unclear rules for student deportment

- lack of administrative support for staff, little staff support of one another, and a lack
  of staff agreement with policies

- academic failure experiences

- students lacking critical social skills that form the basis of doing well academically
  and relating positively to others, such as persistence on task, complying with requests,
  paying attention, negotiating differences, handling criticism and teasing

- a misuse of behavior management procedures

- lack of student involvement

- lack of understanding or appropriate responding to student differences (p. 85)

The installation of zero-tolerance policies has only exacerbated the severity of punitive

discipline measures (González, 2012; Skiba et al., 2006; Teasley, 2014; Thompson, 2016). Skiba

et al. (2006) described the original intention for zero-tolerance practices in schools:

Originally developed as an approach to drug enforcement, the term became widely

adopted in schools in the early 1990s as a philosophy or policy that mandates the

application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that

are intended to be applied regardless of the seriousness of behavior, mitigating

circumstances, or situation context. (p. 2)

These actions equate to a "one-strike, and you are out" policy, increasing the number of

suspensions and expulsions school districts issue. Skiba et al. (2006) continued that the primary

goal behind zero-tolerance policies was to "assume that removing students who engage in

disruptive behavior will deter others from disruption and create an improved climate for those

students who remain" (p. 2). However, according to González's (2012) findings, there is very

little, if any, evidence that proves zero-tolerance policies effectively prevent misbehavior.

Suspensions and expulsions were designed to be the nuclear option in school discipline

and be used only in the most severe situations to deter egregious negative behavior. Still, zero-

tolerance policies have increased school administrators' dependence on suspensions and

expulsions without the intended benefit. González (2012) detailed that:

Studies suggest that zero-tolerance policies have had multiple negative effects on student

behaviors and are said to increase the likelihood that students will engage in future

disciplinary problems, including school disengagement, noncompliance, tardiness,

absence, truancy, and disrespect for authority figures in school. (p. 295)

These numerous negative aspects result in students missing a significant amount of class time

and putting them at risk of falling behind.

With a possible increase in school disengagement and increased absenteeism, those

students assigned suspensions and expulsions face further challenges. For example, Balfanz et

al.'s (2014) study of 181,897 students from the state of Florida, tracking them from 9th grade in

2001 through 2008, concluded that suspensions are quite costly for the student; after one

suspension, "each additional suspension further decreases a student's odds of graduating high

school by 20%, and decreased their odds of enrolling in post-secondary schooling by 12%" (p. 9). Further, Balfanz et al. (2014) shared their findings of student data that when the sample size was in 9th grade, 27% of those students received at least one out-of-school suspension, and 40% of those students were out of school at least five days. The data presented showed that 49,112 students in this study were at risk of decreasing their odds of graduating if they were to receive one more suspension during their high school careers.

The evidence of the adverse effects of zero-tolerance policies has been staggering, but additionally, zero-tolerance policies have been directly linked to a disproportionate number of minority students, especially African American males, receiving out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. For example, Gregory et al.'s (2016) study found the following:

African American students (26.2%) were more likely to receive out-of-school suspension in response to a first infraction compared with Latinos (18%) and Whites (9.9%). This disparity held when accounting for other risk factors. For instance, African American ninth graders were 31% more likely to receive a discretionary discipline referral compared with White students when student characteristics were taken into account (e.g., socioeconomic status, academic test scores, and number of days absent). Discipline encounters were also not uncommon for Latino students. Over the 6 years they were followed, almost 65% of Latino students encountered some type of disciplinary action. (p. 326)

Additionally, Hirschfield's (2018) findings establish that "black students who violate school rules are more often subject to out-of-school suspensions, which heighten their risk of arrest and increase the odds that once accused of delinquency, they'll be detained, formally processed, and institutionalized for probation violations" (p. 11). Administrators' reliance on out-of-school

suspensions and expulsions can place a high risk of funneling students toward the school-to-prison pipeline.

In recent years, with a lack of evidence showing the effectiveness of punitive discipline methods, school administrators across the country have been under scrutiny to improve statistical data regarding the number of suspensions and expulsions issued to students. Zero-tolerance policies, which were designed at first to make schools safer, have produced little-to-no evidence that they create a safer school system or improve student behavior (Advancement Project, 2005). Balfanz et al. (2014) present arguments to emphasize that:

> The exclusion of students from school for disciplinary reasons are directly related to lower attendance rates, increased course failures, and can set a student on a path of disengagement from school that will keep them from receiving a high school diploma and further affect their chances of enrolling in the post-secondary schooling and realizing many life-long career opportunities. (p. 1)

To counter the harmful effects of punitive discipline, restorative justice systems have been introduced in numerous school districts around the country.

Restorative justice reforms within schools allow a replacement practice to counter the negative effect of zero-tolerance and punitive discipline. Sumner et al. (2010) explained that:

> Proponents of restorative justice have begun to promote school-based restorative justice as an alternative to zero-tolerance policies. Restorative justice is a set of principles and practices grounded in the values of showing respect, taking responsibility, and strengthening relations. When harm occurs, restorative justice focuses on the repair of harm and prevention of re-occurrence. (p. 2)

Teachers and administrators working together to shift to restorative justice practices are developing a solution for students to partake in understanding their behavior issues, why it was not appropriate, and working through the action to find a solution. Students can take ownership of the new process and learn from their mistakes. The goal is to help them not repeat the same mistake in the future. The student gets to feel that they are part of finding a solution rather than feeling that they are being talked down to and just receiving punishment for their actions.

The effects of restorative justice practices in schools have been shown to positively affect school settings when schools effectively implement the new procedure. González's (2012) report showed that schools in 11 different states which shifted from punitive discipline to restorative justice saw a dramatic improvement in suspension, expulsion, attendance, and graduation rates across school districts in multiple states. With those positive outcomes keeping students in the classroom, Armour's (2013) review of early findings suggests that "restorative justice can have a significant impact of redirecting the school-to-prison pipeline" (p. 14). In addition to improvement in those areas previously mentioned, Gregory et al.'s (2016) study concluded that students who participated in restorative conversations felt their teachers showed more respect towards them in school, and those students had better relationships with those teachers.

Trust is critical for student buy-in with teachers and the school they attend. Amemiya et al. (2020) found that students who trusted their teachers and school system became more engaged in the classroom after restorative practices were used with classroom discipline. Students who lacked trust in their teachers did not see any improvement in their future outcomes despite partaking in restorative practices and having a consequence assigned. Similarly, students with high trust in their teachers but not the school administration became less engaged in their

learning after restorative conversations and discipline took place. These results emphasize that whole school buy-in is critical for success when implementing restorative justice practices.

Studies showing the effects of restorative justice on reducing the number of suspensions and expulsions have been positive, but research has suggested additional areas to explore. Gregory et al. (2016) started their journal article by stating that "little is known about the experience of students in classrooms utilizing restorative practices" (p. 325). The study further noted that if there is a different range of implementation of restorative practices in classroom settings, that will change the effectiveness of the practice. Research on the effectiveness of restorative justice has shown positive outcomes in curbing future negative behavior, with an overall reduction of school suspensions and expulsions (González, 2012; Thompson, 2016; Watts & Robertson, 2022; Weaver & Swank, 2020). In contrast, time and time again, punitive discipline has been shown to be ineffective at curbing future negative behavior (Advancement Project, 2005; Chu & Ready, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Beyond discipline issues that arise in schools, administrators and teachers are looking for ways to engage students in their learning and create more buy-in for students. Traditionally, American education has not considered the viewpoints of underrepresented student populations and has even gone as far as offensive stereotypes in student curricula. Gholson and Robinson (2019) reported on math curricula in multiple districts around the United States that built inappropriate and painful historical aspects into elementary school math word problems. These word problems covered various topics, such as asking students to calculate the amount of cotton enslaved individuals needed to pick, how many times whipped an enslaved person would accumulate in their lifetime, and the number of deaths slave ships would expect during the Middle Passage. Looking for a way to correct these injustices, Gholson and Robinson (2019)

designed a curriculum focusing on restorative justice practices to integrate into classrooms to allow all students to see themselves as mathematicians and valuable members of the school. This curriculum focused on connections between mathematics and social justice, connections to personal identity, and individual practices. These changes in the traditional curriculum showed how restorative justice practices could be integrated into the school for increased student learning and improved inclusion and did not need to be connected to school discipline issues.

Rationale & Significance of the Study

Numerous studies have shown the positive impacts a restorative justice discipline plan can offer a school if run effectively (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; González, 2012; Gregory et al., 2016; Hulvershorn et al., 2018; McCluskey et al., 2008; Schiff, 2018; Sumner et al., 2010; Thompson, 2016; Watts & Robertson, 2022). While existing research has shown a positive impact, most of these studies were conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis of Thompson's (2016) article "*Eliminating Zero Tolerance Policies in School: Miami-Dade County Public Schools' Approach*" studied how this system worked for several school years in Miami-Dade Public Schools. Before this system was implemented, Miami-Dade Public Schools had an excessive number of out-of-school suspensions, causing students to get in trouble outside of school and fall under the traditional school-to-prison pipeline. Miami-Dade shifted to a positive behavior support system, putting in restorative practices and other methods to help students who acted out in class. By doing this, over five years, the data showed that student suspensions were down by 44%, and student arrests were down by 69% in the largest public school system in Florida. Despite the positive outcomes of the use of restorative justice practices, some questions arise about implementation and effectiveness.

The existing research shows there is a gap to explore in how teachers view the effectiveness of restorative justice practices post-pandemic. For example, since the daily school schedule has returned to normal, how do teachers view the cultural shift of restorative justice that impacts student discipline and classroom behavior? How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of restorative justice in their classroom settings? Finally, how do teachers incorporate restorative justice practices in their classrooms?

In contrast to Thompson's (2016) study, Short et al.'s (2018) study shares that there is a lack of information regarding how teachers view this practice in a natural school setting and wanted to explore some aspects of teacher perception of restorative justice practices. Their study tracked and interviewed five teachers over five years who worked at a school where restorative justice practices were being used. During the study, the teachers were interviewed several times to share the positive and negative aspects of using restorative justice in the school setting. Still, the authors did not specifically ask how those teachers view the effectiveness of restorative justice as the primary method of handling school discipline or how teachers incorporate restorative practices in their classrooms. The study also excluded interviewing students and asking how they perceive the effectiveness of restorative justice. With relatively few studies on teacher and student perceptions, more extensive studies need to be conducted to understand better the perception of restorative justice practice in the eyes of teachers and students.

One of the few existing studies on student perception of restorative justice practices showed positive results on the student side but left out teacher perception when asking the teachers what led them to use a restorative conversation with the student. In Gregory et al.'s (2016) study, students shared their feelings on how the restorative conversations went, asking, was the conversation productive, and if the student felt respected and heard by that teacher or

administrator. In addition, teachers were surveyed with a simple form asking what led to the

discussion happening. While the study concluded that students participating in restorative

conversations felt they had better relationships with teachers who utilized restorative practices,

they emphasized the need for further studies on student and teacher feelings about the

effectiveness and long-term impacts of restorative justice practices in schools. That statement by

Gregory et al. (2016) and the challenges that schools are facing, such as increased negative

student behavior, worse student mental health, and higher teacher turnover since the pandemic

(Prothero, 2023a; Prothero, 2023b; Will, 2022) is what led to this study's research and research

questions.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine teacher perceptions of

restorative justice practices in the post-global pandemic classroom using semi-structured

interviews. The administration at the middle school where this study was implemented mandated

the use of restorative practices for all staff members starting in the fall of 2022. Therefore, the

researcher wanted to interview teachers across multiple grade levels (6-8), different education

levels, and those with differing years of experience to understand each person's perceptions of

restorative justice practices. Specifically, the researcher wanted to know how teachers define

restorative justice practices, how they incorporate it into their classrooms, how they perceive its

effects through discipline, and the impact on their relationships with students. Since all

participants had at least one year of experience using these practices and seeing numerous

outcomes, the researcher felt all the participants were qualified to share their experiences, which

would connect to the study's theoretical framework of Norm Theory.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework lens used for this study is *Norm Theory,* which was first

brought forward by Daniel Kahneman and Dale T. Miller in 1986. In Kahneman and Miller's

(1986) article *Norm Theory: Comparing Reality to its Alternative*, the authors state that norm

theory is "applied in analyses of the enhanced emotional response to events that have abnormal

causes, of the generation of predication and inferences from the observations of behavior, and the

role of norms in causal questions and answer" and further stating that, "norms are computed after

the event rather than in advance" (p. 136). This theory examines how individuals view an event

after the individual knows the outcome. For example, does that person view the event outcome

that occurred with regret, or are they happy with the outcome? Was the decision made by the

individual within their normal scope of behavior, or was it a decision that was not typical of the

individual? The rationale for selecting Norm Theory as the theoretical framework was because

this theory examines how individuals view events after they happen through backward thinking

and to understand those perceptions after the individual has experienced them. In addition, this

theoretical framework allowed the researcher to focus primarily on the end outcome, which led

to a teacher's perception of the effectiveness of restorative justice practices.

Norm Theory looks at individuals' choices and feelings of regret through action or

inaction. Kahneman and Miller (1986) ran a series of experiments tracking how and why

individuals feel regret toward either their action or inaction towards a situation. The experiment

had individuals answer which of two imaginary people being put in four different situations

would have more regret or anger toward an outcome, where misfortune is the primary outcome.

The four situations to predict outcomes were:

1. That outcomes that are easily undone by constructing an alternative scenario tend to elicit strong affective reactions.

2. That outcomes that follow exceptional actions—and therefore seem abnormal—will elicit stronger affective reactions than outcomes of routine actions.

3. That people are most apt to regret actions that are out of character.

4. That consequences of actions evoke stronger emotional responses than consequences of failures to act. (p. 145)

The outcome of the experiments fell in line with what Kahneman and Miller hypothesized. First, those individuals will have a stronger adverse reaction toward event decisions that they would label abnormal compared to routine. Second, those individuals will regret more decisions that are out of character compared to their norm. Finally, those individuals will have more significant regret toward the consequences of action compared to the consequences of not acting.

Norm Theory analyzes situational outcomes through three different norm lenses that Kahneman and Miller (1986) outlined in their article. The norms that people experience can be simplified into three types, "social norms: what society thinks or does. Subjective norms: what those important to you think or do. Personal norms: what you think and do" (Manning, 2021, 1:00). How individuals view themselves will impact which norm they place a higher emphasis on. Manning's (2021) Virginia Tech lecture on Norm Theory outlines that the higher an individual's self-esteem, the more emphasis that person will place on personal norms with less emphasis on subjective and social norms; individuals with low self-esteem will place a higher emphasis on social norms due to wanting to fit in. Individual self-esteem varies for all people, and individuals will shift their emphasis within these three norms depending on what they are feeling and experiencing.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of using restorative justice practices in their classrooms. Since all teachers in this case study have been using restorative justice practices for a minimum of one year, each teacher has created their own norms utilizing this system. In addition, every teacher in the building has had positive and negative experiences using restorative justice practices; through those norms, each teacher has developed perceptions of these practices, such as how a teacher would define what restorative justice practices are, how they use them in the classroom, if the systems have achieved the desired outcome, and what impact they have had on student relationships. Based on this information, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers define restorative justice practices?

2. How do teachers use restorative justice-based instructional strategies in their classrooms?

3. How do teachers perceive the use of restorative justice practices as a discipline method?

4. How does the use of restorative justice practices impact teacher and student relationships?

Definition of Terms

Community Circle. "An approach to community building that creates a space for participants with varying values, experiences, and backgrounds to discuss a particular topic. Everyone is encouraged to engage in constructive dialogue, creating new understanding of the topic for participants" (Restorative Justice Practices at UCSF, n.d.).

Punitive Discipline. Punishment for an individual's action when rules are broken. This

type of discipline typically involves someone in a place of authority assigning a specific

type of punishment to an individual (Mullet, 2014).

Restorative Conversation. "One-on-one conversations between a teacher and a student

using the restorative justice questions. Such interventions are used when the issue or

behavior correlates with the first step of the discipline ladder" (González, 2012, p. 331).

Restorative Justice. "An approach to discipline that engages all parties in a balanced

practice that brings together all people impacted by an issue of behavior. It allows

students, teachers, families, schools, and communities to resolve conflict, promote

academic achievement, and address school safety" (González, 2012, p. 281). González et

al. (2019) add to the definition that "it is grounded in Indigenous traditions that

emphasize interconnectedness and relationality to promote the well-being of all its

community members" (p. 208).

Restorative Justice Practices. This is a practice used to handle wrong doing within a

school or community. This practice allows the victim, offender, and the surrounding

community to discuss the hurtful action that arose. The goal is to allow the one hurt to

share why it was hurtful and for the offender to learn from their action, while remaining

in the community (King Lund et al., 2021).

Restorative Practice. This is the school-based term for restorative justice, and it focuses

on healing harm rather than traditional punitive disciple (i.e., the US criminal justice

system) (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005).

School-to-Prison-Pipeline. "The increased reliance on more severe consequences in

response to student disruption has also resulted in an increase of referrals to the juvenile

justice system for infractions that were once handled in school" (Skiba et al., 2006, p. 9).

This has also been called the 'cradle-to-prison pipeline' most frequently felt by minority

students who live in impoverished and underfunded communities (Alexander, 2012;

Fabelo et al., 2011).

Zero-tolerance Policies. One that "results in mandatory expulsion of any student who

commits one or more specified offenses" (The Department of Education's Office for

Civil Rights, 2019).

Subjectivity & Researcher Positionality

The researcher in this study has been a teacher for 10 years and has used restorative

justice practices in their classroom for almost their entire career. They believe that these

practices are effective and allow for student voices to be heard, whether handling a discipline

issue or trying to build strong relationships. Additionally, the researcher spent the majority of

their career working at inner-city schools and serving underrepresented populations. They have

seen how a punitive discipline system has disenfranchised students through excessive

punishments, resulting in loss of class time through classroom removals and suspensions for

minute infractions. While working at inner-city schools, the researcher used restorative justice

practices in the classroom to build relationships, promote student voices, and put healing at the

forefront when a discipline issue arose rather than revenge. Through the use of these techniques,

the researcher had the lowest number of classroom removals each school year, and typically the

next closest teacher would have dozens more in the same time frame. These statistics led the

researcher to believe this system is highly effective and should be widely adopted in schools

nationwide. Due to this bias, the researcher ensured that the questions within the instrument were

open-ended and did not lead or pressure participants toward the answer they wanted to hear.

Additionally, the researcher included all teacher responses that were negative or critical of using restorative justice practices in schools. Since this research is on teacher perception, the researcher felt that any type of censoring would be immoral and could make the study invalid.

Starting in the fall of 2022, the researcher changed schools and began a teaching position where this case study occurred. The rationale for selecting this location for a case study was because, at the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year, the building administrators implemented a restorative justice practices program to help students as they adjusted back to the normal setting of school post COVID-19 pandemic, and all teachers and administrators would be required to use them. Therefore, the researcher felt this location would be ideal for their study, as they would see first-hand how teachers and administrators adapted and adjusted to these changes. By the time the study took place in the fall of 2023, all staff members would have had at minimum one year of experience using these practices. Realizing that a potential bias or conflict could arise when interviewing coworkers, the researcher ensured that they only asked for volunteers for the study, confirming that all participant identities were kept confidential and that interviews would be conducted over Zoom. The rationale for that was to allow participants the comfort of conducting the interview where they felt most comfortable, where potentially in-person interviews conducted at school may place pressure on participants only to report positive perceptions of restorative justice practices. Additionally, all participants were given a copy of their interview transcript for a member check, and participants were allowed to withdraw at any time.

The school in this case study created a restorative practices committee, called the Climate Committee, to help staff members become more comfortable using restorative justice practices in the classroom. This committee was made up of one building administrator and two teachers who

had been in the district for several years. The goal of this committee was to help with

professional development training, one-on-one coaching with teachers, and providing classroom

materials for community circles during study hall time. To remain impartial and help participants

feel comfortable sharing both positive and negative responses, the researcher declined all

invitations to be part of the Climate Committee until this study and dissertation were complete.

Chapter II. Literature Review

Traditional school-wide exclusionary discipline tactics are costly for students' potential

academic success and place stress on school administrators and teachers to find ways to keep

students in the classroom. When outlining the school-wide effects of a school's discipline policy,

Balfanz et al. (2014) stated that:

Aside from the obvious consequences for individual students, and their contributions to

their larger communities, any policies that serve to increase student exclusion from the

schooling environment are also likely to be detrimental to the many efforts and resources

that district and school administrators invest towards increasing their graduation rates and

raising achievement levels. (p. 1)

The issue with the school-wide use of zero-tolerance policies is that there has been almost no

evidence to show that these policies are effective (González, 2012). As administrators are

looking to combat the adverse effects of punitive discipline, this leads to more emphasis on

effective classroom management for teachers.

In today's classrooms, teachers are expected to have excellent classroom management

skills to keep students engaged with lessons and in the classroom to achieve their potential while

also including social-emotional learning (SEL) components. The perception of effective

classroom management has changed over the years, with Evertson and Harris (1999) stating, "the

meaning of the term classroom management has changed from describing discipline practices

and behavioral interventions to serving as more holistic descriptor of teachers' actions in

orchestrating supportive learning environments and building community" (p. 60). Through the

proper use of restorative justice practices in classrooms, students have increased attendance,

reduced the number of out-of-school suspensions, spent more time in the classroom learning,

believe their voices are being heard, and are more respected by their teachers (González, 2012; Gregory et al., 2016; McCluskey et al., 2008; Schiff, 2018; Sumner et al., 2010).

The purpose of this study was to examine the gap in the literature regarding teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of restorative justice practices in the classroom setting. Current gaps show that further research should be conducted on teacher perception of restorative justice as schools around the United States implement this cultural shift toward school and classroom discipline practices, as well as instructional strategies (Gregory et al., 2016; Short et al., 2008). This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers define restorative justice practices?

2. How do teachers use restorative justice-based instructional strategies in their classrooms?

3. How do teachers perceive the use of restorative justice practices as a discipline method?

4. How does the use of restorative justice practices impact teacher and student relationships?

The studies for this literature review were collected using the University of Findlay's online search library search engines, specifically Academic Search Complete, Education Source, and APA PsycInfo, in the fall of 2022, the spring of 2023, and again in the spring of 2024. Additionally, Google Scholar and ResearchGate was used as an outside source of the university. Search terms used were as follows: 'restorative justice,' 'restorative conversations,' 'restorative practices,' 'school-to-prison pipeline,' 'punitive discipline,' 'classroom management,' 'social-emotional learning,' 'diversity equity and inclusion,' 'schools,' 'education,' 'k-12,' and 'zero-

tolerance policies.' A review was conducted of the initial studies that came up with these terms

and studies found within the initial search.

The researcher set the parameters for all journal articles to be peer-reviewed, full text

needed to be available, articles needed to be from 2012 or newer, and from the United States.

Through these parameters, 36 different results came back. Due to a low article return rate, the

researcher then included Canada and the United Kingdom in the search results while removing

the parameter of full text being available. This increased the number of results to 637. For

articles the researcher was interested in but could not find through the University of Findlay's

Academic Search Complete, they searched for those titles to see if they were available on Google

Scholar or ResearchGate. Upon reviewing articles for this literature review, two studies were

mentioned several times that were slightly older than the initial parameters set—one from 2011

and one from 2008. The researcher included those in this study due to their relevance to other

studies.

This literature review will outline five distinct topics to aid in understanding the research

questions of this study and the factors that might lead to certain teacher perceptions. The five

topics that will be outlined in this chapter are:

1. The history of restorative justice practices in schools

2. How teachers, administrators, and students define restorative justice practices in

    schools

3. Teachers' perceptions of restorative justice practices

4. Restorative justice practices within instructional strategies and curriculum

5. Restorative justice practices effects on student perceptions of school and influence on

    teacher/student relationships.

This comprehensive review was conducted and checked several times to see if additional studies needed to be included.

The History of Restorative Justice Practices in Schools

González's (2012) quantitative case study examined the setup, installation, development, and impact of the restorative justice practices program at North High School in Denver, Colorado. The study did not have a theoretical framework or research questions but was guided by a plan that schools should follow if they are looking to implement restorative justice practices in their schools. It should be expected that it would take three to five years to implement and should be guided by five key areas:

1. Gaining commitment from the school community.

2. Developing a clear institutional vision with short, medium, and long term goals.

3. Establishing responsive and effective practice.

4. Developing policies that align with restorative practice to transition into a whole school approach, rather than a program-based model.

5. Investing in an ongoing system of growth and development for all members of the school community. (p. 304)

The data collected in this study went over various student statistics, including the number of tardies, classroom removals, in-school and out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and restorative conversations issued. The North High School's office provided this data, but how the data was analyzed was left out of the study.

One of the primary reasons Denver Public Schools was modifying their discipline procedures to include restorative justice practices in their district was the rise in suspensions. Between the 2000-2001 school year and the 2004-2005 school year, the Denver Public Schools

saw in-school suspensions rise from 1,846 to 4,859, and out-of-school suspensions rose from 9,846 to 13,487. In addition, most out-of-school suspensions ranged from five to 10 days, meaning there were between 67,435 to 134,870 days of instruction lost.

Before the case study at North High School, the initial system rollout of restorative justice practices showed dramatic improvements for students. González (2012) found that 15% of the referred students to the restorative justice practices program had an 87% reduction in office referrals in the second semester of the school year compared to the first semester. In addition, 13% of those students had a 92% reduction in out-of-school suspensions in the second semester compared to the first semester. Additionally, those students positively increased attendance and tardy numbers.

One of the primary findings of this study was that González (2012) believes that "the use of a full-time restorative justice coordinator who is an employee of the district, not an outside consultant of project contractor, promotes increased commitment from the school community" (p. 305). This made students and staff feel a stronger connection with the restorative justice coordinator. For example, when an issue arises for a student, the restorative justice coordinator would ask, "What happened? What are the effects? Who is responsible? What part of this problem are you responsible for? How will the situation be repaired?" (p. 331). This system and the coordinator coming from a natural stance allowed students to reflect on the issues.

Additional findings from this case study showed significant improvement from the first semester to the second semester. Central office data showed that 41% of students participating in restorative conversations improved their attendance by 44%, 37% improved behavior through a 94% reduction in office referrals, and 30% improved school behavior, noticed by an 88% reduction in out-of-school suspensions. Across the five-year time frame of the case study, North

High School's out-of-school suspensions went down by 34%, expulsions reduced by 82%, and referrals to law enforcement reduced by 72% from the start of the implementation. In addition, over the five years, more than 830 formal restorative conversations were held. This study showed the potential positive impact of restorative justice practices on a school.

Like the previous study, Weaver and Swank (2020) conducted a case study, this time qualitative, and examined the implementation of a restorative justice system at the middle school level. The middle school was not identified but is in the southeastern United States and is part of a large public school district. The researchers stated that teachers and administrators had become frustrated that students were not improving their behavior after receiving punitive discipline for their actions. These comments led Weaver and Swank (2020) to a single research question, "what are the experiences of a middle school students and staff who engage in RJ discipline practices?" (p. 2).

The study participants included three teachers, one administrator, and six middle school students. The data collected for this study was face-to-face interviews, observations, and reviewing discipline documents. Observations were conducted in classrooms, shared spaces, and a professional development session for the staff on using restorative practices. The reviewed documents were respect agreements signed by teachers and students, restorative letters between students, and a review of the book *Discipline that Restores* since that was the primary text used for the teachers' professional development. Interview and observation data were transcribed and then coded to find emerging themes. Weaver and Swank (2020) stated they used open coding and analytic coding but did not state what coding system they used.

The findings by Weaver and Swank (2020) were categorized into five themes. Those themes are different approach, restorative justice activities, relationships, meaningful

consequences, and expectations. The different approach was a specific idea of integrating

restorative justice into the classroom to find a solution to the ineffectiveness of punitive

discipline. The teachers and administrator in this study have positive connotations with

restorative justice and felt that if implemented correctly, it could help resolve some of the

negative behavior issues the school had been facing.

Teachers implemented restorative justice activities into their curriculum by creating a

respect contract at the beginning of the school year. For example, the teachers in this study

started class by discussing what respect is, how it is earned, why it is valued, and what it takes to

earn it. Then, with the students participating in the process, they created four respect categories,

"student respecting students, student respecting facilities, teacher respecting the student, and

student respecting the teacher" (Weaver & Swank, 2020, p. 4). The researchers found that this

created a positive classroom culture that carried outside the classroom because individuals felt

valued to share their ideas through mutual respect.

Letter writing was another curriculum strategy used to implement restorative justice in

the classroom and repair harm. For example, if a student got into an argument, was bullying, or

had a conflict with another student, the students would be assigned to write a letter to each other

to explain what had happened and how it made them feel. Students would then swap and read

each other's letters. Students reached the point where they talked about appreciating the

opportunity to write these. One student said, "when you write a letter you kind of realize in your

head like, oh I should have [said or done] this…give you time to think about it, reflect on it" (p.

4). The teachers and administrator found that this practice allowed students to put themselves in

someone else's shoes and realize how their actions hurt.

The relationship findings were a primary factor in making restorative justice work in the middle school. For restorative justice to be effective in a school setting, the students need to have buy-in and believe their teachers care about them. Students created a group mindset through peer mediation and accountability. Teachers and students built stronger relationships through mutual respect and peer accountability. After some time, students held themselves to high expectations and would keep their peers accountable too. This led to Weaver and Swank (2020) sharing how the staff switched to meaningful consequences rather than traditional punishment. Student voices were brought into the conversations, and connections were made about why the correction was being made. One teacher brought up the example of a student throwing trash on the ground and the teacher calling them over to explain why that behavior is not okay, and it is everyone's responsibility to take care of their environment. The student understood and helped clean up other trash on the way to their next class.

The final observation that Weaver and Swank (2020) found was having high expectations for students when building the classroom environment. Teachers let students know from the beginning of the year how school is designed to develop students into better individuals and the teachers would hold them accountable in a loving manner all year. These high expectations and showing students respect was found critical from the beginning of the year to let the students know the purpose of being at school, which is to be developed into better people while having adults there who care about them.

Similar to the González's (2012) study, the findings of this study showed how restorative justice could be integrated into the classroom curriculum and the benefits that can come from it. Unfortunately, the study only lasted five months, and not everyone in the school used this process. Still, over time, schools can continue to make improvements with discipline issues while

blending restorative justice into the curriculum. Studies that last longer, while more time-consuming, can lead to richer research. The following study tracked discipline referrals over several years to see what impact restorative justice practices could have on out-of-school suspensions and expulsions.

Thompson's (2016) study examined if restorative justice practices and positive behavior supports could reduce the reliance on zero-tolerance policies and punitive discipline in the Miami-Dade County Public School system. As Florida schools were required by law to use zero-tolerance policies starting in January 2003, student suspension and arrest numbers rose. To help combat these rising numbers, Miami-Dade County Public Schools created a Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) system in 2003 and then a restorative justice practice in 2009. This study did not have specific research questions but led Thompson (2016) to explore the following:

1. Can a system that implements restorative justice and positive behavior support systems help reduce the need for zero-tolerance policies? (p. 337)

2. Are zero-tolerance policies effective at setting students up for success of deterring negative behavior in schools? (p. 340)

This quantitative study examined student discipline numbers across the district, tracking out-of-school suspensions, in-school-suspensions, and arrest rates between the 2005-2006 school year through 2013-2014. The data was collected from the school's central office, and Thompson (2016) did not use any specific data analysis but only tracked specific numbers over the years to show the decreases in student discipline referrals, suspensions, and arrests.

The findings of this study showed a dramatic decrease in the number of discipline issues from the 2005-2006 school year to the 2013-2014 school year. The statistical data showed that Miami-Dade "decreased duplicated outdoor suspensions by 44%, duplicated indoor suspensions

by 51%, unduplicated outdoor suspensions by 41%, and unduplicated indoor suspensions by

48%" (p. 348). Despite these improvements, both Hispanic and African American students were

disproportionately affected by school arrests and suspensions compared to their Caucasian peers.

Due to a significant turnaround, Miami-Dade won the Broad Prize for Urban Education for being

the United States' most improved urban school district in 2012. Two years later, the

superintendent won the National Superintendent of the Year in 2014. On top of discipline issue

improvements, Miami-Dade County Public Schools was recognized for increasing their high

student achievement for Hispanic and African American students. Graduation rates rose, state

testing scores improved, and more students were taking college preparation exams like the ACT

and SAT. These statistical improvements led Thompson (2016) to believe that zero-tolerance

policies do negatively affect students' mental health, optimistic view of school, and the chance of

success in life outside of school.

       With the previously outlined studies exploring specific school districts implementing

restorative justice practices, Darling-Hammond et al.'s (2020) study examined all the published

quantitative data in the United States they could find to investigate the effectiveness of

restorative justice in schools across grades K-12. This quantitative study did not have a

theoretical framework or specific research questions. Still, it looked to examine the challenge of

implementing restorative justice and examine the last two decades of restorative justice practices

in schools, specifically looking at suspensions, student aggression, bullying, and the impact on

racial disparities in schools.

       Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) first interviewed several restorative justice experts on

what areas to explore and what data to focus on. Next, the authors used ProQuest Social Sciences

from the University of California, an online library of scholarly texts, and Google Scholar to find

all their studies. They use the search terms "restorative justice" and "schools." Finally, the

authors took all the existing quantitative data and ran regression analyses, non-parametric

models, t tests, and analyses of variance to examine the effectiveness of restorative justice in

schools on a larger scale.

The findings were mixed across several categories, but one category that showed

significant improvement for students was restorative justice's effects on out-of-school

suspension and expulsion. Running the data sets, the researchers found that numerous large

school districts in the United States had close to a 50% reduction in the number of suspensions

and expulsions issued, specifically public school districts in Denver, Los Angeles, and others on

the east coast. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) stated that schools that saw the most significant

decreases were those that had spent three to five years implementing restorative practices.

Additionally, all the data they calculated showed that restorative justice in schools reduced the

racial disparities in discipline for minority students, especially African American and Latino

students.

The data found that most schools saw a significant reduction in student aggression and

fighting, with one district in Illinois having an 85% reduction in violent acts since using

restorative justice in their school. A school in San Bernardino, CA, had been using restorative

justice for five years. Through a chi-squared analysis, Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) found a

significantly lower rate of violent acts in schools post-implementation of restorative justice, $p <$

.001. While a majority of the findings showed that violent acts in school decreased, bullying was

an area that had mixed results. Reviewing the statistical data from a district in Texas found:

> Overall, assignment to treatment did not predict less bullying, suggesting that RJ *training*
>
> did not have a statistically significant negative impact on bullying victimization.

However, students who reported that their teachers used *more restorative practices*

experienced statistically significantly less physical bullying (p < .01) and statistically

significantly less cyber bullying (p < .001). (p. 301)

This information led Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) back to their overall conclusion that

schools that have implemented restorative justice in their schools for three to five years have

shown better results than schools that are just starting with the practice.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) concluded that the statistical data showed that restorative

justice could effectively curb negative student behavior and bullying, decrease reliance on

suspensions, and improve school climate. However, they saw potential flaws in restorative

justice in helping improve academic performance. The authors stated that this might be due to

the increased workload on teachers to use restorative practices in their classes and having less

time to go over class content. They concluded that schools that properly implement restorative

justice over extended periods find the practice more effective. Schools looking to implement

restorative justice need to be patient and be clear and concise with how they want the practice to

look in their school. While the concern of increasing a teacher's workload is something to worry

about and could lead to potential negative perceptions of restorative justice practices, the use of

restorative justice practices and other programs to help students has shown great potential. The

subsequent study examined how restorative justice practices could work with a similar program.

Hulvershorn et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study on how the combination of

restorative practices and social and emotional learning (SEL) can lead schools to have a more

favorable climate for students and staff. This study examined what effective restorative practices

and SEL looks like in schools and considerations for implementation. The authors of this study

incorporated three theoretical frameworks: the continuum of RP, the social discipline window,

and Morrison's (2004) hierarchy of restorative practices. Each of these frameworks allowed for a

specific lens to be looked through to understand the significance and importance of restorative

practices and SEL for students. The following research questions guided the study:

1. Have school practitioners applied RP?

2. What are the factors to consider in the implementation of RP?

3. Can an understanding of students' social and emotional learning needs enhance our
   overall understanding and assessment of RP? (p. 111)

The participants of this study are in school leadership roles, are considered experts in both

restorative practices and SEL, and specifically use both restorative practices and SEL in their

buildings. Unfortunately, the researchers did not state what schools they were explicitly at or

their location. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews tracked

administrator perception of restorative practices and SEL, what is needed for these programs to

be successful, and pitfalls that educational leaders could fall into if not implemented properly.

The interview data were coded for trends, but it was not stated how it was explicitly coded.

Hulvershorn et al. (2018) findings concluded that restorative practices and SEL can

effectively be blended for students to develop the necessary skills to cope with stressful

situations that life throws at them. These stressful situations include students being overwhelmed

with classes, conflicts between students or teachers, and general issues that can arise throughout

a typical school year. The perception of positive student impact was significant, according to

those interviewed.

For schools to succeed in implementing restorative practices and SEL, a fundamental

change is needed within schools to make these changes both positive and successful for students

and staff. First, school staff must have buy-in and a "restorative mindset" to create a stronger

foundation. Through school staff setting a stronger foundation, students have an easier time

buying into the cultural shift they are experiencing. This led Hulvershorn et al. (2018) to outline

four key steps to help schools that are considering a change to start including restorative

practices and SEL into the curriculum.

1. Willing to see the humanity in every situation: conflicts are less about behavior and rules

    which are broken and more about the humans and their needs.

2. Trust others, especially youth: by expecting that students will rise to the occasion of

    solving their own problems they teach students that they are wise and capable.

3. They are willing to be wrong. Modeling what it looks like to own our own mistakes is

    one of the greatest ways to teach accountability and to sustain relationships.

4. They are creative: they come up with ways to make time for circles, to have restorative

    chats their groups need, and to model restorative language, even when it seems like they

    do not have enough time or tools. They view the obstacles to implementation as

    challenges to solve. (p. 120)

School staff members having an open mindset and trust in the practices can be a significant

factor in the successful implementation of restorative practices and SEL.

      With trust and open-mindedness being essential for success, Watts and Robertson (2022)

conducted a quantitative research study to examine if restorative justice practices, training, and

acceptance by school staff would be an effective model for resolving conflict in high school. The

study examined two high schools located in an urban Midwest city during the 2016-2017 and

2017-2018 school years. The established high school had been using restorative justice practices

for 12 years, while the comparison school had just implemented the process for the 2016-2017

school year. While there were no research questions for the study, the authors developed two hypotheses:

1. Hypothesize that incidences of tardiness, absenteeism, and disciplinary suspension will be lower for all students in a building with established restorative practices than without it.

2. Hypothesize that the difference will persist even during the period immediately after new restorative practices services begin to be offered to similar students, due to the time required for a restorative culture to become established. (p. 128)

The researchers reviewed data provided by the school district's central office. Watts and Robertson (2022) looked at two measures for students between the two high schools to measure the size and significance differences. The first was truancy for students, specifically, the number of times a student was late to class and the number of days absent. The second was discipline issues, specifically out-of-school suspension numbers and the number of office referrals. Student names and personal identification markers were removed. However, the study still tracked student gender, age, race, homeless status, free and reduced lunch status, and if they were a native English speaker. The data was calculated using descriptive statistics.

In line with the previous four studies mentioned, Watts and Robertson's (2022) findings were students in the school with established restorative services had lower average numbers of suspensions, absences, and students being late to class than the comparison school. The comparison group data was not shared because the authors said they wanted to focus on data from the school where restorative justice practices had been established. The differences between schools were statistically significant and carried across the studied years—this information aligned with the first research hypothesis. Watts and Robertson (2022) believe that the

comparison group, which just started implementing during the 2016-2017 school year, could have data that aligns with the established school once strong restorative justice culture is established. How long it takes for a school to develop strong restorative justice culture will vary across locations.

The second hypothesis was the comparison school would have a decrease in the differences from the control school during their second year of implementation. The data analysis "found no consistent change in the results pattern between the first and second academic years of the study" (p. 135). The researchers did not find evidence as to why there was no significant decrease in tardies, absences, suspensions, and discipline referrals that second year at the control school.

Watts and Robertson (2022) did acknowledge there were limitations to the study. First, they stated that since this study was done at a midsized, urban high school, the results might not apply to rural or suburban schools and schools with additional grades. Second, they lacked data that gave a quantifiable measure of the restorative culture developed in both schools. Third, they felt restricted by the time and data that was available to them. Additionally, having two years' worth of data only gave them a snapshot of the total picture of what restorative justice practices can do within a school and its culture. One significant flaw from the study that stood out was only including data from the school that had been using restorative justice practices rather than including the control school. The lack of the control data did not allow for a comparison between the two and chance to see if there was a statistical significance in the data points.

While restorative justice practices are relatively new in schools, their use continues to expand as we advance in the 21st century. The historical results of using restorative justice practices have shown success in improving the climate for students, decreasing the need for

punitive discipline, and allowing students to feel more respected (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; González, 2012; Hulvershorn et al., 2018; Thompson, 2016; Watts & Robertson, 2022). The rationale for this section in the literature review was for the reader to understand why more schools are looking to implement restorative justice practices, the benefit of using it in schools, and the areas necessary for success. The research has found that for these practices to be successful, there must be adequate time for this cultural shift to happen, and school staff must remain open-minded to the changes they are asked of (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Hulvershorn et al., 2018).

How Teachers, Administrators, and Students Define Restorative Justice Practices in Schools

Kervick et al.'s (2020) bounded, mixed method, single case study examined how teachers and parents viewed the introduction of restorative practices into an elementary school to help build upon the previous School Wide Positive Behavior Incentives and Supports (SWPBIS) implemented. Furthermore, the authors wanted to examine the findings in the first year of implementing restorative practices in an elementary school setting. Therefore, the study was based on the following research questions:

1. What are the primary processes that were utilized in the first year of RP implementation?

   - What are the structural facilitators that supported RP implementation?

2. How did RP align with existing school-based behavioral structures?

3. What are the next steps for implementation as described by participants? (p. 162)

The study took place at an elementary school in the Northeastern part of the United States. The school district had committed to implementing a district-wide comprehensive restorative justice practice plan, building upon their previously used SWPBIS systems. The reasoning was that the

previous school year saw a drastic increase in the number of office disciplinary referrals, rising

from 302 on average over three school years to 569 in the 2017-2018 school year. Moreover, that

school year, looking over office disciplinary referrals, African American students received twice

as many referrals as their Caucasian peers.

The study participants were 40 volunteer teachers and two parents who completed an

online survey at the beginning of the school year, and 27 teachers retook it at the end of the

school year. Additionally, 17 random teachers from the survey were selected to partake in a

semi-structured face-to-face interview. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and the 13

questions were developed from previous research on restorative practices and the research

questions. The data focused on how restorative practices were being introduced to the school,

teacher and student understanding of restorative practices, and their personal experiences in the

school using those practices. Data from teacher surveys were calculated with descriptive

statistics. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and focused coded.

The study's findings indicated that of the teachers who participated in the surveys, there

was significant buy-in as most teachers used circles in their classrooms and found restorative

practices to build community. Most teachers incorporated a talking piece, centerpiece, check-ins,

and questions during the circle's sessions. Additionally, most teachers used circles multiple times

per week in their classes. These circles encouraged students to have more buy-in to the process

as well. Teachers and students bought into this process more because they saw the

administration's investment in the program's success. The principal would observe and

participate in classroom circles with teachers and students. Seeing this made students and

teachers more comfortable with the process, and they understood why it was helpful. Some

teachers and parents brought up circle consistency as a bit off. Teachers did not have total

alignment on what circles would look like in each class. This created a bit of confusion for

students since each classroom procedure was slightly different. Those staff members believed a

consistent pattern would benefit everyone to follow the same rules. Teachers and administrators

felt the next step in improvement was more professional development and coaching to build

upon that years' worth of restorative practices. Next, it was brought up that creating a shared

goal plan would improve continuity. Lastly, school staff wanted additional time to collaborate

with peers to keep improving the restorative practices program.

Kervick et al. (2020) acknowledged that their study had shortcomings. The authors stated

that it was not ideal to have only two parent participants in the study. The two who did

participate were members of the school PTO (Parent-Teacher Organization) and were quite

active in the daily aspects of the school. They acknowledged that if more parents participated in

the study, they likely would not think the same way as the two who were part of the PTO. It

would be beneficial to get more parental participation to gain a broader view of the parental

perspective. Additionally, there was no data shared if there was an improvement in disciplinary

referrals. The subsequent study examined how discipline referrals would be defined while using

restorative justice practices as the foundation for the school's culture and discipline structure.

Lustick's (2020) qualitative – multi-case ethnography study examined how principals in

schools that utilize restorative justice practices make their disciplinary decisions. The theoretical

framework used in this study was Sergiovanni's (2000) concept of "systems" in the "lifeworld"

(p. 1). This framework investigates how individuals may complete their professional obligations.

Still, if mistrust and fear corrode the organization's culture, there will be negative impacts on the

systems that have been implemented. Therefore, as school leaders balance the use of restorative

justice practices and keeping safe learning environments for students and staff, this led Lustick

(2020) to a single research question:

1. How did the three principals of these small, collocated urban public schools negotiate

    disciplinary decisions given the seemingly contradictory pressures they face from internal

    and external stakeholders? (p. 3)

The study consisted of three principals, two Caucasian males, and one Asian-American female,

who led secondary schools. The schools were small, implemented restorative justice practices,

and had the lowest suspension rates in all New York City Schools. Lustick (2020) conducted

multiple semi-structured interviews with each principal and looked to see how each balanced

their belief on the effectiveness of restorative justice practices compared with punitive discipline.

The interview data was transcribed, then open In Vivo coding, followed by analytic memos and

deductive coding.

   Lustick (2020) found that all three principals have strong positive beliefs about the

potential use of restorative justice practices to help combat student misbehavior. Although, all

three stated that "displaying an orderly school environment was first priority" (p. 12). The use of

restorative conversations and circles was an excellent means for handling "low-level

misbehaviors, but exclusion and zero tolerance policies had their place as well" (p. 12). The

principals felt they were walking a fine line between punitive and restorative discipline. Each

principal used restorative justice practices in their schools when dealing with classroom

removals, disruptions, arguments, and issues that did not involve aspects where someone could

get seriously hurt. For example, one principal talked about how they would rush to the scene of a

fight when the call would come over the radio, hoping to get there before the school safety

officer, to try and hold a restorative conversation after it was broken up. The principal believed

that the conversation would have more of a long-term impact than the suspension they were

going to issue.

A theme in the findings was that the principals still felt that punitive discipline was

needed in the school for several reasons: to send a message to the community about what

behavior is appropriate and what is not, to keep the teachers from thinking the administration is

soft on discipline, and a necessary consequence for violence on school grounds. Lustick (2020)

spoke on the findings that school culture is difficult to change and restorative justice practices

take time. Despite the lowest suspension rates in New York City, these administrators felt

pressure to use punitive discipline more frequently. Lustick (2020) found that "the values of the

principals' placed on accountability kept them from framing restorative practices as a means of

cultural transformation" (p. 17). The three principals agreed that restorative justice practices

could help to lower suspension rates but will not fix all school culture issues without further

school employees working on culture and building relationships with students. Like Kervick et

al.'s (2020) results, Lustick (2020) found that more staff members must be on board with the

cultural shift for these schools to continue their journey using restorative justice practices. These

two studies lead to the question of what does it look like for a school to implement restorative

justice practices effectively?

Gregory et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study to examine the components of the

successful implementation of restorative practices, specifically, "building infrastructure and

strengthening staff and student capacity, and enacting multitiered supports" (p. 147). The authors

used Grounded Theory as their theoretical framework to guide their study. In addition, there was

one developed research question for the study: "According to RP leaders in the field, what are

the facets of a comprehensive, equity-focused initiative?" (p. 151).

The study's participants were 18 school-based restorative practitioners in the Northeastern United States. The participants' current roles were split between building principals and restorative justice practitioners in schools. All participants considered themselves experts in the field of restorative justice, and their current schools were in years 1-4 of implementing restorative practices.

All data was collected through semi-structured iterative interviews to gather perceptions on their experiences implementing restorative practices. This included insight into implementation strategies, thoughts on equity, and what effective use of restorative practices looks like in schools. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded through the Grounded Theory lens. A total of 12 category codes were developed and used to indicate what effective implementation of restorative practices would look like.

The findings of the study showed there were 12 critical factors identified to install restorative practices at a school effectively: administrative support for restorative practices, schoolwide buy-in and distributed leadership, discipline policy reform, data-based decision-making to guide change, addressing equity and social justice, restorative practices professional development, restorative practices student leadership and student voice, restorative practices family and community involvement, explicit and differentiated SEL skill-building, community and skill-building circles, repairing "less serious" harm and restoring community in classrooms, and repairing "more serious" harm and restorative conferences.

The first six factors that were identified related explicitly to what school leaders need to focus on at an administrator level to help make restorative practices effective in school. Across the 18 interviews, these factors came up repeatedly, starting with how the administration portrays their belief in restorative practices in the building. Next, the teachers must be confident that the

administration believes these practices are best for children, the staff, and the school. From there, teachers need to have that same level of buy-in and be trained on how to use restorative practices effectively. Finally, school administrators must revamp discipline policies to incorporate restorative practices and make effective decisions by following the data. That especially relates to addressing inequalities for certain groups of students who may have been disproportionately targeted under previous discipline practices.

The remaining six factors are related to community building and how to gain additional buy-in from students, parents, and the community. Participants who were interviewed spoke about how student voices must be brought into the process so they can see their opinions are valued from the beginning. Additionally, getting parents involved in the process was mentioned as a key to helping build the foundation for restorative practices in school. Finally, when implementing restorative practices, the students need to feel that they are supported on three levels: their teachers, the administrators, and their families.

Gregory et al. (2021) shared that a theme that arose across multiple interviews was the use of community circles. These circles are used to build SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) skills, repair harm, and develop a stronger community in the school. The authors outline how these practices are highly beneficial to help address many of the issues students face in the 21st century, such as returning to school post-COVID-19, racial inequalities portrayed on the news and social media, and other community factors. Additionally, the authors shared that shifting to restorative practices is not an overnight process. Those interviewed in this study are part of a multiyear process of installing restorative practices in their schools. Therefore, patience is necessary, along with following the 12 steps outlined in the study.

This section showed that teachers, administrators, and students view restorative justice practices differently. All three studies shared the positives and negatives of using restorative justice practices in various schools. Through each study, participant's definition of restorative justice practices was slightly different, and teachers and administrators did not feel that these practices would solve all school issues (Kervick et al., 2020; Lustick, 2020), but the overwhelming theme that arose was that time and consistency needed to be given for restorative justice practices to be effective and make long term improvement in the school (Gregory et al., 2021; Kervick et al., 2020; Lustick, 2020). Beyond varied views of restorative justice practices, there is also a limited number of studies on teachers' perceptions of restorative justice practices.

Teachers' Perception of Restorative Justice Practices

Short et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative case study to examine teacher perception and effectiveness of restorative practices over five years at a school in the United Kingdom (UK). Additionally, they wanted to explore how students who were wronged in a setting can confront the wrongdoer, and both sides can express their perspectives and talk to each other in a safe environment. While no direct research questions were listed in this study, the authors wanted to examine four unique aspects of restorative justice in this school setting. Those examples are:

1. The core of restorative practices and aspects of restorative practices, which participants viewed as key when using this process to deal with situational conflict.

2. The methods of communication used when applying restorative practices.

3. The aspects of a restorative approach that provide an opportunity to learn or develop new skills.

4. The wider impact and influence of restorative practices, in particular in relation to creating a positive atmosphere and building relationships, as well as the challenges of implementing restorative practices. (pp. 316-319)

This study was conducted at a school for students aged 11-18 in the UK. The participants in the study were five teachers, two females and three males, who were interviewed multiple times over five years. The participants' years of experience in education ranged from 3 to 23 years. The primary objective was to ascertain the requisites for the program's success. This encompasses examining potential challenges in implementing restorative practices, identifying necessary actions for success, and gauging the teachers' overall perspectives on the process.

Short et al. (2018) collected data using individual semi-structured interviews and analyzed them using thematic analysis. Each interview lasted between 30-60 minutes. All interviewees were audio-recorded and then transcribed for accuracy. Short et al. (2018) stated:

The first author listened to the recorded interviews several times before transcribing them. Initial codes were identified by reading and re-reading the transcriptions. All data relevant to each code were then collated to develop potential themes that reflected coherent, meaningful data and were distinct from each other. (p. 316)

The findings of these interviews were conducive to the research data; restorative practices can be effective when implemented correctly. Restorative conversations can curb negative behavior by creating a positive atmosphere where students feel safe and trust the adults running these conversations. Short et al. (2018) detailed three fundamental components found in previous literature: engaging all involved with the issue, ensuring all individuals understand the reasoning behind any decision made, and educating students on acceptable behavior rather than focusing on control to improve student behavior.

Short et al. (2018) included that this school system in the UK faced many of the same challenges American schools have in urban settings. Before implementing restorative practices, the school had issues with high suspension rates, overall student misbehaviors, and students living in poverty. All five participants over the five years were in alignment that the system of restorative practice at their school is not perfect. All five, separately and at different times, mentioned numerous challenges for all staff members to buy into the restorative practices fully. A theme was that continual professional development was needed to keep existing skills sharp and to help new staff members to understand routines and procedures.

The teachers also stated there were more positives to this program, including increased teacher and student relationships, students feeling they have more of a voice in their school, and more of a positive atmosphere. Short et al. (2018) concluded that through restorative practices, focusing on what proper behavior looks like, students are more likely to change their behavior, rather than teachers and administrators just focusing on discipline from a control aspect. This study was included because it was one of the first that tracked teacher perceptions of restorative justice practices, and the first-year results could be compared to this case study.

Similar to Short et al.'s (2018) study, Lustick et al. (2020) examined data from teachers, social workers, and students on the perception of restorative practices, but this time specifically on restorative circles in three schools in New York City. The authors felt it was necessary for this study to "go beyond the "what" of restorative practices, to the "how": how teachers and students related socially, emotionally, and culturally, as they forged a community together" (p. 91). In addition, it was crucial to include school social workers in this study to understand the challenges of implementing restorative practices within schools, including preventive and responsive procedures.

Lustick et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study using Empowerment Theory as their theoretical framework. While lacking direct research questions, this study was to "examine, through interviews with teachers and students, the successes and challenges of implementing community-building circles with attention to equity and inclusion" (p. 89). The study was conducted at three schools in New York City; two middle schools and one high school. All three schools were smaller, had a similar-sized student population, and all students were of a similar demographic. All participants of this study volunteered to partake. The authors collected and examined qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with the school staff. Additional data was collected from classroom observations. Over 300 hours of data were collected at each school in this study. All data was processed using deductive and inductive coding. First, each author of this study reviewed the interview and observation data to identify themes and patterns. From there, data was grouped into two themes: How teachers perceived the benefits of using community-building circles and how teachers and students experienced discomfort with community-building circles.

Lustick et al. (2020) detailed their study's many positive and negative findings. Numerous positives existed for teachers as they became comfortable with this process. For example, one teacher interviewed in the study shared that he learned to be more accepting of others' views, opinions, and personal choices when a student shared what life was like for them as a gay male in school. This led to deeper connections between this teacher and his homeroom students.

Through observations, Lustick et al. (2020) found that teachers were often uncomfortable being vulnerable themselves with students during the daily community-building circles, unsure when to wrangle in conversations that were getting off track, or picking up on student discomfort

when a topic was resurfacing past trauma. This led the authors to recommend that teachers and

social workers should be paired together to run restorative circles together. This would allow an

extra set of eyes to identify students who may need further support. Lustick et al.'s (2020)

findings concluded:

> That both teachers and students experience these practices as transformative when
>
> enough trust is established to share openly; however, more training is necessary for this
>
> to be consistent across schools and classrooms. Considering the lack of discussion of
>
> implicit bias and cultural responsiveness embedded in the restorative practice trainings
>
> these teachers received, authors argue that social work professionals and concepts—
>
> namely, empowerment theory—can support teacher training and implementation of
>
> community-building circles. (p. 1)

Lustick et al. (2020) identified that many schools will have funding issues when it comes

to hiring the necessary number of social workers at a school for cultural shifts to restorative

practices, especially in inner-city schools. These additional mental health professionals are

helpful when trying to serve all students' individual mental health needs, as well as observing

classroom community circles. Further recommendations align with other studies on this topic.

Primarily, teachers need continued professional development training on restorative practices.

This study was included due to the school in this case study in this dissertation placing a high

emphasis on using community circles to help address difficult situations and build community in

the classroom.

Tracking year-to-year improvement and continued development is vital when examining

teacher perceptions of restorative justice practices. King Lund et al.'s (2021) case study

examined the identity belief systems of middle school teachers and staff at a school in the

southeastern United States implementing a restorative justice system. Specifically, they looked

into the teachers and staff's mindsets on restorative justice practices to see if they changed over

the school year with additional professional development. The school was in year three of a

three-year implementation of restorative justice practices. Year one consisted of no

implementation, year two introduced restorative justice practices, emphasizing restorative

circles, and year three was the intentional full-school implementation with formal professional

development.

King Lund et al. (2021) collected data from observation of teachers and staff using

restorative circles, tracking student discipline referrals, and tracking the discipline data of 15 at-

risk students from the previous year. While there were no research questions in this study, the

study was guided and aligned with three key pillars from *The Successful Middle School: This We

Believe* by Bishop and Harrison:

1.   The school environment is inviting, safe, inclusive, and supportive for all.

2.   Ongoing professional development reflects best education practices.

3.   Organizational structures foster purposeful learning and meaningful relationships.

(p. 17)

This study started with 36 teachers and staff members completing a survey questionnaire prior to

the school year starting. The instrument given to the participants was the RJI (Restorative Justice

Ideology Measurement Instrument). This instrument tested how comfortable these individuals

felt using restorative justice practices in their classrooms. Upon completion of the survey, the

school staff received professional development on using restorative justice practices in their

school. Since this was year three of the program, all staff members were told they must use

restorative justice practices in their classroom and school settings. At the end of the school year,

21 teachers retook the RJI to see if there was an increased comfort level of using restorative justice practices in the classroom. Additionally, 27 of the original 36 participated in a semi-structured interview relating to how the teachers perceived the professional development they received during the school year to use restorative justice practices in their classroom and school.

King Lund et al. (2021) analyzed their data through paired t-tests but did not provide additional details on what they did with the data. Similarly, the authors did not share how they coded the qualitative data. King Lund et al.'s (2021) findings of the quantitative data showed a statistically significant difference between the pretest and post-test data toward disagreement for the cooperation factor. Still, there was no statistically significant result for the healing and restoration factor. The interview data showed an increase in the number of staff who felt comfortable using restorative justice practices in their classrooms, from 52% to 65%. When asked if teachers noticed restorative justice practices helping to reduce discipline issues, many reported that they were not "involved in higher levels of discipline issues and were not sure if they increased or decreased" (p. 19). Teachers stated that discipline issues were handled by the administration or the dean of discipline. King Lund et al. (2021) believe this is a negative change since restorative justice practices would have teachers taking the lead on discipline issues to help restorative the problems that arise in the classroom.

Additionally, the data tracked for the previous year's at-risk students found they received more discipline referrals, suspensions, and detentions than the last school year. King Lund et al. (2021) felt the findings were the opposite of what would be expected in a school-wide implementation of restorative justice practices. Despite an increased number of teachers who felt comfortable using restorative circles in morning homeroom, they either lacked confidence or did not embrace the restorative circle process when handling discipline issues. The authors

recognized that this is a small sample size but how it shows the importance of teacher buy-in and shifting of mindset regarding school discipline. This study found that there are times when some teachers will have a negative perception of the use of restorative justice practices and have different reasons for creating those norms. Through either being uncomfortable using them in difficult situations or not having enough training, these results are realistic and suggest that these may potentially arise in this dissertation study.

While the previous study examined how teacher perceptions could change with increased professional development, Martinez et al.'s (2022) qualitative study examined how school districts' organizational procedures affect their installation of restorative justice. This study used an experimental design to understand if increased resources, improved decision-making, individual beliefs, and policies can help schools implement restorative justice. Martinez et al. (2022) used the systems change framework as their theoretical framework, which they believed had not been used before when examining restorative justice in schools. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do system structure (i.e., resources, decision-making and power, beliefs, policies) affect RJ implementation?

2. What is the contribution of RJ staffing capacity in bringing forth system-wide change? (p. 193)

This study consisted of 124 school staff members being interviewed; 114 were included in the study. All worked across 10 public high schools in a New York City school district between 2017-2020. There were five control schools and five treatment schools. Treatment schools consisted of enhanced staffing and restorative justice practice resources. The control schools had an implementation based on tier-1 training of five staff and little ongoing support.

The data was collected through semi-structured in-person interviews. Interviews consisted of 19 open-ended questions, with follow up questions if necessary. Participants were identified by their building administrator as engaged in using restorative practices in their classroom. Convenience sampling was used for additional candidates in the study. The instrument was designed to address teachers' thoughts on using restorative practices. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Inductive coding was used to code the qualitative data.

The study findings were positive and negative, with teachers feeling they were time constrained to balance the use of restorative practices and their class content. This led teachers to an overreliance on restorative justice counselors to run procedures to help students. Still, the coordinators had more time to build relationships with students outside the classroom. In addition, the counselors spent a reasonable amount of time coming to teachers' classrooms to help them develop skills. Teachers and students felt these improved relationships were like currency for everyone to buy into restorative practices more but were more of a time demand on the teachers. An overwhelming number of the teachers stated they were able to implement restorative justice practices successfully. Still, many reported that restorative justice is the opposite of how they learned to be teachers. Staff members felt they sometimes struggled without a specific script since circles can get various responses. It was followed up that professional development helped overcome these issues at times.

The interview data was split between teachers who felt that restorative practices were helpful and effective at curbing negative student behavior and those who felt that punitive discipline needs to exist in schools to send a message to curb unwanted negative behavior. Martinez et al. (2022) stated that this shift aligned with how teachers identified themselves as teachers. Those who believed that punitive discipline needs to be there to send a message viewed

themselves as primarily being an instructor. In contrast, those who supported restorative

practices in schools viewed themselves as more holistic and there to span across relationships

and content.

The treatment schools, compared to the control schools, found the teachers interviewed in

the treatment school had a better understanding of restorative justice practices and how to use

them in school effectively. The counselors provided significant help to the school and took some

of the load off the teachers. In contrast, the control school had many more issues trying to

implement restorative justice practices in their schools. Teachers felt constantly overworked and

overwhelmed. These teachers spoke of being "less knowledgeable and consistent than treatment

schools in their understanding of formal RJ protocols, terminology, and rituals" (p. 199). The

lack of professional development time prevented the control group from understanding how to

use restorative justice practices.

School administrators at the control school also spoke of wanting their staff to get trained

but not wanting them to get professional development on school days due to leaving their

schools short-staffed. Unfortunately, this prevented many of the teachers at the control school

from getting the additional professional development they wanted to improve their use of

restorative justice practices in their classrooms. This study shows the pitfalls of what can come

up when trying to implement a new practice like this. Similar to King Lund et al.'s (2021) study,

administrators need to ensure that they provide time for professional development opportunities

to increase the odds of positive teacher perception.

Many teachers expressed stress regarding the implementation of restorative justice

practices in their work and advocated for further training to effectively utilize these methods

(Gregory et al., 2021; Kervick et al., 2020; King Lund et al., 2021; Lustick, 2020; Lustick et al.,

2020; Martinez et al., 2022; Short et al., 2018). This raises the question of potential outcomes if education majors were to receive training in restorative justice practices during their college education prior to having their own classrooms. Kohli et al.'s. (2019) study looked to examine the history of restorative justice in schools, how restorative justice is integrated into California's Teachers Performance Expectations (TPEs), and future educator perceptions of the use of restorative justice in the classroom. Their case study argues that due to misinformation and prior historical context, many teachers do not understand the actual purpose of restorative justice (RJ). While there are no research questions attached to this case study, the authors looked to examine their study through three statements:

1. A historical overview narrative of RJ constructed through primary and secondary sources.

2. Conceptual analysis of RJs representation within the California TPEs.

3. An analysis of teacher candidates understanding of RJ through responses to Likert and open-ended questions about RJ obtained from a survey administered to a teacher education program in a large public university, alongside syllabi analysis and informal observations and dialogue. (p. 378)

The participants of this study were 105 students enrolled at a large public university in California. These students were earning a one-year teaching credential for primary teaching subjects to teach at diverse schools, primarily Title 1, in either an urban or suburban district. At the end of the program, the professors in the university program asked the graduating students to complete a 60-question survey. Only 52 students completed the survey, and of the 52, only 26 answered the open-ended question. All but one question was survey-based on a 1-4 Likert scale—six questions related to restorative justice and what they learned about its use in school.

The final open-ended question was, "how would you define restorative justice and its usefulness

as a teaching practice?" (p. 381). That last opened-ended question made up the entire qualitative

aspect of the study.

Kohli et al. (2019) collected and reviewed the survey data, employing descriptive

statistics to analyze the 52 responses. However, the authors did not state how they coded the

qualitative data from the open-ended question. The initial findings from the survey showed the

participants felt they had a moderate understanding of what restorative justice is. Still, only 30%

had a solid understanding and a positive view of restorative justice. The qualitative data had

participants define restorative justice and its usefulness in teaching in their own words. Those

soon-to-be teachers, who had a solid understanding and positive perspective on restorative

justice, spoke to the general cultural aspects it brings to the classroom. For example, one teacher

candidate said, "I would describe it as a sense of belongingness, where there is a system in

practice that allows for errors to be restored through a learning experience" (p. 381). All positive

responses focused on relationships and community building.

Kohli et al. (2019) shared other soon-to-be teacher perspectives that viewed restorative

justice as a positive in school. These soon-to-be teachers spoke to deeper aspects, such as

community building and amending previous institutional injustices that exist in students' lives,

with one saying restorative justice works:

> As a means to make amends with the unjust institutionalized practices which have
>
> systematically oppressed people who do not fall within the frameworks for accepted
>
> normativity. I believe an important element of restorative justice is the notion of making
>
> amends–that is, not seeking revenge against the systems of oppression, but critically

examining its structure and raising our critical consciousness so that we can dismantle it.

(pp. 381-382)

Not all 26 responses were in favor of restorative justice. Their answers ranged from

confusion on the topic to outright not believing it should be used in schools. Kohli et al. (2019)

shared that more than half misunderstood restorative justice's epistemological and pedagogical

foundation. What was shared by one of these participants was, "I honestly could not really tell

you, except that it is supposed to help maintain/build relationships with students" (p. 382).

Others simplified its meaning and saw it as a method for teachers to promote fairness. According

to Kohli et al. (2019), some responses were critical of restorative justice being used as a crutch,

stating, "traditionally what I noticed is that if you are a person that needs to use it then you're the

same type of person that will have a hard time using it in the first place" (p. 382). Another

individual stated, "I very much dislike restorative justice. It does not coincide with many of my

personal beliefs and I find it completely unnecessary as a teaching practice" (p. 382).

Unfortunately, without further follow up, there was no additional information on why these

individuals felt this way.

This limited case study showed what soon-to-be teachers think about using restorative

justice in a school setting and identified the gap many individuals struggle with how to identify

and define what restorative justice is. With many participants not fully participating in the study,

it would have been beneficial if the authors shared why close to 75% of the participants did not

complete the open-ended questions. Instead, the reader was left to wonder if it was a time

constraint issue, if the participants did not know how to answer the questions, or something else.

Restorative justice practices have been successfully used to reduce the number of

classroom removals, suspensions, and expulsions for students, especially minority students

(González, 2012; Thompson, 2016), but what do black teachers think about the use of restorative

justice practices in their schools? Lustick's (2017) study examined African American teachers'

perceptions of using restorative justice practices. This qualitative-ethnographic study was

conducted at Riveredge High School, a high school located on a multi-school building that

utilized different floors. The building administrator at Riveredge High School implemented a

restorative justice discipline system after a previous building principal left, and the staff noticed

a dramatic increase in fights. Lustick (2017) had been part of a more extensive study that

involved this school and noticed that there had been some pushback on the use of restorative

justice practices by African American staff members. This led to the studies only research

question:

1. Why do restorative practices replicate the same rates of racial disproportionality when

    suspensions are used? (p. 118)

Lustick (2017) used Du Bois's Double Consciousness Theory as the theoretical framework. This

theory views the double consciousness that many African Americans describe how they engage

in both public and professional American settings, where they face the stress of prejudice and

discrimination.

The data for this study was collected through an observation of a staff retreat to share

perspectives on the existing use of restorative justice practices and follow up in-person semi-

structured interviews with four African American staff members on their views of the practices.

The observation and interviews were transcribed and coded by Lustick, using the en Vivo

method and coding around the primary findings.

The primary finding was that these four believed restorative justice was valuable. Still, in

practice, "it did not promote authentic trust and relationship building among staff and students,

and restore order in the school" (p. 114). Instead, these staff members felt it connected more towards restoring order and obedience in the school. In addition, the practice still predominantly targeted the same students who had been receiving punitive discipline. The four staff members outlined three specific ways that restorative justice practices were used that continued to cause student issues. The first was that even with restorative conversations being used upon a student's return from a suspension, the school administration was signaling to the student they had power and control over them. Second, these four noticed how restorative practices did not account for a student's home life, outside-of-school experiences, or how they learned to handle conflict. Third, the administration's power dynamic with certain forms of restorative practices and punitive discipline interfered with trust building with students and staff.

A theme arose of how it is challenging to have students buy into restorative justice practices when there are systems in place at school that go against the messaging. For example, one teacher brought up that the students had to check in with school resource officers and have their student identification scanned when entering the building. It was mentioned how there were incidents where the resource officers were rude and combative towards students; this led to past trauma with police officers coming up before their days had started. Another was how the other floors of the building did not use restorative justice practices, and the answer to any incident involving students from another floor was automatically punitive discipline. The four staff members expressed an increased workload and stress from learning how to use restorative justice and being the ones who would lead the restorative conversations when an issue came up. They felt if they could not step in and solve the problem, then those negative aspects would make them and the school look bad.

Still, despite some negative views, the four did see positive aspects behind the practice. The four interviewed stated that they shared a similar experience in the past to what their students are currently experiencing. They can use restorative circles to address issues and want them to be used more frequently to discuss past trauma with students. For the circles and practices to be effective, the staff must continue to be facilitators and encourage honest and open conversations with the students. If that can happen, then the restorative justice practices at Riveredge could keep improving. Upon reviewing the study's findings, it did not conclude the research question of "why do restorative practices replicate the same rates of racial disproportionality when suspensions are used?" (p. 118). This left the reader to wonder why that gap still exists in the research and what can be done to address that gap.

Looking to examine perceptions outside of the United States, a study that came up several times when reviewing the literature, McCluskey et al.'s (2008) mixed-method study which explored what type of impact restorative practices can make in schools by examining teacher perception, as well as including students and parents. The authors did not use a theoretical framework for their analysis and did not have specific research questions. However, they said the study looked specifically at the benefits and challenges of implementing these practices in schools with increased student behavior issues. This study took place in Scotland during a two-year window where 18 local schools partnered up with two universities to see what the effects of restorative practices could be on students across primary and secondary schools.

The study was conducted across 18 schools in Scotland: 10 secondary schools, seven primary schools, and one school that specialized in teaching students with moderate disabilities. These schools spanned across urban, suburban, and rural settings; additionally, they spanned across wealthy to poorer school districts. To help with the implementation, each school was

gifted £45,000 to help train staff on how to use restorative practices in the classroom. The study

participants were school staff members, students, and parents. Over the two years, multiple in-

person semi-structured interviews took place with 162 school staff members, 231 student

interviews, and 31 parent interviews. In addition, key contributors were interviewed numerous

times. The interview data was coded to identify "indigenous themes—themes that characterized

the experience of the informants" (p. 409). Additionally, 627 school staff surveys were

completed, 1163 student surveys and numerous school observations were taken. The surveys

were analyzed using SPSS, but it did not state how the survey data was collected.

The study findings were slightly different between the primary and special schools

compared to the secondary schools. The results from primary and special schools indicated that

school staff found it easier to adapt to using restorative practices compared to staff in the

secondary schools. There was a high level of teacher buy-in and sharing the narrative with

students about why this shift was being made. Teachers in those schools focused on building

stronger relationships with students, teaching students what restorative practices look like,

positive modeling, incorporating restorative practices into curriculum and daily activities, using

circles, and focusing on developing SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) skills. These cultural

shifts and positive modeling carried over to student perceptions of school. Students reported that

the school atmosphere felt calmer and had better culture.

When discipline issues arose, students felt their voices were better heard, and their

teachers took time to ensure they listened to both sides of the story. Through the implementation

of restorative practices, exclusionary methods decreased since there was less focus on using

punitive discipline. The statistical data showed that students developed conflict resolution skills

they used with their teachers and peers. Numerous students communicated that restorative

practices aligned with the SEL skills they were being taught.

The secondary schools were uneven with their implementation process. This led to not as

smooth of a transition for these practices. Administrators introduced restorative practices at

professional development as an option to try, but it was not insisted that they use them in their

classrooms. As a result, there was not a high level of teacher buy-in initially, and teachers felt

that these practices were more like another tool in their teaching belts. Several resistant teachers

reported that they thought restorative practices would remove power from them, students would

be allowed to do whatever they wanted, and students would not be afraid of them anymore. The

teachers who felt this way reported no change in their classroom environments. The secondary

teachers who implemented restorative practices in their classrooms reported an improvement in

student behavior and better relationships with the student population. In addition, secondary

school students responded that they felt more comfortable in classrooms with teachers who used

restorative practices. Still, it was a balancing act between teachers who used them and those who

did not. That inconsistency led to a negligible overall improvement in school culture compared

to the primary and special schools.

The study's results led to an additional two years being added to see if there would be

continued growth with universal buy-in from teachers across all 18 schools. This systemic

change led teachers to evaluate what they wanted their classrooms to look like and how students

perceived them. For students to have further positive connotations of school, there needs to be

consistent modeling, enthusiasm, and noticeable commitment to restorative practices from the

school staff. While this study examined larger scale use of restorative justice practices, tracking

how specific strategies work is vital an understanding teacher perception.

Wang and Lee's (2019) study explored the use of responsive circles in schools to prevent future student misbehavior. Responsive circles are a method within restorative practices to be used in response to a student incident to help them learn from and take responsibility for their actions. Typically, these are led in an open-ended manner and do not follow a script. This mixed-method multiple case study was part of a more extensive case study examining the first year of implementing restorative practices in an urban district to help curb negative student behavior and improve the school district's climate. The authors used the social discipline window theoretical framework for their study and were guided by the following research questions:

1. How are responsive circles used in schools?

2. What is the general quality of responsive circles?

3. What facilitates and hinders implementation of responsive circles?

4. What is educators' perception of the impact of responsive circles? (p. 183)

This study took place at four schools in a large urban district comprising of two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The participants were 40 teachers, 10 from each school. Wang and Lee (2019) conducted observations of 22 responsive circles, which lasted 21 minutes on average, and conducted semi-structured interviews with the teachers. Both observations and interviews were guided by the RP-observation tool, which was designed restorative practices subject matter expert, and the researchers were trained on how to use it by the developer. Descriptive statistics were used for the quantitative data, and the RP-observation tool was used in coding the qualitative data.

The study's findings align with the authors' research questions. Responsive circles are used in the four test schools to handle behavior issues and the most common times that responsive circles were used were in detention. A school staff member would lead a responsive

circle with students to work through the problem that arose. This includes understanding why the student decided to cause harm to someone and discussing what they could do in the future to prevent the misbehavior from happening again. The practice's primary goal is to have students reflect on their actions and learn from them in a safe space. Additionally, responsive circles were used to discuss student conflict, disruptive behavior, student-adult conflict, and how to handle the pressure of complicated family issues. Teachers reported having a solid understanding of why responsive circles are used.

Responsive circles' general quality was reported as mid to low in effectiveness. The authors found that preventative circles were more effective in the elementary schools and where teachers ran circles in a firm but respectful way. When younger students became more familiar with the process, they started asking to have a circle when an issue arose. The RP-observation instrument found that older students were not engaged despite the meaningful topics. For the older students, this carried across the problems of focus, empathy, engagement, respect, and a variety of other school topics.

For responsive circles to be effective, teachers needed to show that they were firm, hold students in the circle accountable, but be perceived as caring and fair. The adult's tone of voice and empathy played a significant factor in the level of success that was observed. Additionally, for success, students needed to buy into the process and have trust with those in the circle. It was observed that when the trust was there, the circles were more effective. A lack of trust was the most significant factor for responsive circles not having the desired effect. Ineffective circles had little trust between students and teachers, and it was found that students needed to trust their peers if they were going to be vulnerable. The other significant factor in leading circles being ineffective was how time-consuming they were perceived to be. A considerable number of

school staff reported they took too much time away from classroom learning. With the high

pressure of state test results falling back on teachers, they felt they could not dedicate 21 minutes

of class time several times per week to handle issues that arose. The overall perception of

responsive circles was positive, with 70% of the teachers reporting they understood the process,

its benefit, and its effect on improving student behavior and school culture. However, 30% of the

staff expressed doubt about their effectiveness, saying that school misbehavior and violence had

increased over the seven months of using the circles. Between those factors and the amount of

time responsive circles took, 30% were unsure how sustainable the process would be in the long

term. Wang and Lee (2019) stated that this was the district's first year of implementing

restorative practices. On average, it takes three to five years to see the long-term benefits of

improving student behavior and culture. However, through continued staff buy-in and positive

modeling, and additional time using restorative practices, as students progress through the grade

levels, there may be the desired improvement in student behavior and school culture.

The limited number of studies available show that teacher perception can range based on

the norms that they experience in their schools. A lack of training, professional development, and

trust in the system can lead teachers to have a negative perception (King Lund et al., 2021;

Lustick, 2017; Martinez et al., 2022; McCluskey et al., 2008; Wang & Lee, 2019). But those

schools where administrators emphasize implementing restorative justice practices is not an

overnight fix and provide the necessary training tend to see teachers that have a more positive

outlook on these practices (Gregory et al., 2021; Kervick et al., 2020; Lustick et al., 2020; Short

et al., 2018; Wang & Lee, 2019. Next, research exploring how teachers can embed restorative

justice practices within their classroom curriculum is addressed.

Restorative Justice Practices Within Instructional Strategies and Curriculum

González et al. (2019) conducted a seven-year case study on whole school-based restorative justice initiatives at Alliance High School, a 9-12 charter school in Madison, Wisconsin. The study aimed to examine new directions for restorative practices by building them into the student curriculum. Moreover, they wanted to explore how this procedure worked when students took the lead role as restorative justice practitioners. This case study posed the following research questions/statements:

1. Examine restorative approaches quantitatively as a theory and set of practices aimed at being responsive to discipline.

2. Aims to understand qualitatively the associated outcomes and benefits of restorative approaches in such areas as improved school climate and safety.

3. The processes and associated stages of implementation. (pp. 208-209)

This mixed-methods case study collected teacher opinions of restorative justice practices and how these new procedures can transform student learning. This data was collected through open-ended interview questions and observations at Alliance High School over seven years, from 2011 through 2018. Unfortunately, the authors did not share how the data was processed or analyzed.

González et al. (2019) provided brief overviews of those seven school years and how additional levels were being built upon the previous year. During the first year, there was an intense installation process of this new whole-school model of restorative justice. This consisted of a teacher at Alliance taking over the restorative justice program. From there, a specific curriculum was developed to incorporate restorative practices as a mainstay. Next, students at Alliance were brought into the process to help design what restorative practices would look like

school-wide. Finally, the staff partook in additional professional development and practices

using restorative circles.

Over the following years, Alliance High School teachers and administration continued to

build upon the foundation set in year one. Year two introduced a new class to these restorative

practices. They included students from the previous year to help be student leaders and help

make decisions regarding the whole-school implementation. Teachers also continued their

professional development and the continued use and practice of circles to build upon the norms

created in the previous year. The following years continued to build student reliance on the

program. This included students presenting how they use these practices at educational

conferences, building upon the existing restorative justice class required for all 10th graders into

advanced restorative justice classes for upper-classmen, and out-of-school workshops to help

facilitate ways to improve the community.

González et al.'s (2019) findings showed that the combined use of restorative justice in

the school setting, blending it with the curriculum, and teaching practices, allowed for several

positive outcomes. Students improved social-emotional learning, leadership skills, positive

relationships, and professional skill development. The authors noted there was not an overnight

change when switching to restorative justice, but it was successful because of consistent full staff

buy-in. Using a mandatory one-semester course during the student's sophomore year, students

engaged in an introductory course on what restorative principles looked like and showed students

the benefit of using restorative practices in school.

The findings of this study aligned with previous studies on the whole-school

implementation of restorative justice; the success of this program would not have been

successful without a massive buy-in from all staff members, including the administration. The

authors also clarify that this program was successful because it was rolled out in stages rather than in one massive change. This process took years to install fully. There needed to be professional development for all staff, year after year, to develop their skills to use these practices correctly. Students needed to initially see what these systems looked like to buy into the program and trust the adults in the school. This study showed the significant impact that can be made when the entire school buys into the process, including when students take ownership in the process.

Another study examining how students view this process is Lustick's (2022) qualitative case study that examined the schoolwide use of restorative justice practices to promote student engagement, personal resiliency, and social justice. The purpose of the study led Lustick (2022) to use Knight and Wadhwa's (2014) concept of critical restorative justice. This theoretical framework examines restorative justice through two crucial aspects: "promoting student engagement and resilience, and promoting restorative justice" (p. 4). This led to three research questions:

1. How and to what extent do participants discuss restorative justice practices as a means of cultivating student engagement and resilience?

2. How and to what extent do participants discuss restorative justice as a means of promoting social justice and resisting oppression?

3. What dilemmas arise? (p. 2)

The case study was conducted at Justice High School, a charter school in the southern United States. The study participants were four administrators, five teachers, and six students. Lustick (2022) conducted semi-structured in-person interviews and observed two focus groups running restorative circles. The data collected was how staff and youth leaders at Justice High School

experience implementing restorative justice practices in school. All interviews and observations were done in one week. Lustick (2022) recorded the interviews and then transcribed them. There were two rounds of coding. The first round was descriptive coding, and the second was axial. This allowed Lustick (2022) to find trends in how participants discussed restorative justice practices, punitive discipline, and connections to their social, institutional, and interpersonal healing.

The school staff and students believed that restorative justice practices are a means to help with building relationships and trust with each other. These actions led students and staff to think it could help overcome oppression inside and outside of school. These results were in line with the theoretical framework for this study. Lustick's (2022) findings showed that when school staff builds rapport with students and teaches students that it is okay to make mistakes, they are more willing to open up and participate in challenging situations. This led to teachers challenging themselves to do more and drive developments in redesigning their existing curriculum. For example, one 9th-grade English teacher got approval to create a class focusing on ethnic studies curriculum. The teacher would use these stories to help encourage the students with their writing and reading. One social studies teacher used classroom circles to address the stress students, and staff felt toward the 2016 presidential election results.

Using restorative justice practices and circles allowed students to have an active voice in their learning and solving conflicts. Students felt comfortable reaching out to the youth leaders and adults to set up a time for a circle to address an issue. This vulnerability led to open discussions and to learn how to put themselves in someone else's shoes.

One issue that pushed back against using restorative justice practices was managing students who were perceived as "difficult or dangerous" (p. 10). When problems arose with

students whose behaviors were classified as difficult or dangerous, both staff and students favored using punitive and exclusionary discipline. While both groups praised restorative justice practices, these individuals felt there needed to be a line that would lead to student exclusion when crossed. As a result, the administration and teachers routinely resorted to punitive practices to maintain order. Unfortunately, these exclusionary tactics predominantly affected African American males. Restorative justice practices were not a complete solution for all student behavior issues, but Lustick (2022) believes they can help if continued to be used properly. This led the researcher to examine Knight and Wadhwa's (2014) concept of critical restorative justice study that was predominant in Lustick's (2022) study.

Knight and Wadhwa's (2014) qualitative study examined how restorative justice in schools can positively impact a student's resiliency and overall success. Using relationship-building and restorative justice practices, school staff members can help at-risk students to overcome discipline challenges. There were no research questions listed in this study, but the authors wanted to explore the following:

1. How can educators and practitioners help students, particularly students of color, to experience positive outcomes in a school setting? (p. 13)

The participants of this study are high school students in Boston, MA. Knight and Wadhwa (2014) observed and interviewed about 60 students assigned to a program called Project Graduation, which emphasized restorative practices within classrooms to help overcome the issues they face in their daily lives and help build resiliency. The district labeled these students as at-risk due to having failed at least one grade, being consistently unsuccessful in the classroom, or being on the verge of dropping out. The interview and observation data were transcribed, but the authors did not say how they coded the data.

The study found that restorative healing circles are practical, influential, and can be used within schools to help struggling students. Knight and Wadhwa (2014) detailed a circle observation of a student who had been calling out homophobic and sexist slurs in the classroom. This continued behavior caused the class to get off track and hold others behind consistently. The English teacher decided to have a restorative circle with the entire class and invited students' family members. This resulted in the teacher, six parents, including the misbehaving student's mother, and 25 students opening up with each other. Rather than being directed at the misbehaving student, the teacher asked the class, "what does an ideal classroom look like to you?" And "what positive or negative behaviors do you engage in during this class? (p. 17). This led to open discussions on how the students wanted to learn, how disruptions held them all back, and wanted a calm and safe environment. The student's mother spoke about how it was hard to hear this about her son. The student followed up with the reasoning for his disruptions. He described not liking class and being constantly tired, but he did not realize his behavior was dragging his peers down. He vowed to improve his behavior and started making minor improvements over time. The continued circles led to further progress for him and the rest of the students in the class.

According to the school administrators, those students in Project Graduation had noticeable behavior improvements. The high school did use punitive discipline for students when significant incidents happened, but there were hardly any suspensions for the students in the program. In addition, the students in Project Graduation expressed they had more respect toward their teachers and were responsive to staff redirects toward minor behavior issues. The trust and respect developed in the classes that used circles created stronger bonds between the students and staff.

Knight and Wadhwa (2014) found that gradual implementation of the program led to better student and teacher success. They suggest that schools looking to do something similar start small, define the purpose, draw on resources, ensure safety, and analyze what works well. Further, they acknowledge that the process can be frustrating, and that change does not appear overnight. There will be pushback and areas of improvement at the beginning. Changes within the process are normal, but staff should be on the same page and be consistent. With proper effort and time, restorative circles have been shown to reengage students in their learning, help students understand why specific school topics are essential, and help get students on track to graduate.

While restorative justice practices can be built into the classroom curriculum for discipline issues and community building, they can also be built into the traditional curriculum so students of different races can "see themselves" in the learning content. Gholson and Robinson (2019) examined how restorative justice practices could be integrated into a mathematics classroom to help African American students overcome past educational trauma. This qualitative case study examined how a form of mathematics therapy using a restorative justice framework could help students understand their internal and external thoughts on complex math curricula. The intervention program was designed by Gholson and named *Mathematics for Justice, Identity, and meta-Cognition* (MaJIC). There were no research questions in the study, but the authors felt that restorative justice blended into curricular instruction could help restore the relationship between African American students and math.

This qualitative case study relied on in-class observations and examining student projects. The participants in the study were part of a bridge program at a Michigan high school to prepare them for college. There are typically 120-150 students in the bridge program each year. These

students are identified as successful in school, primarily African American, and have varying

interests and competence in math. The data collected in this study was how students view

themselves and believe others view them as math students. Gholson and Robinson (2019) did not

detail how they coded their data but shared the results of four student projects.

While there are numerous styles of lessons in the program, the project observed in this

study was having students create a silhouette poster, outlining external messages they get about

math and internal messages they tell themselves. Gholson and Robinson (2019) detail how "these

artifacts effectively capture dominate discourses in mathematics classrooms and the intrapsychic

scripts about mathematics that mediate students' engagement in mathematical work" (p. 352).

When the students were finished with their posters, they were hung around the room, and

students walked around the room reading each student's project, gaining an understanding of

how they each viewed themselves. The walkabout led to a dialogue about the poster content and

various student experiences with math. Observing the class conversation led Gholson and

Robinson (2019) to observe the following:

> Despite seemingly varied levels of mathematical success, the internal messaging reveals
>
> an intrapsychic script that reflects tensions between an aspirational and actual self.
>
> Yearning and hopefulness for mathematical success seems to be mediated by self-doubt,
>
> and while some messages reveal explicit evidence of the racialized and gendered aspects
>
> of children's mathematics identities, such as messaging does not appear uniformly across
>
> the posters. (p. 353)

Students have a variety of positive and negative messages between internal and external

messaging. This project allowed African American students to examine the complex emotions

they face inside and outside the classroom and their struggles and hopes to be successful in a

traditionally complex subject.

Gholson and Robinson (2019) believed that the results of incorporating restorative

practices into classroom curriculum allowed students to view their experiences through the

bigger picture, including their peers, media, and family influence. The results showed that "these

new insights and awareness can actually channel and build students' agency and navigational

capacities as they continue to move through educational and social settings and systems" (p.

355). Using alternative restorative methods built into the curriculum to help with difficult

subjects can provide additional opportunities to increase student success.

While most of the studies in this section examine what teachers can do with their

curriculum to include restorative justice practices, improving student response is the primary

goal. This can be in engagement in the class, trust they have in the school, and trust they have in

the teacher. Amemiya et al.'s (2020) study examined how students' behavior would be affected

by their level of trust in their teachers and the school they attend. This was a mixed-method case

study at a midsized middle school in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Using two

theoretical frameworks, Legal Socialization and Procedural Justice, the researchers developed

one research question:

1. Does high trust at school serve as a psychological framework that helps adolescents

    respond adaptively to teacher discipline? (p. 663).

The participants in the study consisted of 186 8th graders during their daily math class.

Amemiya et al. (2020) chose to examine students in math class because most math classes are

presented in a lecture format, a subject that students have challenges with, and these factors can

lead to discipline issues arising. The student cohort predominantly consisted of lower

socioeconomic status, with 67.9% qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The majority also struggled academically, with 62.8% scoring below basic on the previous year's state's standardized math test. In addition, the participants were a diverse group, with 56.4% identifying as African American, 33.7% Caucasian, 8.8% multi-racial, and 1.2% Asian or Pacific Islander.

The data collected in the study was student diaries on their perception of school, teachers, behavior, and other factors arising in school. First, students completed a presurvey, and then for 15 days, students wrote in a diary for the first five minutes of class. Additional semi-structured interviews were conducted with student groups to follow up on their diary responses. The quantitative data was calculated using descriptive statistics and factor analysis. The qualitative data was coded using a bifactor model.

Amemiya et al. (2020) were surprised by several aspects of the findings. One significant factor was that previous discipline did not correlate strongly with the student's behavior the following day unless they had strong trust built up with their teacher and the school. This carried over to the next day with student engagement. Students with higher levels of teacher trust stated their engagement was more elevated in class; when students also had higher levels of school trust, their engagement was even higher. Additionally, Amemiya et al. (2020) found that students who reported low levels of teacher trust found that discipline had no impact on student engagement the following day, regardless of how they perceived their school—rendering the punishment ineffective. Further, when disciplined, students with higher levels of teacher trust but lower levels of school trust decreased their engagement in class the following day by one full standard deviation. Amemiya et al. (2020) speculated that being disciplined by a teacher they trusted led students to associate that teacher with the mistrust they had in the school, confirming that school is a negative place. The one group of students who improved their behavioral

engagement after being disciplined was students who had a positive relationship with their

teacher and trust in the school. This confirmed the author's belief that students come to school

with preconceived notions about school. The study results showed no correlation between

students' trust in teachers and school based on race. The African American students did not

report significantly different perceptions of their school or trust among teachers. Amemiya et al.

(2020) stated that this might be related to the higher population of African American students at

the school and potentially reducing racial discrimination.

The authors stated that this was a limited case study, and the results might not be the

same if examining a larger sample size. They believe that the next step is to run this experiment

at different schools and increase the student population, both in size and across grade levels, to

see if the results are similar. Amemiya et al. (2020) believe that this was a good test to examine

how student perception of teachers and school affected their response to being disciplined. By

expanding the population size, and going across multiple grade levels and different subjects,

educators might better understand how to keep students engaged with their learning and in the

classroom. To account for the need for a larger sample size, the subsequent study examined a

similar type of examination but on a larger scale.

Durlak et al. (2011) conducted a quantitative meta-analysis on all existing data that

examined SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) practices that are used for whole class

implementation, including restorative practices, to help students develop the necessary skills to

overcome conflict, negative emotions, issues that arise at school, and academic performance

across grades K-12. The authors of this study wanted to take all existing quantitative data and see

if there was a statistically significant improvement for students with teachers using these

practices. Durlak et al. (2011) did not develop research questions but did have five hypotheses for their study. There are as follows:

1. Meta-analysis of school-based SEL programs would yield significant positive mean effects across a variety of skill, attitudinal, behavioral, and academic outcomes.

2. Programs conducted by classroom teachers and other school staff would produce significant outcomes.

3. Interventions that combined components within and outside of the daily classroom routine would yield stronger effects than those that were only classroom based.

4. Staff using all four practices would be more successful than those who did not.

5. SEL programs that encountered problems during program implementation would be less successful than those that did not report such problems. (pp. 3-4)

Durlak et al. (2011) gathered all existing quantitative data from three sources. Source one was an online search of PsycInfo, Medline, and Dissertation Abstracts using all terms relating to SEL and restoration. Secondly, a manual search was conducted across 11 journals from 1970 to 2007, pulling data relating to the previous online searches—finally, scanning organization's websites for additional quantitative data that might be applicable. Descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, z-tests, and t-tests were used in the study, and other advanced calculation methods were not explicitly mentioned.

Durlak et al. (2011) found that these programs have yielded significant positive effects for students through their calculations. The positives for students relate specifically to "social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school" (p. 418). The data in this study led the researchers to believe that traditional classroom teachers, across all grade levels, are effective at teaching students how to regulate themselves, empathize with others, and solve

conflicting issues with peers and adults. They found that this carried across rural, suburban, and urban schools but acknowledged that there has been less research done in rural locations. Similarly, there has been less research on this topic at the high school level.

While there was less quantitative data connecting these practices to academic performance, the limited data reviewed showed an 11 percentile gain in academic performance for students who participated in SEL and restorative activities. This led Durlak et al. (2011) to hypothesize that teaching students resilience and confidence would carry over to challenges in the classroom and overcome those challenges. This study had a massive amount of data, and Durlak et al. (2011) acknowledged that initially, there could have been errors with the results. However, to prevent miscalculations and misinterpretations, the authors stated that they "re-analyzed out initial findings to account for nested designs that could inflate Type I error rates" (p. 418). They also made sure only to use data that had a minimum of six months post-intervention and specific data that came from the schools, not student perceptions.

Durlak et al. (2011) shared that 59% of schools in the United States have implemented programs to address students' development, handle emotions, and restore the issues that arise in students' lives. These practices are not going to be removed from schools since they are effective. The authors expect this trend to continue as schools are asked to do more.

While restorative justice practices can be effective in helping students learn from negative behavior, there are numerous other ways they can be used in schools to create a better learning environment for students. Research has shown that these practices within curriculum and classrooms can improve academic performance and trust in the school (Amemiya et al., 2020; Durlak et al., 2011; Gholson & Robinson, 2019). Additionally, on the teacher and administrator side, these practices can lead to better teacher success (Knight & Wadhwa, 2014;

Lustick, 2022). Finally, when schools get bold and ask more of students, these practices can lead

to students taking ownership of a unique culture that promotes leadership skills, better overall

relationships, and developing skills for later in life (González et al., 2019). Next is an exploration

of restorative justice practices' impact on teacher/student relationships.

Restorative Justice Practices Effects on Student Perception of School and Influence on

Teacher/Student Relationships

Grant et al.'s (2022) study examined if schools implementing restorative practices (RP)

would affect teachers leaving the profession and how teachers view school culture. This multi-

year study examined "the results from a randomized control trial of RP when these practices are

combined with the teacher and student supports provided by Diplomas Now" (p. 1). This led to

two research questions:

1. Did assignment to the treatment, RP/DN (restorative practices/Diploma Now),
   positively impact school climate?

2. Did assignment to treatment, RP/DN (restorative practices/Diploma Now), increase
   teachers' intentions to stay? (p. 14)

Grant et al. (2022) looked at the school climate between the schools implementing restorative

practices and those that were not. School climate has been tricky to measure and define.

Therefore, the authors decided to use what is considered the most widely used definition from

the National School Climate Center (CSCC):

> NSCC defines school climate as the quality and character of school life. School climate is
>
> based on patterns of students', parents', and school personnel's experience of school life;
>
> it also reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning
>
> practices, and organizational structures. A sustainable, positive school climate fosters

youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing and satisfying

life in a democratic society. (p. 3)

This quantitative, multi-year study was added to an existing study examining the validity

of a program designed to help urban students graduate high school on time called Diplomas

Now. This was in addition to some schools making a cultural shift to fully implementing

restorative practices. There were 33 schools throughout the United States, grades 6th-12th, that

agreed to participate in this study.

This study collected 686 teacher responses through a paper survey in 2016. One block of

teacher responses was removed due to the school closing before its restorative practices program

started. Survey questions were split between the sample groups. Individuals were coded so they

could not be identified. Participants began by answering the question, "which best describes your

future intentions for your professional career?" (p. 13). Those who intended to stay in education

were given a binary variable of 1, and those who indicated they were planning on leaving were

given a binary variable of 0. Survey questions asked teachers about how they use restorative

justice practices, practices from Diploma Now, how they view their school climate, and how

they view their teaching practices. Grant et al. (2022) used factor analysis to analyze the data

from the survey responses from the spring of 2016.

The findings of this study were in line with previous studies regarding the

implementation of restorative practices. If implemented with full staff support and professional

development, it will increase how students and teachers view the school's climate. Grant et al.

(2022) findings stated that, "only the effect of treatment on professional learning and

collaboration climate is statistically significant, where on average, teachers in RP schools report

.15 standard deviations more professional learning and collaboration compared to teachers in

control schools (p <.05)" (p. 21). The teachers in the schools that used restorative practices had a more positive view of their school environment and how they collaborated with staff, and had fewer behavior issues compared to the control school.

The students in schools that used restorative practices stated they had stronger relationships with their teachers and felt there were fewer behavior issues with other students. Grant et al. (2020) said, "on average, students in RP schools report .10 standard deviations less prevalence of problems compared to students in control schools (p <.05), and .08 standard deviations more positive relationships (p < .10)" (p. 21). This led the researchers to conclude that school culture and climate is higher in schools using restorative practices. While research has shown that restorative practices can improve school climate and culture for both teachers and students, several teacher participants stated they are considering leaving the teaching profession. Grant et al. (2022) share that the results from the study are mixed, and it is possible that restorative practices may increase the number of teachers leaving the profession. Therefore, it was hypothesized by the researcher that this study might have had a higher response rate of teachers looking to leave the profession and future research needs to be conducted.

Similar to Grant et al.'s (2022) study, Gregory et al.'s (2016) quantitative study examined how restorative practices can improve student-teacher relationships with similar outcomes. This study was specifically designed to determine if teachers implement a higher level of restorative practices in their classrooms, there would be an increase in student-teacher relationships from students of all ethnic groups and a reduction in out-of-classroom referrals. The authors measured this by examining if students believed their teachers were respectful toward them and how often teachers reported discipline referrals across ethnic groups. Gregory et al. (2016) did not have a

theoretical framework listed in their study. Therefore, this study was guided by the following

research questions:

1. Is greater implementation of RP, as perceived by students and teachers, associated with

   higher student-reported teacher respect? Does this association hold across student

   racial/ethnic groups?

2. Is greater implementation of RP, as perceived by students and teachers, associated with

   teachers issuing fewer misconduct/defiance discipline referrals to Latino/African

   American and Asian/White students? (p. 331)

This study's participants were 31 teachers and 412 students at the two high schools. The

teacher participants for the study were close to even between the two high schools, but the

students in the study were predominantly from one of the high schools. All participants

volunteered for this study, and all students had parental permission to participate.

Each teacher and study completed a one-time survey that took participants between 30-40

minutes. This survey was taken during the middle of the school year, and teachers could not

access the student data while answering questions. Questions were rated on a 1-5 scale or a 1-4

scale. Gregory et al. (2016) coded the student data based on their identified race. Latino, African

American, and Native American students were coded as 1, and Asian Americans and Caucasians

were coded as 0. Teachers were asked to rate themselves on how they perceived themselves

enacting restorative practices in their classrooms. Examples of questions that students answered

were:

1. My teacher is respectful when talking about feelings.

2. When someone misbehaves, my teacher responds to negative behaviors by asking

   students questions about what happened, who has been harmed and how the harm can

   be repaired.

3. My teacher uses circles to provide opportunities for students to share feelings, ideas

   and experiences.

4. Asks students for their thoughts and ideas when decisions need to be made that affect

   the class.

5. My teacher uses circles to respond to behavior problems and repair harm caused by

   misbehavior.

6. My teacher acknowledges the feelings of students when they have misbehaved. (p.

   335)

Gregory et al. (2016) used factor and component analysis and found that the student

survey results had no statistical difference between racial groups on restorative practices

implementation scales. This led the researchers to believe that all students experienced a similar

experience while restorative practices were being implemented. This information was of interest

because it showed that restorative practices could benefit all students, regardless of race. Further,

Gregory et al. (2016) found that this carried over to how students perceive respect from their

teachers; the students' race was not a factor.

This study additionally examined how teachers view themselves as restorative justice

practitioners. Gregory et al. (2016) stated that their study was "the first study to examine whether

teachers with higher (compared to lower) implementation of RP, as reported by teachers and

students, tend to have more positive relationships with their students" (p. 331). This is

foundational in showing that students of all races view teachers who use restorative practices as more understanding and caring of them as individuals.

   While Grant et al. (2022) and Gregory et al. (2016) looked to explore restorative justice practices across all races of students, Skrzypek et al.'s (2020) study further wanted to focus predominantly on African American students. They conducted a mixed-method case study to examine how middle school students perceive the effectiveness of restorative practice circles in their schools concerning curbing negative behavior and overcoming challenges. While this study did contain a small qualitative aspect, by asking all students two open-ended questions, this study was primarily quantitative. The researchers did not include specific research questions or a theoretical framework. Skrzypek et al.'s (2020) study consisted of students from a public school in the Northeastern United States. A total of 90 students participated; three fifth-grade classes and two eighth-grade classes—69.3% of participants identified as African American. The survey instrument was adapted from the Tiered Fidelity Inventory-Restorative Practices draft instrument (p. 247). Skrzypek et al. (2020) collected data was based on students' perception of using restorative circles to help with conflict and behavior. This led them to ask the students the following:

1. Do you think restorative justice Circles help to address student behavior issues?

2. "Are you satisfied with the way restorative justice Circles address conflict between you and your peers?" (p. 247)

Each answer was measured using a 10-point scale with a one meaning not helpful/not satisfied and a 10 meaning very helpful/very satisfied. The other survey questions regarding restorative practices' impact on individual behavior were on a 1-5 scale. All student participants were also

asked two open-ended questions to examine what students do and do not like about restorative circles.

Skrzypek et al. (2020) made sure that their quantitative data was accurate by using the following:

> Descriptive analysis and independent sample t tests were used to compare means between fifth and eighth-grade students, between boys and girls, and between Black girls and girls from other racial or ethnic groups. The subsample of boys was not diverse in race or ethnicity, so we could not conduct further analysis for Black boys. Two researchers independently reviewed and coded students' qualitative responses by grade level. (p. 247)

Skrzypek et al.'s (2020) findings showed that fifth-grade students learned more about their behaviors and actions through the use of restorative circles. The data additionally showed that boys felt these circles allowed them to develop conflict resolution skills so they would not have to relate to using violence when upset more than the female students. The authors stated, "black girls were significantly less likely to endorse the effectiveness of RP Circles to help them solve their problems without violence and help them learn about their behavior in comparison with girls of other racial or ethnic backgrounds" (p. 245). The authors are unsure why there was such a drastic difference for African American females in the classroom. However, based on their findings of student perceptions, eighth-grade girls did not find that using circles "appropriately target their needs for problem solving" (p. 251).

The qualitative findings showed the benefits of using restorative circles to help students better communicate their feelings and express their current needs. Across both grade levels, participants highlighted the advantage of being allowed to express their feelings in a safe spot rather than having to bottle up their emotions. The authors found that the fifth graders had a

higher perception rate for restorative justice practices than the eighth graders. They felt that this finding was related to the difficulties of 8th graders starting to develop into adults.

Skrzypek et al. (2020) concluded that further research is needed on student perception of restorative justice practices. There is a need for larger sample sizes, more on student perception to help improve the implementation of restorative justice practices in schools, student experiences during restorative justice practices rollouts, and restorative justice practices implementation studies. They concluded that as more schools start using restorative practices, they must make sure to include student voices if it is to be successful.

Like Skrzypek et al.'s (2020) study, Reimer's (2020) study examined how restorative justice practices facilitated student well-being in school. This qualitative case study was conducted at Rocky Creek school in Alberta, Canada. The study was made up of 86 students enrolled in fifth and sixth grade. Many of the students had immigrated to Canada and experienced different forms of trauma in their past. In addition, restorative justice practices had been implemented in Rocky Creek for five years, so most students were familiar with these practices in their school setting.

Reimer (2020) used Antonovsky's sense of coherence concept as their theoretical framework, which found that individuals are more likely to thrive when they believe their life has meaning and is in a manageable position. This theoretical framework led Reimer to one research question: "How do the students' school experiences of restorative justice support the development of a sense of coherence?" (p. 407).

The data for this case study was tracking student experience using restorative justice practices, specifically how it connected to their feelings of school manageability, comprehensibility, and meaningfulness. Data was collected through student questionnaires,

observation of learning circles, student journals, and classroom activities. Surveys, interviews, and observations were done in person by Reimer. Interviews with students lasted between five and 30 minutes. All 86 students participated in the interviews, but only 36 completed the survey. Reimer followed Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis approach, coded the data based on six phases, and based on repeating ideas that emerged in the results. All quantitative data were calculated through descriptive statistics.

Reimer's (2020) findings were categorized into three groups relating to a sense of coherence: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. Most students reported feeling safe in their school environment, and 87% felt the adults in the building respected them. Numerous students expressed a family aspect to the staff and described teachers as funny, caring, and nice. The family response carried over to students welcoming new peers at Rocky Creek. The current students expressed how they welcomed new students the same way their teachers received them on their first day and felt it was the right thing to do. This sense of community led students to buy into the school rules. School rules were presented to students as a collective responsibility, and students reported feeling that their teachers were fair in enforcing them. For example, one student said, "we have rules and the rules are just the rights of the child: we respect each other" (p. 417). To enforce the rules, teachers used restorative conversations and circles. This consistency led students to know what was expected of them. Students did report that these practices did not lead to the absence of all conflict between students and that conflict was an "inevitable and normal part of daily experience" (p. 418). While 34% of the students felt they could conduct a restorative conversation to solve an issue with another student, 79% thought that the school would step in to help. Additionally, 74% of students felt comfortable talking to adults and trusted them to help solve a conflict between students.

Students overall trusted the restorative practices to work out and deal with the issues that arose. The students of Rocky Creek had experienced trauma and conflict outside of school. They appreciated what the school staff was doing to help them overcome these issues by teaching them ways to express their emotions. Through relationship building with teachers, students discussed a feeling of being part of a school community that cares about them as individuals. Most students expressed joy about attending Rocky Creek and were happy just to be there. Students highlighted how they felt comfortable sharing in circles, as it allowed them to express themselves and listen to their peers. The students developed listening skills and ways to disagree with others during circle sessions respectfully. In addition, 66% of students agreed that student voices were used frequently in classroom decisions, especially if it involved an unfair practice or activity students did not enjoy. Many students mentioned this aspect taught them about responsibility. This led to exploring another study that used a process similar to restorative justice practices to help promote better relationships between teachers and students.

Cook et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative study to examine if professional development and a low-cost behavior management practice called ERM (establish-maintain-restore) would help to cultivate positive teacher-student relationships. ERM is similar to restorative practices because relationships between teachers and students can lead to student improvement in how they view school and their behavior. The researchers did not list a theoretical framework for their study, but the following research questions guided it:

1. Does EMR produce greater improvements in teacher-reported teacher-student relationships for those in the intervention group than for those in the attention control group?

2. Does EMR produce greater improvements in classroom behavior—as measured by

academic engaged time and disruptive behavior—for the intervention group relative to an

attention control group?

3. Are the outcomes associated with EMR moderated by student demographic variables

(race, gender, and socioeconomic status of the student)? (p. 230)

The participants of this study were 10 teachers and 220 students in a public school, grades 4th

and 5th, over two months. The study was spread over three elementary schools in the Pacific

Northwest. These classes were chosen after several observations and identified as having 20% or

more of class time as off-task behavior. The classes were split into a control and treatment group

randomly. Five classes used the ERM methods, while the other five did not.

Teachers completed a pretest survey to examine how they view their relationships with

the students, the classroom culture, and the student's behavior. From there, teachers in the

treatment group completed a weekly survey asking if they were using the ERM method to foster

better relationships with students, whether they were repairing relationships after a discipline

incident, and what they were doing to reengage students to repair harm. Finally, those in the

control group completed a post-test survey. The surveys were modified based on three existing

instruments to track this information: Student–Teacher Relationship Scale–Short From,

Behavioral Observation of Students in School, and a 15-item Intervention Rating Profile. The

researchers used descriptive statistics and t-tests to analyze the quantitative data.

Initial findings from the pretest indicated that the control and treatment groups had no

statistical significance across the three measures. The initial tests showed "teacher–student

relationship measure, $t(157) = .43$, $p > .05$; the disruptive behavior measure, $t(157) = .48$, $p >$

.05; or the academic engaged time measure, $t(157) = -.27$, $p > .05$" (p. 233). The post-test results

showed a statistical significance in the three categories for the treatment group. The findings

showed that the teachers who used the ERM method improved relationships with the students,

improved classroom behavior, and how engaged students were with their learning. Cook et al.

(2018) stated:

> There was a small negative correlation between change in teacher–student relationship
>
> quality and change in disruptive behavior, r = −.19, n = 159, p =.016, indicating that
>
> improvements in teacher–student relationship quality were associated, albeit weakly, with
>
> decreases in disruptive behavior. Additionally, a positive correlation was observed
>
> between change in teacher–student relationship quality and change in academic engaged
>
> time, r = .51, n = 159, p < .05, with increases in teacher–student relationship quality
>
> being moderately associated with improvements in academic engagement. (p. 237)

The results from the study suggested that quality teacher changes in relationships with students

may help mitigate students' misbehavior.

Cook et al. (2018) acknowledge that the study had shortcomings. Despite the findings

aligning with previous research on how restorative practices can improve student behavior and

perception of school, this study did not survey students on their perceptions of these practices.

Students should be included in future research. Also, future research should include examining

the effect these practices would have if implemented for an entire school year rather than just

two months. Additionally, the authors state that future research should have a larger sample size

when conducting a similar experiment since the quantitative data consisted of a smaller sample

size. The following study included student perception of restorative practices but focused more

on restoring harm after a discipline issue arose.

Research by Huang and Anyon (2020) examined student perception of school climate and overall attitude towards the school they attend after being disciplined compared to students who have not been assigned a significant consequence. The discipline structures that were examined were out-of-school suspension (OSS), in-school suspension (ISS), and some level of restorative practices (RP), specifically looking at how students view the school's discipline structure, the support they receive, safety, and disengagement. This quantitative research study did not have a theoretical framework but was guided by the following research question:

1. How do student perceptions of various aspects of school climate and attitudes towards school relate to the receipt of different disciplinary resolutions? (p. 4)

The participants of this study were 30,799 students, in grades 6-12 across 116 schools in one large school district in the southwestern part of the United States. All the participants were students who had completed a *Student Satisfaction Survey* (SSS) during the spring of 2016. The researchers did not specify who administered the survey. Still, the survey collected data on how students perceived the discipline structure at their school, the support they receive, the level of bonding with students and staff, disengagement from school, and the overall safety at school. The data was analyzed with multi-level confirmatory factor analysis and fixed regression models. The initial findings were that 2.8% of students (859) stated they had one or more OSS, 2.3% (694) had one or more ISS, and 2.4% (754) had been part of RP. Most students who completed the SSS survey did not have OSS, ISS, or RP.

After the data was analyzed, the study's findings showed that students who received either OSS or ISS had a worse perception of school than students who had not been part of a severe discipline issue. These perceptions were more negative for school climate, attitude toward

school, bonding, safety, and school perception. The findings for students who had received one

or more OSS were:

> Students who had received an OSS reported poorer perceptions of disciplinary structure
>
> (d = -0.14. p < .05), school bonding (d = -0.16, p < .05), school safety (d = 0.12, p < .05),
>
> higher levels of disengagement (d = 0.12, p < .01) compared to students with no
>
> disciplinary infractions. In addition, students who had already received an ISS also
>
> reported lower perceptions of disciplinary structure (d = -0.13, p < .05), school bonding
>
> (d = -0.13, p < .05), and school safety (d = -0.12, p < .05). (p. 5)

Huang and Anyon (2020) did not specify what type of restorative practices were used for

students who had gotten in trouble but found that those students who participated in restorative

practices reported a more negative attitude toward school compared to those students who had

not been part of the school's discipline system. However, the data for students who had

participated in restorative practices were not statistically significant as those who had received

OSS or ISS (all PS > .05). The results were affected by the student's grade level. Huang and

Anyon (2020) stated that younger grades showed more positive reception toward restorative

practices for discipline compared to older students. This result led the authors to believe that

restorative practices may not be as effective as a reactive intervention compared to a school-wide

preventative system. This makes sense to emphasize a prevention system because most

individuals do not like getting in trouble or being called out for a specific incident. Student

attitude toward an event would likely be more positive if no negative consequences were

attached, but that is not always realistic in a school setting, depending on the incident that took

place.

Looking further into potential improvement in teacher and student relationships, Huguley et al.'s (2022) mixed-methods study started to examine if restorative practices could improve students' socio-emotional well-being and racial justice in the classroom. This is the first part of a more comprehensive study the authors want to publish. The second part of the study examines the cost-benefit analysis of implementing restorative practices in schools, which is currently ongoing. The study did not have listed research questions but only stated wanting to explore restorative practices' effects on socio-emotional well-being and racial justice in schools. The study was guided by two theoretical frameworks: legal socialization theory and relational-cultural theory. Legal socialization theory believes that students' experiences with adults in positions of authority influence their perception of trust and engagement. This can affect students if they perceive consequences as fair or unfair. The relational-cultural theory believes that building relationships, celebrating individualism, and teaching empathy can create a sense of belongingness and communication pathways.

The participants in this study were 4th-8th grade students at five different schools who were partaking in a program called Just Discipline, a program used to implement restorative practices school-wide to help change school discipline and climate. Just Discipline has been implementing restorative practices at these five schools for two school years. The second part of the study expanded to include 12 additional schools. Huguley et al. (2022) collected office referral and discipline data from school administrators. Additionally, student perception of school after implementing restorative practices was collected. This study did not say how that data was collected but was analyzed through descriptive statistics.

The initial findings showed a statistically significant improvement in how students perceive school climate. The students reported a high sense of belonging while at school,

increased levels of safety, inclusion in decision-making by adults inside and outside of the classroom, and better relationships with teachers. These results came about after two years of using restorative practices and high school staff turnover. The second school year brought in a new principal, and two-thirds of the teachers were replaced. Huguley et al. (2022) felt that these results are promising since more schools are reporting high levels of misbehavior and violence in the classroom since the return from COVID-19 lockdowns. The descriptive statistics found that official discipline reports had decreased. For two school years, total suspensions were reduced by 22%, individual suspensions were reduced by 28%, and office referrals were reduced by 30%. Additionally, with more students spending time in the classroom, state testing results reported two years of academic gain across ELA, math, and science. This reversed an academic growth reduction trend before restorative practices were introduced.

The study results are preliminary, and additional data collection and research are being continued on these schools. This study's existing data was unable to conclude if the use of restorative practices led to overcoming racial disparities in the classroom. Therefore, no results in that section of the study were provided. When the study concludes, it will be interesting to see their findings on restorative practices being used to overcome racial disparities and the cost-benefit aspect of installing these practices in schools.

The results across all the studies in this section show that when teachers use restorative justice practices correctly, students feel better overall about their relationships with their teachers (Cook et al., 2018; Grant et al., 2020; Gregory et al., 2016; Huang & Anyon, 2020; Huguley et al., 2022; Reimer, 2020; Skrzypek et al., 2020). Conversely, Grant et al. (2020) did mention one aspect that might raise concern. They noted that while restorative practices can improve school climate and culture for teachers and staff, the change might be stressful for some teachers,

causing them to leave the profession. Unfortunately, Grant et al.'s (2020) study was the only

time where that came up during this review. While this literature review was extensive,

additional literature will need to be reviewed in the future when it comes out to see if this trend is

noted elsewhere.

Summary

The history of restorative practices being introduced in schools has primarily related to

administrators wanting to reduce overreliance on punitive discipline. The overriding goals are to

reduce the number of suspensions, expulsions, and classroom removals issued to students while

improving school culture, increasing attendance, and improving student behavior (González,

2012; Thompson, 2016; Watts & Robertson, 2022; Weaver & Swank, 2020). The findings from

González's (2012) study and Thompson's (2016) study were that through the proper use of

restorative justice practices, schools could see a dramatic reduction in student suspension and

expulsion numbers, as well as referrals to law enforcement. Weaver and Swank (2020) found

that restorative practices can effectively lessen negative student behavior if staff builds positive

relationships with students and when issues arise, handling them with meaningful consequences

and holding high expectations. Additionally, Hulvershorn et al. (2018) found that restorative

practices do not have to be implemented independently but can be successful when combined

with SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) practices. While statistical data has shown

improvement in reducing suspension numbers, switching to restorative practices is not an

overnight shift. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) found that school administrators should plan on

a three-to-five-year window for their districts to implement restorative practices fully and see the

full benefit. The history of restorative justice practices in schools has spanned several decades,

and the results have been mostly positive. While the research shows that administrators should

expect the process to take three-to-five years to implement, this dissertation case study took place in a school that is newly implementing restorative practices school-wide.

As restorative practices are introduced into more schools, administrators, teachers, and students must understand what this cultural shift means for the school culture and climate. Kervick et al. (2020) found that teachers who bought into the idea of using restorative practices in their classrooms defined it as a way of building a stronger community and the students aligned with the teacher's perception. Community building can be accomplished through community circles, allowing students to communicate openly with their peers on various topics (Gregory et al., 2021; Kervick et al., 2020; Lustick, 2020). Meanwhile, Lustick (2020) identified that administrators believe that restorative justice practices can be an additional system to help combat student misbehavior that was not being solved with punitive discipline. While there may be differing definitions of what restorative justice practices mean in schools to administrators, teachers, and students, Gregory et al. (2021) found that for the practice to be effective, the entire school staff must be on board, and student voices should be included if it is to be successful. While a technical definition exists for restorative practices, numerous studies show that teachers, administrators, and students all have slightly different definitions of what that means in their specific school setting.

Teacher perception plays a significant factor in the level of success that schools experience using restorative practices and limited studies exist on that topic post-pandemic. The research has shown that restorative practices can help curb negative student behavior and keep them in the classroom (Lustick, 2017; Martinez et al., 2022; McCluskey et al., 2008; Short et al., 2018). The primary negative teacher perceptions of restorative practices factored into frustration with lack of training, lack of time in the day to run restorative practices while balancing

classroom content, and lack of consistent buy-in from staff members (King Lund et al., 2021; Kohli et al., 2019; Lustick, 2017; Wang & Lee, 2019). To help improve teacher perception and successfully implement restorative practices, there needs to be total staff buy-in and continual professional development. Additionally, administrators must plan for a three-to-five-year timeframe for a school-wide cultural shift to this procedure (King Lund et al., 2021; Lustick et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2022; McCluskey et al., 2008). The existing research on teacher perceptions of restorative practices is limited, and results appear to be evenly split between positive and negative perceptions. In addition, little research has focused on why teachers have their current perceptions and why their perceptions have changed. Hence, this dissertation study further examined why teachers have their perception and what has led that opinion to shift if it has.

For restorative justice practices to be effective in school, it is suggested they need to be brought into the classroom so students can learn through that lens and understand how to build the skills these practices help teach. When issues arise in the classroom, teachers have used restorative circles to bring the classroom community together to help the student who is off track understand how their behavior affects the entire class (González et al., 2019; Knight & Wadhwa, 2014). Restorative practices can go beyond the use of circles, with teachers developing new curriculum and courses to focus on social issues. For example, Gholson and Robinson (2019) tracked how a math teacher developed a class project on internal and external perceptions of students' math skills and allowed everyone to observe what others wrote, leading to a better classroom community. Using restorative practices in the classroom curriculum can lead to increased student engagement, resiliency, and SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) skills (Durlak et al., 2011; González et al., 2019; Knight & Wadhwa, 2014; Lustick, 2022). However,

Amemiya et al.'s (2020) findings showed that trust needed to exist between students and the teacher for students to believe in the new content. The use of circles is a primary method of incorporating restorative practices in the classroom, but other forms also exist. This study additionally examined what techniques teachers use in their classrooms.

One of the essential factors for administrators to consider when deciding to use restorative practices is how the students perceive these new factors and how they will change the school climate. Several studies found that students believed that school climate improved and had stronger relationships with teachers who use restorative practices consistently (Cook et al., 2018; Grant et al., 2022; Huguley et al., 2022; Reimer, 2020). A significant finding from Gregory et al.'s (2016) study was that there was no statistical significance between a student's race and their perception of restorative practices, so restorative practices can be effective for all students. Using classroom circles and other restorative practices had mixed results in general settings. Younger students reported liking the use of circles and other restorative practices, but as students got older, students liked them less and reported them as less effective (Huang & Anyon, 2020; Reimer, 2020; Skrzypek et al., 2020). While studies have shown the effectiveness of restorative practices across all grade levels, student perceptions can be mixed.

This dissertation case study will answer how teachers define "restorative justice practices," what restorative justice-based practices teachers use in their classroom, how teachers perceive the effectiveness of restorative justice practices as a discipline method, and how the use of restorative justice practices impacts student relationships with teachers from the perspective of the teacher participants.

Chapter III. Methodology

Previous studies have shown the need for additional research on how teachers perceive the effectiveness of restorative justice practices in the classroom (Gregory et al., 2016; Teasley, 2014). The following qualitative case study examined teachers' perceptions of restorative justice practices within their classrooms. These building-wide practices consist of the use of community circles during the beginning of the student's study hall time, restorative conversations when discipline issues arise with a student in the classroom or hallway, and other methods that teachers might use restorative justice practices in their classrooms. This chapter will detail the methodology used for this case study. It will include a rationale for the study's design, a description of the research setting, who the participants in the study were, how they were selected for the study, and how the data was collected. Further, this chapter will outline the data collection methods, how the data was coded and analyzed, and any assumptions. The following research questions guide this case study.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided this study. The research questions focused on teacher perceptions of restorative justice practices. This study looked to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers define restorative justice practices?

2. How do teachers use restorative justice-based instructional strategies in their classrooms?

3. How do teachers perceive the use of restorative justice practices as a discipline method?

4. How does the use of restorative justice practices impact teacher and student

    relationships?

Research Design & Qualitative Approach

While the research on teacher and student perceptions of restorative justice practice is

growing and has shown positives, there is less research since the return to schools post-COVID-

19 because we are only a few years removed from school shutdowns (Gregory et al., 2013;

Lustick et al., 2020; Short et al., 2018; Teasley, 2014). Since the return to school after initial

COVID-19 shutdowns and social distancing, school leaders around the country are looking to

adapt to the challenges they are facing, such as increased negative student behavior, declining

student mental health, and higher teacher turnover (Prothero, 2023a; Prothero, 2023b; Will,

2022). Further, educational leaders are trying to increase student voices and agency in the

classroom (Prothero, 2023c) and looking to find ways to help improve the relationships and

social norms between students and adults in school (Wilkins et al., 2023). The existing studies

looking into this topic have primarily followed a phenomenological approach that used semi-

structured interviews and qualitative methods, so the researchers could interview teachers and

hear their specific perceptions, as well as directly observe teachers and students using restorative

justice practices in their school settings (Lustick, 2017; Lustick et al., 2020; Martinez et al.,

2022; Short et al., 2018). This study aimed to determine how teachers perceive the effectiveness

of restorative justice practices post-COVID-19, while many teachers face current challenges

within education in a post-pandemic world. Due to wanting to get a closer understanding of

teacher perception of restorative justice practices at one specific middle school, this study was

designed to be a qualitative case study using a phenomenological approach using semi-structured

interviews. The rationale for selecting a phenomenological approach and using semi-structured

interview questions was to create consistency with previous studies outlined in the last chapter,

as well as being the best choice for understanding teacher perspectives towards the effectiveness

of restorative justice practices within a classroom and school setting (Lustick, 2017; Lustick et

al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2022; Short et al., 2018). To define what a case study is and why it was

chosen, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that "a case study is an in-depth description and

analysis of a bounded system" (p. 37). They further stated that:

> Qualitative case studies share with other forms of qualitative research the search for
>
> meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection
>
> and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly
>
> descriptive. (p. 37)

Phenomenology was described by Patton (2015) as the study of how people describe their

experiences and the things they observe through their senses. The basis of phenomenology is that

individuals can only know what they experience through their own lens. When trying to

understand perception, the only person truly capable of detailing how they feel toward a topic

and what they experienced is themselves. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) asserted that

phenomenology is embedded into almost all types of qualitative research as researchers try to

understand individuals' specific lived experiences. Further, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) outline

that prior to conducting interviews, the researcher explores their past with the topic "in part to

become aware of personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions" (p. 27). Due to

phenomenology being so predominant in qualitative research, they further outlined that it has

become a norm for a researcher to "examine their biases and assumptions" (p. 27). This

statement led the researcher to outline their biases and assumptions regarding restorative justice

practices at the end of chapter one. Using a phenomenological approach in this study allowed the

researcher to understand the lived experience of each participants' experience using restorative justice practices within their workday while examining their own biases and assumptions. The researcher has been using restorative justice practices in their classroom for almost their entire career and has seen how effective it can be when appropriately implemented and ineffective when not correctly implemented. It was vital for the researcher to examine their biases and assumptions to ensure they were not influencing participants or affecting the study's outcome.

The four research questions in this study are based solely on teacher perception, and their answers varied based on their individual experiences. Using a phenomenological approach, Norm Theory theoretical framework, and semi-structured interview questions, the researcher will gain a deeper understanding of teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of restorative justice practices within their classroom and the school where this case study occurred. The responses to those semi-structured interview questions will help the researcher answer this study's research questions. The researcher chose to use a semi-structured interview question guide because this allowed them to ask specific open-ended questions to each participant, but also allowed the freedom to ask for more detail or probe when necessary and when wanting more information from the participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). That reasoning and the fact that the researcher has experience conducting semi-structured interviews led the researcher to choose this approach for this study. Therefore, using a phenomenological approach and semi-structured interviews allowed for an understanding of each teacher's perspective, thoughts, and opinions on the use of restorative justice practices.

The rationale for selecting a qualitative case study design was due to a few specific reasons. First, the study's participants have been consistently using restorative practices in their middle school classrooms for at least one school year. During that timeframe, the administration

remained dedicated to providing introductory professional development to grow teachers' skills

and be comfortable using them in the classroom. Conducting a qualitative case study at this

school, which has been using restorative justice practices for over a year, allowed the researcher

a deeper understanding of teacher perceptions because each teacher had several training sessions

and has been using these strategies and practices for an extended period with multiple groups of

students. These factors align with the existing research that ongoing professional development,

consistency, and time are essential for the successful implementation of restorative justice

practices (King Lund et al., 2021; Lustick et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2022; McCluskey et al.,

2008). The second reason was related to this study's theoretical framework of Norm Theory.

Kahneman and Miller (1986) outline that Norm Theory is "applied in analyses of the enhanced

emotional response to events that have abnormal causes, of the generation of predication and

inferences from the observations of behavior, and the role of norms in causal questions and

answer" (p. 136). This theory examines how individuals view an event after knowing the

outcome, predominantly in either a positive or negative manner, or how their views can be

influenced by observing their surroundings. The rational for using Norm Theory as this study's

theoretical framework and the development of the research questions were directly related to

wanting to understand the teacher participants in this study's perceptions of the use of restorative

justice practices. All participants have used these practices in their classroom, seen outcomes,

and created perception norms based on their specific experiences and observations. Because

these teachers have seen the outcome of numerous community circles and restorative

conversations with the students, they can connect their perceptions of restorative justice practices

to specific outcomes. Additionally, they have at least a year's experience using those practices in

their classroom. They can apply their enhanced emotional response to their experiences using

restorative justice practices and how they view the outcome of using it (Kahneman & Miller,

1986). Lastly, the case study design allowed the researcher to focus on a single school where the

teacher participants have a wide variety of experiences using restorative justice practices and an

extensive range for the number of years they have been teaching.

Participants & Sampling Technique

The middle school chosen for this case study is a suburban district in the Midwestern part

of the United States. This suburb has roughly 13,000 residents who are predominantly

professionals working in the area and would be categorized primarily as upper middle class to

the upper class. The district comprises approximately 2,500 students, and the middle school has a

population of roughly 600 students, grades 6th-8th. According to US News rankings (2022 &

2023), the school district is rated as one of the top public districts in the state. In addition, the

district's 2022 and 2023 state report card has identified them as a top performer. The district

scored the state's top rankings, providing significant evidence that the school exceeded student

growth expectations by a large magnitude, across four of the five primary areas ranked. Those

top-rated categories are *achievement* (student academic achievement using each level of

performance on state tests), *progress* (academic performance of students compared to expected

growth on state tests), *gap closing* (how well schools are meeting performance expectations for

students in English language arts, math, graduation and supporting ELL students), and

graduation rates (the rate of which students graduate in four and five-year cohorts). The middle

school has top scores in *progress* and *gap closing*, with a single step down (exceeds state

standards) in *achievement*. In addition, students across the three grades have achieved scores of

"proficient" or higher on state tests in mathematics, ELA (English Language Arts), and science

at 72.9% on the lowest end and 86.7% on the highest end.

The middle school faculty consists of 47 full-time certified teachers. Within the faculty, 68% of the teachers identify as female, and 32% identify as male. In addition, according to the 2022-2023 Ohio School Report Card, 62.1% of the staff has a graduate degree, which is lower than the district's total percentage of teachers who hold a graduate degree, 67.9%. The teacher's years of experience range from 3 years on the low end to 30 years on the high end. The average years of experience teaching at the middle school is 15 years. The demographic of the teacher population is 95.7% white and 4.3% black.

The following insights are derived from the messaging shared with the researcher through email and in-person meetings with building administrators and members of the faculty who work on restorative justice practices, as well as observations made during the 2022-2023 and the fall of the 2023-2024 school years as a teacher in the school district. The middle school in this case study first introduced the use of restorative justice practices school-wide starting in the fall of 2022, with the school returning to its traditional school day operations and schedule it used before the COVID-19 pandemic. During the 2021-2022 school year, building administration recorded an increase in negative student behaviors, struggles with in-person learning transitions, and an increase in student mental health concerns. Additionally, student learning motivation appeared to decrease. Teachers and administration reported the following negative student behaviors: students leaving the classroom without permission, inappropriate language use, and lack of motivation to complete classwork and homework. Teachers and administrators focused on the goal of creating a safe and connected learning environment to improve the school climate for students and teachers. These issues led the building administrators to start implementing restorative justice practices in the middle school.

The building administrators wanted to create a committee within the middle school that would help introduce restorative justice practices to the staff, with the goal of first addressing introductory professional development sessions for teachers. The building administrators contacted the existing staff about using restorative practices during the summer of 2022. They wanted to see if two or three staff members would be interested in helping to lead the charge in introducing these practices to the school. This role was offered as a paid position, and each member would be given a stipend for the school year. Two teachers, who had been with the district for several years, came forward, interviewed with the administration, and were selected to lead this new committee. This group was labeled the "Climate Committee," and they were tasked with creating professional development to introduce this concept to the staff, train them on how to lead circles, and beginnings of how to have a restorative conversation with students when an issue arose.

All students not in a music program have a traditional 48-minute study hall Monday through Friday. Those in a music program might only have study hall twice per week. The principal outlined that he expected the first 18 minutes of every study hall to be dedicated to the use of restorative practices and SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) practices. The principal wanted classroom teachers to use circles to create a sense of community during this time and use other restorative practices and SEL strategies to help develop students' understanding of well-being and connectedness with the school community. The building administration was adamant they did not want to place additional stress on teachers by forcing them to create lessons and materials for this study hall time. Since this would require further planning, the Climate Committee was responsible for creating a weekly "menu" for the first 18 minutes of study hall for the staff members who had a study hall at the end of the day. This menu followed a consistent

format of topics for a community-building circle twice per week (Monday and Wednesday),

building a sense of community with a type of game (Tuesday), and learning about a topic that

relates to the community, state, country, or the world and discussing the impact that has on

people (Thursday-Friday). The Climate Committee and building administration understand that

each group of students is different and will be at differing levels, so teachers are not forced to

follow the weekly menu and can deviate to something they feel is better suited for their group.

Still, they are expected to lead some activity in study hall Monday-Friday.

At the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year, the introduction to restorative practices in

study hall was rolled out slowly, intending to add layers and move to deeper topics as the year

went forward. The questions first introduced to students during the initial month of the school

year were:

    a.   What is restorative justice?

    b.   What is the purpose of restorative justice?

    c.   What does respect look like to you?

    d.   How can we have a restorative conversation?

The Climate Committee and administration believed it was crucial to clarify why this cultural

change was happening to students. Yet, during follow-up professional development sessions,

members of the Climate Committee questioned whether all teachers had taught the introductory

session to their study hall group. The circle topics used in class related to easier topics like what

they did over summer break, what they are looking forward to during the year, and how they feel

about the shift back to a traditional school day. Over time, the circle topics became deeper,

asking students to open up on complex and challenging issues, such as, do you feel safe in the

school? Do you have a trusted adult in the building? What pressures are you facing from friends, family, and teachers? How can you stand up to peers when they say hurtful comments?

During the 2022-2023 school year, a significant issue arose when students shared an incident of racism across a school-controlled platform. The staff addressed this topic multiple times during that 18-minute timeframe in circles, asking students how they felt, how they could stand up for themselves and their peers, how to "shut that talk down," and how to prevent this type of racism from continuing or happening again. These community-building circles and restorative conversations led a group of students to plan a student-led assembly to address the issue of racism to their peers and staff. The students spoke on how these restorative practices taught them how to use their voices to address the injustice they had observed, share their feelings, and ask that their peers do better at standing up for underrepresented populations at the school.

Teachers were also encouraged by the Climate Committee and building administrators to use restorative practices in their everyday classroom settings. One of the ideas was that teachers would shift their language and tone when addressing students acting out in ways the teacher did not find appropriate. The goal was that staff would have restorative conversations with students to discuss the issues and have them learn from their mistakes rather than just remove them from the class. The purpose behind this was so students would not feel that they were just receiving a form of punitive discipline and could explain their actions and learn from what they were doing. The administration believed that allowing students to have more input in the discipline process would contribute to fostering stronger relationships between students and teachers. Teachers were also asked to include more culturally relevant materials and lessons to ensure that all student voices were heard within the curriculum. The ask for culturally relevant curriculum was

a shift the school had been making before introducing restorative justice practices. Still, an increased effort in this area was being emphasized again with the cultural shift of incorporating restorative justice practices.

Teachers were given professional development and time to practice using restorative justice strategies throughout the school year. All teachers and administrators started the weekly staff meeting in community-building circles, sharing their thoughts on the weekly topic. This is done to help teachers understand how these circles are used to build community and identify strategies from their peers that might be an improvement from what they do. Additionally, once per month during the 2022-2023 school year, the Climate Committee led a professional development session during the weekly staff meeting. This time was used to build upon teachers' existing skills and create an open forum for teachers to ask questions and share what they have been experiencing in their classrooms.

The building administrators and Climate Committee understand that switching the climate and culture of a school to using restorative justice practices is not an overnight journey. They stated they are committed to continual professional development for the staff and themselves. Further, they shared that they planned to continue what they did during the 2022-2023 school year, with weekly circle practice during staff meetings and once-per-month professional development sessions led by Climate Committee but add some outside resources. The most significant change they wanted to make for the 2023-2024 school year was to bring in an external subject matter expert on the topic to lead professional development sessions and help increase the staff's knowledge and understanding of restorative justice practices while assisting them to become more comfortable using them in their classroom setting. Unfortunately,

administration did not follow through with the additional training sessions during staff meetings during the fall of the 2023-2024 school year.

This dissertation case study used convenience sampling to gain participants in the study. After obtaining permission from this school's administration and the University of Findlay's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A), a group email was sent to the 47 middle school teachers, asking for volunteers to participate in an approximately 60-minute semi-structured interview on their perceptions of using restorative justice practices (see Appendix B). The option to participate in the interview process was open to all middle school teaching staff in the building. It was stated that this was voluntary, all participants' names would be removed, no personal identifiers would be published, and interviews would not be shared with school administration. Further, it was noted that the study sought honest feedback rather than only wanting those who would share positive perceptions so that participants could be honest. Since every staff member had participated in professional development training on using restorative practices and had been running community circles in their study hall several days per week for at least one full school year, all participants were qualified to share their perceptions on the topic. All interviews were conducted and recorded over Zoom to allow participants more availability. Additionally, this allowed a transcript of the interview to be created and an audio file.

The use of convenience sampling by asking for volunteer participants in this study was done because the researcher works at the school where the case study was taking place. As strictly a teacher in the building, the researcher holds no administrative power or authority over the teachers. Still, they did not want to pressure peers into feeling they needed to participate in the study. Therefore, the researcher thought it necessary to state to all potential participants that partaking in the interview was voluntary; there would be no penalties or rewards from the

administration based on whether they chose to participate in the research. Additionally, every potential participant was made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions, all names and identifiers would be removed, and each participant would receive a transcript of their interview to conduct a member check to prevent them from being misinterpreted or misrepresented.

Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by The University of Findlay's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were deemed to be at minimal risk (see Appendix A). Research consent forms were shared with all participants in this study (see Appendix B); additionally, all participants participated voluntarily and could withdraw from the study at any time without facing repercussions or negative consequences. The participants in this study might have been concerned that any negative interview responses on the use and effectiveness of restorative justice practices would be shared with the building administrators or district supervisors and be held against them. Additionally, the participants in this study might also have been concerned that their responses would be made public to those outside the district. To mitigate potential concerns, all identifiers were kept confidential. This included all participants' names, the school, the district, and all other identifiers. In addition, all participants personal information that could lead to being identified had been removed. This included where the individuals went to school, previous school districts they worked at, and the number of years they have been at their current district.

To ensure privacy, each participant conducted a one-on-one interview over Zoom. The participants could select where they felt most comfortable doing their interview. The locations ranged from the teacher's classroom to their residence. Upon completion of each interview,

participants were randomly assigned a number from one to 12. Participants were referred to as

Participant 1, Participant 2, and so on. Each participant was guaranteed confidentially and was

given copies of their interview transcript to conduct a member check to ensure their responses

aligned with the transcript created. In addition, all audio files of participant interviews were

securely stored and reviewed by the researcher. The only other individual who had access to

these files was the researcher's dissertation chair.

Instrumentation & Data Sources

For this qualitative research study, the researcher developed a semi-structured interview

guide based on previous interview instruments shared with the researcher by Dr. Hilary Lustick,

who has done numerous studies on restorative justice practices in the field of education. The

semi-structured interview questions had modifications to align with the theoretical framework of

Norm Theory and the research questions. The rationale for Norm Theory as the theoretical

framework was related to the extent that this theory examines how an individual views an event

after knowing the outcome. Kahneman and Miller (1986) stated that this framework is "a theory

of norms and normality is presented and applied to some phenomena of emotional responses,

social judgment, and conversations about causes" (p. 136). The authors describe the concept of a

norm as something that individuals apply to events in their everyday lives. The term *norm* can

describe almost any aspect of an individual's life, such as how someone visualizes an

advertisement, a conversation with peers, or the route taken home from work. Since Norm

Theory examines how an individual views an event after the known outcome, the research

questions for this case study were designed to be based on individuals' perceptions of restorative

justice practices in their profession. Once the researcher modified the instrument to align with

Norm Theory and the research questions, the instrument was emailed to Dr. Lustick for review. Upon review, she stated that the instrument was valid for this study.

Since all the participants in the study have had at least a year's worth of experience using restorative justice practices in the school, the instruments' semi-structured design was to identify how each teacher would define restorative justice practices, how they perceive the effectiveness of these practices in the classroom, and impact on student and teacher relationships. The literature outlined in chapters one and two, the theoretical framework, and previous instruments from Dr. Lustick, were used to develop the instrument in this study. The questions in this instrument were designed to elicit answers to the four research questions while being semi-structured to allow participants to share their perspectives on each topic. The interview questions were designed for participants to examine their history using restorative justice practices. The questions guided participants to discuss positive and negative experiences, discipline issues, relationship building, school culture, areas for improvement, and overall perceptions of restorative justice practices. The interview questions are as follows:

Demographic and Background Information

1. What is your current role and the number of years you have been teaching?

2. What is your educational background? (Degrees, majors, schools you attended)

3. What roles have you held as an educator? Any coaching, department chairs, committees, etc., should be included in your answer.

Main Interview Questions

1. I understand that this school uses restorative practices in a couple of different ways: community-building circles in advisory and conflict resolution circles to heal harm. When and where were you first introduced to restorative justice practices?

2. How would you define restorative justice practices?

3. What restorative justice practices have you used in the classroom? What has been your experience using these practices?

4. What are your impressions of the community-building circles used in study hall/advisory? (Good topics, bad topics, effective, not effective)

5. What are some of the benefits and challenges you have experienced in your classroom in terms of the implementation of restorative justice practices in your classroom? How have you embraced and addressed the issues?

6. Tell me about a time when you thought removing a student from your classroom was necessary for behavioral reasons. What was happening, and what led you to the decision to remove them from the class?

7. What are your impressions of using restorative circles/restorative conversations to resolve disciple issues such as conflict and healing harm? Have you found it to be helpful? How so? (This can be student to teacher or student to student.)

8. Should the administrators/school district always use restorative practices to deal with conflict/discipline issues? Why or why not?

9. What impact do you believe the community-building circles have had when it comes to you building relationships with the students and the student building relationships with you?

10. What impact do you believe that restorative circles/conversations have had when it comes to building relationships with the students and the student building relationships with you?

11. In restorative practices, do you think students feel genuinely heard? Why or why not?

12. What positives in the school climate and culture have you noticed since implementing more restorative practices?

13. What negatives in the school climate and culture have you noticed since implementing more restorative practices?

14. Are there ways your administration/school/other teachers have supported you with implementing restorative practices? Ways they could have been more supportive?

15. What suggestions might you make for those wanting to implement or improve restorative practices?

Interview Questions Connection to Research Questions

The connection between interview questions and research questions is as follows:

- Research question one, "how do teachers define restorative justice practices?" is addressed and answered by a combination of demographic and background questions 1-3 and main interview questions 1, 2, and 12-15.

- Research question two, "how do teachers use restorative justice-based instructional strategies in their classrooms?" is addressed and answered by main interview questions 3, 4, and 11-15.

- Research question three, "how do teachers perceive the use of restorative justice practices as a discipline method?" is addressed and answered by main interview questions 5-8, 12, 13, and 15.

- Research question four, "how does the use of restorative justice practices impact teacher and student relationships?" is addressed and answered by a combination of demographic and background questions 3, and main interview questions 4, 9-13, and 15.

Table 1

Connection Between Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research Questions	Main Interview Questions	Relation to the Literature
1. How do teachers define restorative justice practices?	1, 2, 12-15	Gregory et al., 2021; Kervick et al., 2020; Lustick, 2020
2. How do teachers use restorative justice-based instructional strategies in their classrooms?	3, 4, 11-15	Durlak et al., 2011; González et al., 2019; Lustick, 2022
3. How do teachers perceive the use of restorative justice practices as a discipline method?	5-8, 12, 13, 15	Lustick, 2017; Short et al., 2018; Wang & Lee, 2019
4. How does the use of restorative justice practices impact teacher and student relationships?	4, 9-13, 15	Cook et al., 2018; Grant et al., 2020; Huguley et al., 2022

The three demographic and background questions were primarily related to the first research question; how do teachers define restorative justice practices? Since all participants in the study have a variety of backgrounds and experiences, each individual's personal history would factor in how they would define restorative justice practices. The third question was connected to the first and fourth research questions; how do teachers define restorative justice practices, and how do the use of restorative justice practices impact teacher and student relationships? Each participant's background information can be used to connect to their perception of restorative justice practices, such as how they would define it, instructional strategies they use, discipline-related context, and how they view its impact on relationships with students.

The main interview questions were designed to get at the heart of each participant's thoughts and perceptions of restorative justice practices. Some interview questions were designed to relate to one research question, while others were designed to carry over multiple research questions. For example, the first two questions in the main interview were designed to answer research question number one; how do teachers define restorative justice practices? The third interview question from the main section was designed to answer the second research question; how do teachers use restorative justice-based instructional strategies in their classrooms? Questions five through eight were designed to answer the third research question; how do teachers perceive the use of restorative justice practices as a discipline method? Finally, questions nine and 10 were designed to answer the fourth research question; how does the use of restorative justice practices impact teacher and student relationships?

Several questions in the demographic and background section and main interview section were designed to help answer multiple research questions. For example, question number three in the demographic and background section was written to help answer research questions one and four. In the main interview question, questions four and 11 connect to research questions two and four, question 14 connects to research questions one and two, and questions 12, 13, and 15 relate to all four research questions.

Data Collection Procedures

After receiving approval from the University of Findlay's Institutional Review Board, the researcher sent out an email in the fall of 2023 to the 47 teachers in the middle school where this case study was to take place. The email outlined that they were being asked to participate in a qualitative study on teacher perceptions of using restorative justice practices in their profession. Further, the email outlined the study's methodology, and explained that if a teacher were willing

to participate in the case study, they would agree to partake in a semi-structured, one-on-one

Zoom interview. It was shared that the interview would last approximately 60 minutes. Every

teacher was made aware that their participation was voluntary, their identities and responses

would be confidential, they would have the ability to withdraw at any time if they wanted, and

they would have the opportunity to conduct a member check on their transcript prior to coding to

ensure their responses were accurate. Member checks, also known as respondent validation, are

when the interview data is shared with the participant for them to review. Maxwell (2013) states:

> This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the
>
> meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going
>
> on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and
>
> misunderstanding of what you observed. (pp. 126-127)

Finally, the email ended with asking those teachers interested in an interview to respond to the

email indicating that they were willing to participate in the study and that the researcher would

contact them about scheduling their interview time.

Despite the researcher being a teacher at the school where this case study took place, all

interviews were conducted over Zoom to allow participants a greater range of availability and

security in case they were uncomfortable conducting their interviews at the school they work.

The researcher reminded each participant that their name and responses would be confidential,

and any identifiers would be redacted from the study. The researcher conducted each Zoom

interview from their home office to allow for privacy, where the participants were able to choose

the location that best served them. Additionally, the use of Zoom allowed the researcher to

record the interview and save an audio file while receiving an initial draft transcript. The

recording of each interview was saved to the personal hard drive of the researcher's computer.

All initial interview transcriptions created by Zoom were cleaned up and corrected by the

researcher.

The researcher planned for each Zoom interview to last approximately 60 minutes. Still,

each participant was given as much time as necessary to allow them to thoroughly answer the

questions and add additional insight on a topic or question. At the start of the interview, the

researcher again asked for permission to record the interview, and the participant selected the

"allow meeting recording" button that popped up. The researcher primarily focused on

conducting the interviews and listening to the participants without taking notes. The rationale for

not taking notes was to show the participant that the researcher was engaged in the interview and

wanted it to be more conversational. Upon completion, the researcher thanked the participant for

their time in the study and told them they would receive a copy of the interview transcript in the

next few days for a member check. Participants were asked to review the transcript to ensure

their responses were accurate. After each participant member check, they were asked to email the

researcher back that the transcript was in line with how they answered or if particular answers

needed to be fine-tuned to reflect their response better. The researcher made any necessary

adjustments; then, the interview and transcript data were uploaded into MAXQDA24 for coding

and identifying trends.

Data Analysis

After completing each Zoom interview, Zoom created an audio file and a rough

transcription. The rationale for calling the Zoom transcript "rough" is that the Zoom software

will occasionally record wrong information, mix up words, or give the incorrect person credit for

saying something. First, the researcher downloaded the audio and transcript files from the Zoom

platform to the researcher's password-protected hard drive and placed the files into a different

password-protected folder. Then the researcher permanently deleted all online files from Zoom's

website. Next, the researcher copied and pasted the transcript data into a Microsoft Word

document for corrections, which this Word document was also saved in the password-protected

folder, and the initial Zoom transcript file was deleted. Then, the researcher uploaded the

interview audio and transcript files to MAXQDA24, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis

software (CAQDAS). The primary function of MAXQDA24 is not that the program does the

data analysis itself but to help with the organization of that analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The researcher selected this program because they had previous experience using it and wanted

to ensure the interview files and transcripts could be worked on in one secure location.

After the audio and transcript files were uploaded into MAXQDA24, the researcher

listened to each interview to make corrections to the initial Zoom transcript and delete all

personal identifiers for the participants. Once the transcript edits were completed, the researcher

shared a copy with the participant so they could conduct a member check to ensure that they felt

the transcript reflected their perceptions of the interview questions. Participants were asked to

review them and respond within a week that the interview data was accurate. Any interview

responses that participants felt misrepresented their perceptions or what they meant to say were

given the opportunity to clarify their statements, respond again, and fill in any potential gaps. If

any edits were made to the transcript, that new transcript was placed in the password-protected

file, uploaded to MAXQDA24, and the previous version was deleted.

Once participants signed off on the member check, the interview transcript was analyzed

through a process called coding. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define coding as "assigning some

sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve

specific pieces of the data. These designations can be single words, letters, numbers, phrases,

colors, or combinations" (p. 199). MAXQDA24 is the program where the researcher analyzed the participant's perspectives on restorative justice practices in their classrooms.

The theoretical framework used in this study was Kahneman and Miller's (1986) Norm Theory. The authors state its purpose is "applied in analyses of the enhanced emotional response to events that have abnormal causes, of the generation of predication and inferences from the observations of behavior, and the role of norms in causal questions and answer" (p. 136) — specifically examining how individuals view an event after that individual knows the outcome. The use of restorative justice practices within the school in this case study is relatively new, and the participants in this study are still adjusting to being mandated to use them. Still, they have seen numerous outcomes, having used them for over a year, and have developed their own norms. Therefore, it would be natural for teachers to have heightened emotional responses when using these practices within their classrooms, such as running a restorative circle between students when harm has occurred and leading community circles during study hall. Additionally, this study used a phenomenological approach, specifically looking to understand the participant's perspectives on restorative justice practices.

Based on the research questions, Norm Theory, and the phenomenological approach, this set the stage for the coding process. Provisional Codes were developed prior to coding, and others were developed when reviewing participant transcripts. Saldaña (2013) stated that Provisional Coding, "begins with a 'start list' of researcher-generated codes based on what preparatory investigation suggests might appear in the data before they are analyzed" (p. 141). These Provisional Codes were developed while creating the interview instrument connected to this study's research questions. The Provisional Codes were:

Positive. Used to identify any positive perceptions about restorative justice practices.

Negative. Used to identify any negative perceptions about restorative justice practices.

Defining restorative justice practices. Aligned with research question #1, how do participants define what restorative justice practices are?

Circles. Identifying the use of either community-building circles or restorative circles.

Discipline. Addressing any discipline topic that comes up, both punitive and using restorative justice practices.

Challenging. Identifying where teachers may be struggling when using restorative justice practices.

Rewarding. Identifying areas when teachers perceive excitement about the use of restorative justice practices.

Relationship. Teacher perception of impact on relationships with students.

Curriculum. How teachers perceive they are using restorative justice practices within their curriculum.

The researcher developed additional coding themes while listening to the audio files and reviewing each participant's interview transcription. The researcher first used Descriptive Coding, where passages within qualitative data are summarized in one word or a short phrase (Saldaña, 2013). Further, Wolcott (1994) stated, "Description is the foundation for qualitative inquiry, and its primary goal is to assist the reader to see what you saw and to hear what you heard in general" (p. 55). The process of Descriptive Coding allows a researcher to help categorize the data's contents, and "Descriptive Coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 88). Next, the researcher used In Vivo Coding for a second round of coding. The In Vivo coding process uses "the direct language of participants as codes rather than

researcher-generated words and phrases" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 61). Since this study examines teacher perceptions, In Vivo Coding was selected to precisely identify and share phrases participants spoke of in their interviews.

Additionally, like Descriptive Coding, Saldaña (2013) stated that In Vivo Coding "is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data, and studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (p. 91). These two coding methods combined allowed the researcher to analyze what they heard and examine what each participant said. Lastly, a second coder was brought in to review the transcripts and code the data to identify if any other trends were noticed or missed by the primary researcher. The second coder used the same coding method as the primary researcher: Descriptive Coding and In Vivo Coding. Wolcott (1994) expressed that Descriptive Coding is essential for a second coding cycle and helps with further analysis and understanding of the data. In Vivo Coding was also used by the second coder to identify phrases that stood out and connected to this study's research questions. Additionally, during the coding process, memoing was used to make further connections and identify trending topics between the different interviews or that strongly correlate to the previous research outlined in the literature review.

Assumptions

The researcher made a few assumptions during this study; most assumptions were made during the interview process. From the researcher's perspective, the first assumption the researcher had was that the participants were honest in their answers and felt comfortable sharing their perspectives, even if they felt their thoughts did not align with the researcher's. The second assumption was the researcher believed that participants were in a location where they felt safe to share their perspectives on the topic and not be judged for their opinions. Third, the researcher

assumed that participants were comfortable sharing their perspectives on restorative justice

practices with a coworker who favors using these practices. Lastly, the researcher assumed the

research and interview questions would adequately identify teachers' themes and norms when

sharing their perceptions on restorative justice practices.

The researcher had assumptions about the participants outside of the interview process.

First, all participants volunteered to participate in this study and knew the researcher was also a

teacher at their school. It was assumed the participants knew that the researcher had no power

over them and had no influence over the participants' careers. Finally, participants knew that no

reward would be given for participating in the study or for positive responses on the research

topic.

Trustworthiness

This study was designed to be a qualitative case study using a phenomenological

approach using semi-structured interviews. This phenomenological approach and the use of

semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share their norms and perspectives and gain a

deeper understanding of how they view the effectiveness of restorative justice practices within

their school. All responses and perspectives came from the participants and were not influenced

or guided toward specific answers by the researcher. Convenience sampling allowed participants

to volunteer to partake in the study rather than feel pressured into participating in a coworker's

study. The study participants wanted to take part in the research and were not pressured to in any

way to join in the study. Participants were informed that all identifiers would be removed from

the study so their responses could not be connected to them. The researcher allowed all

participants to conduct member checks for validity. Any information participants who felt the

transcript misrepresented their perceptions or what they meant to say were given the opportunity

to clarify their statements and fill in any potential gaps. Additionally, to help increase the trustworthiness of this study, the researcher used a second coder to ensure that all codes and themes were identified. These systems helped ensure that this study was credible and that the results were accurately interpreted.

Chapter IV. Results

After the completion of this qualitative study on teacher perceptions of restorative justice practices in a classroom setting, this chapter outlines the results of this study's research questions:

1. How do teachers define restorative justice practices?

2. How do teachers use restorative justice-based instructional strategies in their classrooms?

3. How do teachers perceive the use of restorative justice practices as a discipline method?

4. How does the use of restorative justice practices impact teacher and student relationships?

The results section of chapter four is organized first by outlining the demographics of the participants in this study. Secondly, the researcher describes the interview instrument used in this study, as well as the validity of that instrument, the connection to the theoretical framework of Norm Theory and reasoning for the phenomenological approach, and how each interview question was connected to this study's research questions. Thirdly, the researcher will detail how they analyzed and coded the interview data, then, in connection to teacher perception, how the research questions are answered based on the data provided by each participant. Lastly, the findings are summarized based on this study's coded data and themes. These themes and findings will be used to provide recommendations for schools looking to implement and improve upon restorative justice practices within their schools and district, as well as future research on restorative justice practices within schools.

Participants and Sampling

The researcher conducted 12 qualitative interviews during the fall of 2023 with 12 participating teachers where this case study took place; this equated to 25.5% of the middle school teaching staff. Because the researcher works at the school where this case study took place, the researcher used convenience sampling and asked for participant volunteers to ensure that no one felt pressured to participate. Each interview was conducted over Zoom at any location where the participant felt most comfortable, and each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Of the 12 participants, nine identify as female (75%), and three identify as male (25%), which aligned with the overall teacher demographic of this middle school, where 68% identify as female and 32% identify as male. The participants' teaching experience ranged from 11 to 30 years, so each participant would be considered an experienced and veteran teacher.

Regarding the participants' educational backgrounds, 10 of the 12 participants have a master's degree or higher. In comparison, the other two participants have bachelor's degrees and are currently working toward their master's degrees. With 83% of the participants in this study having at least a master's degree, that is higher than the total percentage of the middle school staff (62.1%) and total district teaching staff having a graduate degree (67.9%). See the Participants and Sampling Technique section in Chapter III for further demographics of the school district where this case study occurred.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

The instrument used in this study (see Appendix B) was a semi-structured interview guide based on previous interview instruments by Dr. Hillary Lustick, who has done numerous studies on restorative justice practices within the field of education. The semi-structured interview questions from Dr. Lustick were modified for this study to align with the theoretical framework of Norm Theory and this study's research questions. The rationale for Norm Theory

as the theoretical framework is that this theory examines how an individual views an event after knowing the outcome. Kahneman and Miller (1986) stated that this framework is "a theory of norms and normality is presented and applied to some phenomena of emotional responses, social judgment, and conversations about causes" (p. 136). Additionally, this case study examined teacher perceptions through a phenomenological approach. Patton (2015) described phenomenology as the study of how people describe their experiences and what they observe through their lens. The basis of phenomenology is that individuals can only know what they experience through their own lens. When trying to understand how the teachers in this study define restorative justice practices, what practices they perceive they use in the classroom, and their perception of the effectiveness of restorative justice practices as a discipline method and impact on building relationships with students, the only people truly capable of detailing how they felt about this and what they experienced are themselves, which is why Norm Theory and phenomenology were used. Since each participant had at least one year's experience using restorative justice practices in the classroom, the questions in this instrument were designed to elicit answers to the four research questions while being semi-structured to allow participants to share their perspectives on each topic.

The semi-structured interview questions were designed to identify how each teacher would define restorative justice practices, how they perceive the effectiveness of these practices in the classroom, and their impact on student and teacher relationships. The questions guided participants to discuss positive and negative experiences, discipline issues, relationship building, school culture, areas for improvement, and overall perceptions of restorative justice practices. The connections between interview questions and research questions are as follows:

- Research question one, "How do teachers define restorative justice practices?" is addressed and answered by a combination of demographic and background questions 1-3 and main interview questions 1, 2, and 12-15.

- Research question two, "How do teachers use restorative justice-based instructional strategies in their classrooms?" is addressed and answered by main interview questions 3, 4, and 11-15.

- Research question three, "How do teachers perceive the use of restorative justice practices as a discipline method?" is addressed and answered by main interview questions 5-8, 12, 13, and 15.

- Research question four, "How does the use of restorative justice practices impact teacher and student relationships?" is addressed and answered by a combination of demographic and background questions 3, and main interview questions 4, 9-13, and 15.

Data Analysis

The teacher interview responses were coded in MAXQDA24. Each interview was coded with Provisional Coding, Descriptive Coding, and In Vivo Coding. Saldaña (2013) stated that Provisional Coding "begins with a 'start list' of researcher-generated codes based on what preparatory investigation suggests might appear in the data before they are analyzed" (p. 141). Using Descriptive Coding allowed the researcher to help categorize the data's contents, and "Descriptive Coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 88). Additionally, the In Vivo coding process uses "the direct language of participants as codes rather than researcher-generated words and phrases" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 61). These two coding methods

allowed the researcher to analyze what they heard and examine each participant's words. Lastly,

a second coder was brought in to review the transcripts and code the data to identify if the

primary researcher noticed or missed any other trends. The primary researcher shared all

Provisional Codes, and the second coder used the same coding method as the primary researcher:

Descriptive Coding and In Vivo Coding. The researcher used the MAXQDA24 Smart Coding

tool to analyze the trends, and these codes allowed the researcher to answer this study's research

questions. MAXQDA24 describes the Smart Coding tool as "A table tool you can use to compile

your coded text segments for a specific code. It makes assigning individual data segments to

codes and subcodes a great deal easier, faster, and - above all - clearer" (Code Smarter not

Harder, 2021). This tool allowed the researcher to select a specific code and see every time that

code appeared across each participant to identify themes more easily. The provisional and

descriptive codes identified while reviewing the transcript data are as follows:

Table 2

Provisional and Descriptive Codes Identified

Provisional Codes	Descriptive Codes
Positive, negative, defining restorative justice practices (research question 1), circles, discipline, challenging, rewarding, relationship, and *curriculum*	*Aligned research question 2, Aligned research question 3, Aligned research question4, area of improvement, first hearing about restorative justice practices, participant educational background, restorative conversation, restorative justice practices used in classroom, teacher questions,* and *number of years teaching*

Code counts were gathered through MAXQDA24. While this study examined teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of restorative justice practices within a classroom, most participants shared more positives than negatives of these practices. All 12 participants shared during their interview that they wanted to continue using some form of restorative justice practices within their classroom and hoped the school would continue using these practices and provide more professional development opportunities in the future. Still, they did share challenges and areas of improvement to help enhance the effectiveness of these practices within the middle school. The code summary table below is included to help illustrate all connections to the four research questions that guided this study.

Table 3

Teacher Interviews – Coded Segment Frequency

Teacher Codes	Frequency
Positive	112
Negative	50
Defining Restorative Justice Practices	12
Circles	127
Discipline	69
Challenging	62
Rewarding	27
Relationships	72
Curriculum	14
Area of Improvement	78
First hearing about Restorative Justice Practices	13
Participants Educational Background	14
Restorative Conversation	56
Restorative Justice Practices Used in Classroom	42
Teacher Questions	4
Number of Years Teaching	13
Aligned to Research Question 2	87
Aligned to Research Question 3	73
Aligned to Research Question 4	85
Total Number of Codes	*1010*

Note. Frequency includes the total coded segments from all teacher interviews.

Research Question 1: How do teachers define restorative justice practices?

The building administrators at the middle school where this case study took place decided during the summer of 2022 that they wanted to start implementing restorative justice practices to help curb some of the negative behaviors that had been coming up post-COVID-19. During the 2021-2022 school year, numerous teachers reported to the building administration that they were struggling with student misbehaviors and student mental health issues. The problems that came up most frequently were student apathy towards classwork, students walking out of class without permission, inappropriate language, and the lack of a positive sense of community that had existed prior to the pandemic.

These issues led the building administrators to create the Climate Committee, a team of two teachers who introduced restorative justice practices to the middle school staff and student body. This group was responsible for helping train the teaching staff on introductory practices, such as the purpose behind restorative justice practices, running community circles, restorative conversations, and building stronger communities in the classrooms. Once these practices were introduced, the building administrators mandated that all teachers use them within their classrooms, including the first 18 minutes of study hall, where it was required to use restorative justice practices to help build community. Over the 15 months from when this change was initiated to the start of this study, the researcher was able to observe the professional development, see how these practices were taught, and listen to teacher comments about this cultural shift. The researcher did not partake in leading any professional development sessions on restorative justice practices to remain neutral in this case study but did observe that while there were several training sessions on how to implement restorative justice practices, very little

explanation was given on how to define these practices, which led to some confusion amongst the teaching staff and the participants of this study.

As stated in the Chapter One introduction, restorative justice and restorative justice practices have numerous definitions and interpretations. Prior to examining the answer to the first research question, "How do teachers define restorative justice practices?", reviewing the definitions this study used based on previous literature is critical. For this study, the researcher uses González's (2012) definition of restorative justice and King Lung et al.'s (2019) definition of restorative justice practices. Restorative justice is defined by González (2012) as:

> An approach to discipline that engages all parties in a balanced practice that brings
> together all people impacted by an issue of behavior. It allows students, teachers,
> families, schools, and communities to resolve conflict, promote academic achievement,
> and address school safety. (p. 281)

Additionally, González et al. (2019) added to the definition that "it is grounded in Indigenous traditions that emphasize interconnectedness and relationality to promote the well-being of all its community members" (p. 208). Restorative justice practices are a process used to handle wrongdoing within a school or community; this practice allows the victim, the offender, and the surrounding community to discuss the hurtful action, look to heal the harm, and enable the offender to learn from their actions while remaining in the community (King Lund et al., 2021). Further, they state that restorative justice practices help students develop their social-emotional skills, and these practices "contrasts sharply with traditional punitive, zero-tolerance discipline models which perpetuate systemic inequality in schools, especially for students of color" (King Lund et al., 2021, p. 15). These practices are primarily being used in the middle school where this case study took place to help build a stronger sense of community for students, allow

students to feel like they have more of a voice in school decisions, and curb negative student

behaviors without administrators having to rely strictly on punitive discipline tactics.

Based on the coded segments across the 12 teacher interviews (Participants 1-12),

teachers describe and answered, "How do teachers define restorative justice practices?" in

several different ways. Even though 10 of the 12 teacher participants in this study had heard of

restorative justice practices before this school implemented them, no two definitions were the

same, and several teachers in this study spoke about how the term "restorative justice practices"

was hard to define and felt they did not have a specific definition in their head. Participant 10

responded by laughing first and stating, "Oh, no, that's hard. It's like, how do you define a

spoon? But not quite so. I do use spoons every day, and I don't know if I'm using restorative

justice practices" before trying to define what they thought it was. Participant 2 reacted similarly

by laughing and stating, "I knew I was going to get that question. Yeah, cause that's hard,"

before outlining how they would define it. This question caused several participants to pause and

think for a moment before answering. Participant 3 started by saying, "I would… That's tricky. I

would define it sort of practice or justice," while Participant 4 voiced, "So, I mean, I think that it

is kind of in its name," before trying to explain their definition.

Some teachers did question themselves when asked how they would define restorative

justice practices and might have felt that this was a "gotcha question." Participant 5 started their

response by saying, "So I think it's not just, you know, if something happens, I hope that it's not

just a reactive practice, but it's something that we can kind of build in organically into a conflict

resolution." Participant 9 expressed, "I guess my understanding would be that, I guess, I think of,

like every behavior is a communication, you know?"

While many of the participants initially struggled to define restorative justice practices,

all 12 participants were positive in their definitions, relating it to giving students opportunities,

repairing harm, learning how to work through problems and conflict, and communicating better.

Participant 1 expressed:

> I think the restorative justice practices is all about creating opportunities for people to
>
> learn in authentic ways. Meaning really, some of these, I would say, like social skills, are
>
> almost SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) standards that we'd want student to have.
>
> Kind of creating opportunities. Whether it's circles (community circles), or restorative
>
> conversations, or just effective statements ways to interact with people to model and set
>
> up kid of demonstrating those skills we want students to have and people to have to be
>
> successful in any field.

Half of the participants spoke about some form of healing harm or reconciling an issue that arose

between student-to-student or student-to-teacher. Participant 2 spoke about how they believed

restorative justice practices were a system to help "when someone has been negatively impacted,

to heal all of those involved. So, the victim, the aggressor, or, you know, the person that's done

the harm. And anybody that's witnessed it as well." Participant 8 spoke about how certain

behaviors might cause harm to someone, and restorative justice practices "can sometimes be like

healing that or working on that." Participant 3 expressed this is, "A model to repair harm to a

community, by practices that are nontraditional." Furthermore, Participants 5, 6, and 9 spoke on

how this practice connects to positive communication between students and teachers to work

through challenges so each group can succeed.

Despite there not being a consensus definition of "restorative justice practices," the

researcher noticed several overlapping themes from the interview transcripts, such as discipline,

circles, and relationships. Across the 12 interviews, eight teachers connected restorative justice

practices to discipline, specifically, looking to shift away from punitive discipline. Six of the 12

teachers connected their definition with building relationships with students. Lastly, two of the

12 participants connected the definition to using circles, either community-building or restorative

circles, in their classrooms.

Discipline

While eight of the 12 teachers in this study connected their definition with discipline,

each participant's definition was in opposition to punitive discipline and more wanting students

to learn from their mistakes and understand how their actions affected their community.

Participant 1 spoke on how:

> The concept behind it is again growth for the students in our case and also trying to steer
>
> away from what have traditionally been like punitive situations. Which, you know, we
>
> have plenty of data to say is not effective for all students. So, kind of trying to create
>
> some additional opportunities for kids to learn from their behaviors out of a punitive
>
> consequence.

Several participants spoke about how it is vital to bring student voices into the discipline process,

have them learn from their actions, and understand why what they did was wrong. Participant 5

outlined how restorative justice practices being connected with discipline would allow a shift

from purely punitive discipline by including the "why and not just, you know, you have a

detention, and you, you know, are doing the time without understanding." Participant 8 also

connected to why specific disciplinary actions were happening, stating, "It's just…not just

punishing. Or but like, I think it's important to get to like why things are happening; like

behaviors and different things." The connection between student voice and discipline led to a

few teachers connecting the students' adverse actions to their impact on the classroom.

Regarding connecting discipline to the classroom community, Participant 3 continued

that theme, stating, "A model to repair harm to a community, by practices that are nontraditional,

such as like suspensions. We don't suspend, we do more of a collaborative approach of with our

community in terms of this, this action caused harm." Negative student behavior can have an

impact on the classroom, and Participant 11 connected their definition of restorative justice

practices to that, stating:

> If you broke something, you clean it up. If you hurt someone's feelings, you need to have
>
> a discussion with them. You need to apologize. I feel like restore it. Justice has to have
>
> human contact, like, there has to be some, some interaction. It's not just a "you get sent
>
> for detention," but there has to be some kind of communication with that student.

The idea of repairing and fixing the classroom community was critical within the participant's

definitions.

Relationships and Circles

Additionally, six participants connected relationships and circles with their definitions of

restorative justice practices. These six spoke on how restorative justice practices allowed

stronger relationships to form between themselves and students while also developing a stronger

sense of community, both regarding improving the relationships after a disciplinary occurrence

and general positive classroom relationships. Participant 7 spoke of this by saying, "I think the

focus is on not punishing behaviors or students for behaviors but working towards building

community." Participant 12 felt that restorative justice practices were defined by the idea of

"helping us understand each other, you know, just get outside of what our perspective is,

understand other people's perspective, so, we can build relationships." The most common

practices mentioned here were community-building circles and restorative circles by two

teachers. Participant 2 stated, "I think with our circles (community and restorative) would be like

building that those relationships and trust, so that when we have those more challenging

conflicts, we can restore that collectively." Participant 1 spoke of how community-building

circles and restorative circles allow students to develop the skills to handle conflict in adulthood.

Several teachers in this study overlapped discipline and relationships within their definition of

restorative justice practices.

Table 4

Teacher Interviews – Response to how they defined Restorative Justice Practices

Teacher Participant	How each participant defined "restorative justice practices"
Participant 1	So, you know, I think the restorative justice practices is all about creating opportunities for people to learn in authentic ways. Meaning really, some of these, I would say, like social skills, are almost SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) standards that we'd want students to have. Kind of creating opportunities. Whether it's circles, or restorative conversations, or just effective statements ways to interact with people to model and set up kind of demonstrating those skills we want students to have and people to have to be successful in any field. And I think the for me, the concept behind it is again growth for the students in our case and also trying to steer away from what have traditionally been like punitive situations. Which, you know, we have plenty of data to say is not effective for all students. So, kind of trying to create some additional opportunities for kids to learn from their behaviors outside of a punitive consequence. So, I think restorative practices gives us a framework to do that.
Participant 2	I knew I was going to get that question. Yeah, cause that's hard. I, I think, the intention is to, when someone has been negatively impacted, to heal all of those involved. So, the victim, the aggressor, or you know, person that's done the harm. And any anybody that's witnessed it as well. So, and proactively, I think with our circles would be like building that those relationships and trust, so that when we have those more challenging conflicts, we can restore that collectively.
Participant 3	I would... That's tricky. I would define it sort of practice or justice. A model to repair harm to a community, by practices that are nontraditional, such as like suspensions. We don't suspend, we do more of a collaborative approach of with our community in terms of this, this action caused harm. What can we do as a community to discuss that action, and how it impacted us as a community that having that conversation with that specific individual and having a very open conversation. Restorative practice to me means, that it is very important to know that we cannot lose any member of our community, and it's only impactful when you are able to have open and honest communication and dialogue.
Participant 4	So, I mean, I think that it is kind of in its name. It's anything to reset, like something happens, and you know a party is injured, hurt, upset, angry, whatever, it allows time to sit down and reflect on your part in it, and their part in it, and try to come to consensus of how to make it

	better. Restore what to, you know, restore to before the injury, the hurt, the sadness, the whatever it was.
Participant 5	So I think it's not just, you know, if something happens, I hope that it's not just a reactive practice, but it's something that we can kind of build in organically into a conflict resolution. But being kind of proactive with beginning with building relationships with your students that you know with clear boundaries, you know, I think, as you know, it's clear that I communicate to my students what my role is, but also I'm here as a safe space. If you need to have, you know, more meaningful conversations around like social emotional health. And so, I think it really just starts with the beginning of the year getting to know your students. And then when and if something does happen, they feel comfortable coming to me and sharing, you know, kind of their background. And as to why and not just, you know, "you have a detention," and you, you know, are doing the time without understanding. You know why the whatever happened, happened.

But I think it's really, you know, it's it begins with the relationships that you establish with these young children. Yeah. And, you know, then creating a safe space, and then from there you can create the community trust. |
Participant 6	I always would define restorative justice as for getting to the root of a situation and allowing students especially to learn how to positively communicate work through conflict. And get to the other side of it if you will.
Participant 7	I would say, I feel like when I hear or think of the term with sort of justice practices, I think, like, the focus is on not...not like punishing behaviors or students for behaviors, but working towards building like community. Replacing them with like healthy behaviors. Basically, like, if there's an issue, instead of just punishing, but like working on like what really happened like the core of what's happening. And trying to lay the groundwork for, just healthier, I guess, interactions, I guess.
Participant 8	Essentially, it's just…not just like punishing. Or but like, I think it's important to get to like why things are happening; like behaviors and different things. There's a reason these things are happening. It's communication in some way or another. And so it's figuring out and like, it can sometimes be like healing that or working on that. And sometimes it's just like restoring a relationship from a bad, like, interaction. Or so I feel like it's a million different things. And it's very personalized. And it really depends on like the student situation.

	I think it's just like seeing a person where they're at, adult or kid, and dealing with that. And whatever is like the most effective and beneficial way for everyone to move forward in a healthy manner.
Participant 9	I guess my understanding would be that, I guess I think of, like every behavior is a communication is, you know? Every behavior that I see is communicating to me in some way, and I guess I would see restorative justice is taking that information as the adult in the room, taking that information that's being communicated to me and helping that student in a very positive way. Improve whatever the problem is. Like, if there's a problem or a concern, or something in their way of success or something, in their way of helping them move forward. Take that information and help them move forward with it. And I guess that's an opposition to punishing them for something that they're doing, so like, take what I see and try to help them replace that with a more positive behavior that can help them go forward in their life versus, "Oh, that's wrong. And now you're punished, or you have a detention," or whatever. Should I say more about that, or is that? I mean, I guess so. I guess I see restorative justice is all things leading to more positive behavior, outcomes and helping a student progress and be a better version of themselves and belong in this world. And, you know, obviously learn ways to act in. You know by yourself and in social settings that are going to help you throughout your life.
Participant 10	Oh, no, that's hard. It's like, how do you define a spoon? But not quite so. I do use spoons every day, and I don't know if I'm using restorative justice practices. I mean for me, I guess, it's practices that are intended to be less pun…less punitive. To actually bring students into the conversation, or to bring more people into the conversation, rather than just being from on high. So, it's more inclusive and trying to, you know get more into the social, (redacted), the social, emotional side of things, you know, since that's so important for teaching to begin with. And being more intentional about it.
Participant 11	I would define it as of, there are rules that we all have in society, and the classroom and halls and everything. And if you break that rule, and it causes an issue with someone, then you have to speak and address those other people that you've interfered with or broke the rule with, or there has to be some kind of, I guess, a reparation or some kind of, you need to personally deal with something. Either have a conversation with another person about it.

	If you broke something, you clean it up. If you hurt someone's feelings, you need to have a discussion with them. You need to apologize. I feel like restore it. Justice has to have human contact, like, there has to be some, some interaction. It's not just a "you get sent for detention," but there has to be some kind of communication with that student. Some kind of, I don't know, "give and take," interaction that lets them say what's going on in their head, when that happens, and figure out the "why's and the what's." That's what I feel like.
Participant 12	It is a tool to help people understand each other, where they are, where there, where there might be harm, where there might be hurt. And helping us understand each other, you know, just get outside of what our perspective is, understand other people's perspective, so, we can build relationships.

Note. Summaries are used to explain teacher's definition of restorative justice practices visually.

Summary of Research Question 1

While the teachers in this case study did not have a consensus definition of restorative justice practices, and some struggled to define it, all 12 participants defined it positively. All the participants spoke about how restorative justice practices look to help heal the harm that might have happened, to allow amends to be made, and to continue building a positive community while reducing or removing punitive discipline from the outcome so the students can learn from whatever mistake they have made. Several teachers alluded to the idea that the overall community would be better when there are stronger student relationships in the classroom. Further, while sharing how they would define restorative justice practices, no participant spoke negatively about it. It appeared that each teacher was either actively in favor of using restorative justice practices in their classroom or believed the practices were worth implementing.

The primary methods that were mentioned in participants' definitions were the use of community-building or restorative circles. Ideally, in their definitions, these strategies would be effective, mainly by giving students the skills and ability to work through conflict positively.

Additionally, these strategies were used to help model and set up successful behaviors, communicate more effectively, and set healthy boundaries for students to follow.

Research Question 2: How do teachers use restorative justice-based instructional strategies in their classroom?

Research question two focuses on how teachers use restorative justice-based instructional strategies in their classrooms and the impact of these strategies. Research question two directly connects to interview questions 3, 4, and 11-15 (see Appendix C). Three main codes and themes were produced based on the coded segments from the 12 teacher interviews: circles, restorative conversations, and curriculum. The first and most occurring code was circles, which connected to further codes regarding circles used in the classroom. Those additional codes were positive, rewarding, relationships, RJP used in class, discipline, challenging, negative, and area of improvement. Additionally, the code restorative conversations was used within teachers' instructional strategies, with additional codes connected to restorative conversations. Those additional codes connected to restorative conversations were positive, discipline, RJP used in classroom, challenging, negative, and relationship. Lastly, the final primary code relating to research question two was curriculum. The curriculum code led to the connections of additional codes: positive, relationship, rewarding, RJP used in class, and challenging.

Table 5

Teacher Interviews – Coded Segment Frequency within "Aligned RQ2" code

Teacher Codes	Frequency
Circles	72
Positive	54
Area of Improvement	53
Negative	39
RJP Used in Class	29
Relationships	26
Challenging	25
Discipline	14
Restorative Conversation	13
Curriculum	10
Rewarding	9
Teacher Questions	3
Total Number of Codes	*347*

Note. Frequency includes the coded segments from all teacher interviews aligned with research question 2.

The most commonly mentioned restorative justice-based instructional strategy that these 12 teachers mentioned was the use of circles, both community-building and restorative circles. All 12 teachers in this case study mentioned using these in their classroom, either in their study hall or in the classes they teach. Additionally, all 12 teachers spoke positively about the use of or potential with community-building circles in classrooms. Participant 9 said, "I love this kind of thing. I really do love it!" After Participant 8 talked about using community-building circles, they stated that they are great, and they use them in both study hall and in the class they teach, stating:

> It's been really beneficial. I feel like it spills over into the classroom as a whole, and how it's running personally. I think it helps with classroom, just maintaining, like, a calm, respectful classroom, allowing others to speak and allowing others to have, not have to worry about being judged.

Continuing with the optimistic view and benefits of using community-building circles,

Participant 10 talked about how this allowed students to speak about issues that might be taking

place in their lives, saying, "I see, like these kids that are very open about mental health and so

many issues I never even thought about as a teenager." This led Participant 10 to continually

push themselves out of their comfort zone and see positive effects from this practice.

Participant 1 spoke about the positive and rewarding aspects of using community-

building circles and how he has noticed that starting with simple circle questions and building up

over time allows students to feel more confident opening up with their peers. They said, "I mean,

I think it's big. Kids feeling comfortable. Sharing like even when the community circles low

level, and you start building it up." This participant later spoke about how sharing and

effectiveness get better when done with consistency, stating:

> That's where the benefit of having the community circles over a period of time comes,
>
> where kids are like, "I feel comfortable sharing with everybody in space, even if I think
>
> other folks might not agree with exactly what I'm saying," right, or "I don't feel like I
>
> have to say it in the perfect way where I'm gonna be judged."

Participant 2 stated right off the bat how community-building circles have been very positive for

them and allowed them to get to know their students better and sooner. Additionally, it permitted

Participant 2 to lay a strong foundation with their students on day one, stating, "I certainly have

gotten to know my students better. And it's like created other side conversations, like, I've

learned more about them and been able to talk to them, you know, individually." While several

of the teachers in this study spoke about how community-building circles allowed them to get to

know their students sooner, several mentioned how it allowed students to get to know them

better. Participant 6 said that during their circles, students "asked things about myself, and like,

we connected maybe on an interest level… it's just big…it just changes the dynamic of the

conversation you can have with the kid."

Through the continued use of community-building circles, some teachers spoke about

how conversations could move away from surface-level questions to deeper topics and

understanding. Participant 3 said that after several months of using community circles in their

study hall, the group of students had been able to discuss challenging world events, such as the

attacks in Gaza, and practice empathy for those in difficult situations. Participant 5 spoke on a

similar note of empathy and understanding when one student in their study hall told the class

they were from Israel and had only been living in the United States for a short period of time.

Building these circles over time led Participant 5 to speak to that discussion, saying:

> One of my students is from Israel. And we weren't necessarily well. No, we were kind of
>
> in a circle, but I had my kids and my, as they all kind of all arranged sort of around the
>
> perimeter and facing each other, and you know, talking about what happened there—and
>
> asking if she was comfortable. She shared some ways that we could support her, and you
>
> know, she just shared. She just appreciates that we care, you know, and that we're here if,
>
> you know, there's anything she wants to share and talk about.

Participant 12 spoke about a challenging time during the 2022-2023 school year when a school-

wide incident, which involved a racist image being displayed in the school, and how they felt

community circles allowed for healing for those who had been affected by the incident. They

stated:

> Had I not had restorative practices at that time, I think it would have looked a lot
>
> different, and I think what I mean by that is, I think it would have, I think a lot of people

would have remained hurt and hopeless. What I mean by that is, but they wouldn't have

been able to share their hurt with somebody because it would be a lost cause.

Powerful sentiments like this were echoed by several of the participants regarding the use of

circles in their classrooms.

The second most mentioned restorative justice-based instructional strategy was

restorative conversations. While the following research question section will outline how

teachers perceive the use of restorative justice practices as a discipline method, 11 of the 12

teachers in this study spoke of how they use and rely on restorative conversations with students

to help with classroom issues as they arise. Each teacher addressed the fact that they rely on

restorative conversations because the last thing they want to do is remove a student from class,

and they feel that a student's place is in the classroom. Several participants thought a student

should only be removed if others were in danger. Participant 1 said they like to use restorative

conversations so "students can be seen and heard, and you can set agreements to hopefully avoid

that traditional disciplinary action." Participant 4's perception aligned with Participant 1: "I think

they're really helpful because I think that…kids make mistakes. Teenagers make mistakes.

They're always gonna make mistakes. They're teenagers!" They then shared how restorative

conversations allow the student to come back to class with a healthier mindset and learn from

their mistake, versus traditional punitive discipline, where the student comes back after

punishment, and there was nothing done to help repair the relationship or help the student learn

from their misbehavior.

Participant 5 spoke of how they sometimes use restorative conversations to apologize to

students after a student issue arises that needs to be restored to meet that student halfway.

Participant 5 elaborated on initiating that restorative conversation, saying, "I think that's an

important part of the restorative practice, too, is like if I do mess it up, it's like, hey, what can we

do to get back to where we were?" Continuing later, they said, "Middle school, I think

developmentally, they're ready to understand that she's genuine and she's here for me, and I

think that can be very effective." Participant 6 also spoke of how much more effective restorative

conversations can be when they (the teacher) include taking some responsibility if warranted.

They said:

> I think it's extremely important for students to see that human that is behind the teacher,
>
> but also for the teacher….and so I think, the moment it kind of takes away that
>
> (resentment). None of us are perfect, and but we need to, and I think that really builds a
>
> relationship. I know some of my toughest students, it was very hard for me to tell them I
>
> was wrong, or that I was sorry, but it was always a game changer.

Participant 11 shared that meeting students halfway and having a healthy restorative

conversation "Helps them understand that they're not alone. That everybody has issues and

everybody is struggling." This theme was carried across all participants; they use restorative

conversations to help resolve issues that arise in their class, heal relationships that may have been

harmed, and allow the students to return to the learning environment in a way that will enable

them to be successful.

The primary reason that these teachers rely on restorative conversations is to handle a

student situation, help them understand the issue that arose, and help get them back on track to

be successful in school. Participant 2 spoke of how they want the student to understand what

happened, why it happened, and how to move on. They further stated it is about, "How can we

debrief and have a conversation and come to an understanding together. That is kind of my first

instinct." Participant 4 spoke about why they rely on restorative conversations versus punitive

tactics, stating, "I think it's important because that's when the learning happens. It doesn't

happen when the kids sit in the office, getting suspended for four days." This led the teachers in

this case study to discuss how they use these practices in their classrooms.

The final main theme related to research question two was implementing restorative

justice practices within their classroom curriculum. Participant 12 said, "I've used it to guide

curriculum. I've used it to help with my classroom climate." This allowed them to evolve as a

teacher continually, include different voices in the curriculum that they were not earlier in their

career, and understand that all students need to see themselves in what they are learning.

Similarly, Participant 10 spoke about how they have increased the amount of diversity and

different situations in their English class curriculum. They emphasized how this included the

voices of black, Asian, Hispanic, and LGBTQ+ authors in the readings they do in class.

Additionally, they ensure that they are discussing incidents of police violence and how groups

push back against inequities. Participant 10 spoke on how well their students respond when

dealing with these complex topics in class, stating:

> It's to me a great opportunity for them to, you know, kind of be open about a topic that's
>
> violence, racism, etc. That's really difficult to talk about. And I do think that my kids rise
>
> to that occasion and are, you know, usually pretty willing to speak up and be honest.

Participant 3 spoke about how at previous schools they would have a class where they would

teach students the history of social justice, social practices, and how to use different restorative

justice practices, and that they would like to do that where this case study took place. This idea

of getting away from a strictly Eurocentric perspective within their classroom content is vital to

several teachers in this study.

Another aspect of blending restorative justice practices within the curriculum was checking the students' current headspace or mood and adjusting curriculum expectations for the day. Participant 3 also outlined how they implemented a check-in and check-out system for the beginning and end of class. This would allow them to gauge what type of mindset the students were in, saying, "I always lead with like an anxiety exercise." This allowed the teacher to make daily adjustments on the fly to help meet the needs of the students. The rationale Participant 3 used was:

> I have no idea how their (students) day has been unless I've just had them in class. I have no idea how the night was before. I have no idea the current state of mind or the head space where our kids are at. So, before I start that lesson, I will do the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. We'll do a check.

Ideally, through these check-ins and outs, the students can leave class in a better mental space than they might have been when they first entered, leading to better academic performance the rest of the day. Unfortunately, none of the participants spoke about observed outcomes regarding whole class check-ins and outs.

While these are positive outcomes, and each teacher shared positive aspects about using circles, restorative conversations, and curriculum, some concerns were addressed regarding using restorative justice practices in their classrooms. The problems mentioned were coded as negative, challenging, or area of improvement. The primary adverse concern that teachers perceived was that many of the middle school students pushed back and stated that they did not enjoy participating in community circles or felt they were having to participate in them too frequently. Participant 4 spoke of this, stating, "I do think sometimes, when you do them too often, especially the age that we're dealing with, it gets very, kids get tired of them, and that's the

feedback I've heard, if that they're done too often." They followed up with, "And so, I think sometimes like that can be a problem a little bit with the restorative (community-building) circles at this age. That they get a little bit mocky with it." Participant 2 talked about the challenge of using these practices with middle schoolers, saying, "I don't know if this is an accurate perception, but I feel like having eighth graders, it is more difficult than maybe having a younger age group or even an older, more mature age group." They further communicated that during the previous school year, they had negative experiences trying to use circles because many of the boys in their study hall would use this time to start making fun of others sharing. This led them to say, "So, it was actually like counterproductive, and that was really hard to break. And I did a lot of reflecting on it...was it my lack of leadership or just the individuals that I had in the class?" They did follow up that using circles with this year's students has been a noticeable improvement compared to last, but is not sure if that is because students have gotten used to circle expectations in general or if it is just a new group of students who are more open to the experience. While some teachers perceived the students' lack of interest in community-building circles to their age, others were unsure why there was no student buy-in.

Participant 9 addressed multiple variables as to why the students are negative about using these circles in study hall and class. They questioned, "Is it the mix of students? Is it the time of the day? Are they just tired?" Continuing with:

> I had a really, a lot of really great, nice students, and I think would be wonderful to talk
> to, but it really was like I was imposing something on them they were not into, and they'd
> be like, "pass." I mean a lot.

This teacher became frustrated that almost 90% of their study hall students would pass every time it was their turn to share, leading Participant 9 to ask students in their study hall their

thoughts on the use of circles, with one student saying, "You know, not very many say they like it." Participant 10 shared a similar sentiment, sharing, "My kids are like, 'Why do we have to do this?'" This made this teacher question their performance implementing this practice, saying, "What am I doing wrong? I swear, you know, this is going to be better than writing an essay…but sometimes it seems like they're just too cool for school."

While every teacher in this study spoke about the positives of using circles, Participant 11 spoke quite negatively about some of the trends they noticed their students displaying. "A lot of fakeness because it's like they practice saying things people want to hear…but it's a lot of that fake, sarcastic compliments…so I don't know if this, it's a natural middle school thing…maybe, I'm just being more aware." They did follow up that they have noticed their students being a bit more supportive of each other as the school year goes on but will only use circles once per week.

The primary challenges and areas of improvement that teachers in this study expressed were the time of day that teachers were expected to use community-building circles with their study hall group, the stress of having additional work put on their plates, and not feeling qualified to use restorative practices. Participant 1 felt that the use of community-building circles could be more effective if teachers were meeting with a group earlier in the day and not in study hall at the end of the day, sharing:

> I lean towards it (study hall) not being the most effective use of the community circles because if you think about what the purpose of study hall is, it's to provide time for students to get their academics done and seek support if they need it.

Following up, students might be pushing back against using circles in study hall because they want to maximize their time to complete homework before leaving for the day. Participant 3 spoke of something similar, saying that some students "see it as more work because it is done

during a study hall period," which causes them to lose 18 minutes of their time to complete

homework. Participant 9 also spoke about how the administration could help with this issue by

changing the time of day these practices are used across the school, sharing, "Other ways

administration could be supportive to me would be having a dedicated time for it, and not make

it part of study hall."

Five participants spoke about how being told they needed to use restorative justice

practices across their classes and study hall added stress to an already stressful job. Participant 5

spoke of the stress they have heard teachers talk about, saying, "I feel like this is adding some

unnecessary added stress and anxiety to teachers, especially because there's…15 minutes every

day that we feel like we need to fill and that we need to do a circle once a week." Further,

Participant 6 shared how many teachers are stressed with how much they are being asked and

stated:

> More of still the weight of "here's something else to do" or "something else to learn. It,
>
> which is sad, not because I don't think they don't find value in it. I think it's just our
>
> profession right now as a whole, you know, unfortunate, right? Where because it is just a
>
> "here's something else," you know, or "to remember to get through." But again, I think
>
> the mindset is it's a box-checking. When we're, hopefully, the needle will start moving
>
> from box-checking to just part of it.

While Participant 4 was in favor of everyone using restorative justice-based instructional

strategies, they did share that they have noticed other teachers are becoming more stressed as the

school year goes on, stating that these teachers have expressed to them, "It feels like it's just one

more thing getting pushed down our throats." Participant 6 did say that while it has come off as

stressful sometimes, the building administrators have given teachers grace and time to use these

practices in their classrooms rather than coming down on them from a position of authority.

Some teachers did offer suggestions to reduce the stress of implementing these practices.

When it comes to handling the additional stress of this being added to teachers' plates,

many of the participants spoke to an area of improvement being additional training and modeling

of these practices, starting slow and building up, as well as knowing who to reach out to for help

using these practices and adding additional ones in their classrooms. Participants 5 and 6 shared

that they had heard several other teachers in the building expressing they did not feel

comfortable using restorative justice practices because they were not officially trained and did

not have the same level of comfort as they do teaching their specific content. Participant 2 was

optimistic about future professional development and shared:

> I just think ongoing training would be helpful, and I also feel like in those trainings in
>
> general, giving us the ability to kind of break down some of that within smaller groups or
>
> with partners, or something is always really helpful to you to kind of bounce ideas off
>
> one another and learn from one another. Like, "What have others done?" "Well, what's
>
> working?" I feel like, you know, we're a little disjointed, especially this year, with a lot
>
> of things. So, while I want that, I don't know when they're gonna, I don't know how
>
> they're gonna do that since there's so many other things that we have to prioritize, too.
>
> But I do think, yeah, time and consistency with continued training.

They followed up later with how more administrative support and a positive mindset would be

the best course of action when taking on these new challenges. Participant 9 spoke about how

they would like more training and have reached out to the administrative team because they felt

that they are not as successful using these practices as they would like, saying, "If you can show

me how to do it, please do. And I thought, this will be a great opportunity for me to see, is it

really me?" Some of the teachers felt that they were expected to jump into heavier circle topics too quickly, which led to more stress for teachers. Participant 10 felt that to be successful, they needed "Baby steps. I think most people probably do. And just…if you know why we're doing this, what is our end goal? Be as clear as possible."

Participant 1, who is a member of the Climate Committee, understood where many of the teachers in the building were coming from. They asserted, "There is an opportunity for us to be a little more strategic and explicit about, like, here's what you can do and here's how you can do that." Continuing later about ways to develop systems for teachers seeking help, stating:

I mean even to the point of like reaching out for assistance. Like, how do you do that? What's the best way to do that? Who do you go to first? So, I think there's an opportunity there for us as well to improve.

Participant 12, who is the other Climate Committee member, felt that all teachers in the building should get more training and possible certifications on how to use these practices. If teachers were to get further practical education on these practices, the stress level would decrease for teachers. They were worried that if these more profound professional development sessions did not start happening soon, it would lead to more teachers and, eventually, administrators losing interest in continuing to implement these practices. It is obvious Participant 12 is passionate about using restorative justice practices and wants the school to continue using them. They concluded:

I would suggest that you (teachers at this school) get proper training. What does that mean? I mean, like, go to a location that somebody has their doctorate on restorative practices and has had experience implementing this into their schools. And then what does that look like from their (teacher) perspective? And so, you're just trained. Trained

without any guesswork. And then, I would also suggest that when you go through it, be

okay with it not going well right away. And keep going at it and ask questions from

somebody that does know.

They concluded this section by talking about how they would like teachers to continue to push

through the discomfort of not knowing what to do all the time perfectly and keep practicing their

craft. Further, they perceived some administrators were letting a few teachers opt out of

continuing to use restorative justice practices if they did not want to. They ended with, "I don't

want anybody to have permission to not do it. It feels like that's what they have."

Figure 1.

Teacher Code Alignment: Positive versus Negative – Regarding Restorative Justice-based
Instructional Strategies in the Classroom
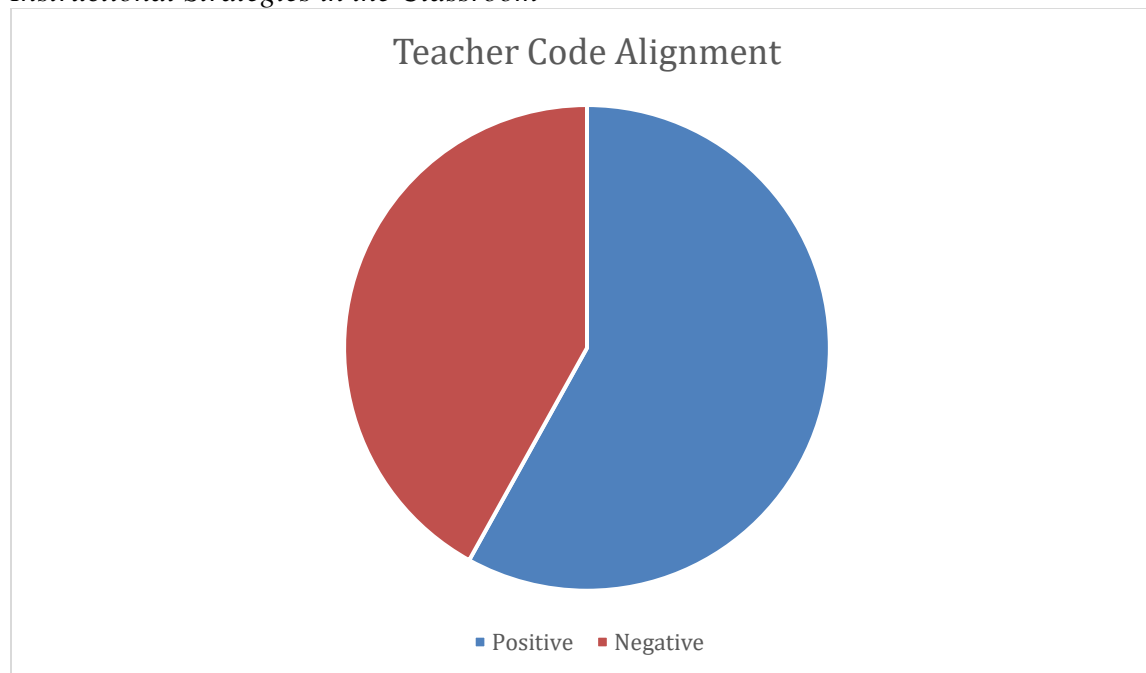
Note. Pie chart was used to display positive and negative codes regarding Research Question 2.

Summary of Research Question 2

All 12 teachers in this case study perceive restorative justice practices in their classroom

as effective and beneficial. The primary restorative justice practices that these teachers used are

circles (community-building and restorative), restorative conversations, and implementing

practices within their curriculum. Community-building circles have allowed teachers to get to

know their students better, give them a platform to discuss complex topics, and allow students

time to have an open dialogue with them and their peers. Additionally, regarding circles, the

teachers in this study have seen positives regarding discipline and relationship building with

students, which will be discussed further in the following two sections on research questions

three and four. Lastly, some teachers have integrated restorative justice practices within their

curriculum, specifically with more diverse authors and the learning of complex topics, such as

police violence and racism.

While all 12 teachers spoke positively about using restorative justice practices, many

expressed challenges when using these with fidelity. The three primary things that continued to

be mentioned were students pushing back and not being interested in partaking in community-

building circles, additional stress being placed on teachers with hectic schedules, and teachers

not feeling like they have the training to use restorative justice practices correctly. Regarding

student pushback on participating in circles, teachers perceived that some students lacked interest

or might have found it difficult to share because they felt self-conscious. Additionally, since

these circles often took place at the end of the day, when students were either fatigued from the

long school day or eager to complete their homework before leaving, participation might have

been impacted. With the additional time and lack of training stressors, several teachers perceived

that they would feel more comfortable using these more frequently if they had formalized

training. Additionally, some teachers felt proper training would alleviate some stress and gain

more student buy-in when using these practices in their classrooms.

Research Question 3: How do teachers perceive the use of restorative justice practices as a discipline method?

Research question three focuses on each teacher's perception of the effectiveness of restorative justice practices as a discipline method. This research question is directly connected to interview questions 5-8, 12, 13, and 15 (see Appendix C), and the teacher responses were viewed through the lens of Norm Theory. Kahneman and Miller stated that Norm Theory is "applied in analyses of the enhanced emotional response to events" (p. 136). Further, they stated that "norms are computed after the event rather than in advance" (p. 136). Additionally, this case study examined teacher perceptions through a phenomenological approach. Patton (2015) depicted phenomenology as the study of how people describe their experiences and what they observe through their lens. When trying to understand how the teachers in this study perceive the effectiveness of restorative justice practices as a discipline method, the only people truly capable of detailing their perspectives on effectiveness are themselves, which is why Norm Theory and phenomenology were used. Since each participant had been using restorative justice practices for at least a year, they applied backward thinking to how effectively they viewed them through a disciplinary lens.

When coding the interview questions that aligned with research question three, how do teachers perceive the use of restorative justice practices as a discipline method, several codes and themes were identified. The most reoccurring codes developed when answering research question three were discipline, area of improvement, challenging, positive, restorative conversation, circles (restorative), negative, and relationships. The identified themes connected to what restorative justice practices teachers used to handle discipline issues, the positive and

negative perceptions of using these practices, and their opinion on whether building

administrators should always use them to handle discipline issues.

Table 6

Teacher Interviews – Coded Segment Frequency within "Aligned RQ3" code

Teacher Codes	Frequency
Discipline	43
Area of Improvement	41
Challenging	37
Positive	36
Circles	31
Restorative Conversations	31
Negative	18
Relationships	17
RJP Used in Class	12
Rewarding	10
Curriculum	3
Teacher Questions	2
Total Number of Codes	*281*

Note. Frequency includes the coded segments from all teacher interviews aligned with research question 3.

        While all 12 teachers in this case study spoke positively of using restorative justice

practices in their classes, 11 of the 12 teachers in this study emphatically stated that they do

whatever they can to avoid removing a student from the classroom and have felt that way

throughout their careers. Participant 5 stated, "I have never in 21 years removed, had a student

removed from my class. That is a fact." Before clarifying, they shared that an in-class

intervention specialist once removed a student from their class because the student had an

outburst that involved screaming obscenities and disrupting the other students' learning

experience. Participant 11, who is in their 30th year of being a teacher, stated they give a student

in need a five-minute break by letting them stand in the hallway, go to the restroom, or get a

drink, but other than extreme situations, they do not remove students from class. Participant 2

shared that while classroom removals for students sometimes happen, they are "Very rare when I do that. It's a behavior that's escalated to the point where I feel I can't do anything to calm the student down." Similarly, Participant 6 shared how in their 25 years of teaching, they have removed fewer than 10 students from their classroom. The ones who were removed were because that student needed to reset, and the other students' learning opportunities were being diminished. Still, they always made sure to follow up with that student to explain why the removal happened. They stated:

> I do it as quickly as I can. A follow up to let them know, "I removed you for your own sake," to be able to refocus yourself, but also me because nothing gets revolved when either one is starting to, you know, feel backed up against a wall.

The teachers in this study believe that students need to be in the classroom to be successful, which leads them to give students as many opportunities as possible to stay in the class, and the teachers use specific strategies to de-escalate student behavior when they arise. This led to what teachers perceived as a student's purpose and their effect in the classroom: getting an education.

Many teachers shared that they believe a student's place is in the classroom so they can get the best education possible, and removing a student from the learning environment sets them up for failure down the line. Participant 4 said, "Nobody wins when you kick a kid out of class," and then followed up that statement by talking about how it can lead to future issues between the teacher and the student. Going further, Participant 7 spoke about students needing to know they are wanted and needed in class, saying:

> Like, I hate taking kids out of my classroom because they need to be in there. Like they just need to be in there, and I don't wanna set a precedent where they think they don't need to be in there.

But they did follow up later in their statement that they need to think about the other students in

the class and if it is fair to keep an extremely disruptive student in the class when it is taking

away other students learning opportunities, saying:

> I feel like the behavior, what this kid's doing is, like, troubling enough, or distracting
>
> enough, or toxic enough, that it's gonna have an overall negative impact on my other
>
> students in their education, then I feel like it's my duty as a teacher, I need to remove this
>
> other person.

Participant 3 echoed a similar sentiment, saying that while they do everything they can to prevent

a student from being removed from their classroom, they would remove a student if "they are

putting themselves or other's physical safety, mental safety, or emotional safety at risk."

Participant 8 went even further, stating that in the rare circumstances that they removed a

student, they send out a short email to that student's teachers, saying, "Hey, just an FYI, it's (this

student) is a little rough" to help prepare those other teachers and to potentially offer that student

grace in case their mood appears different or agitated. Regarding discipline, the building

administrators' rationale for implementing restorative justice practices within this middle school

aligned with previous research and was being used to combat an overreliance on punitive

discipline, keep more students in the classroom, and have students learn from behavioral

mistakes in a positive and productive manner. This leads to the restorative justice practice

strategies these teachers use to keep students in the classroom rather than remove them from the

learning environment.

Teachers' primary strategies were restorative conversations and restorative circles in their

classrooms. Restorative conversations were mentioned to be used more by teachers compared to

restorative circles with the entire class, with some teachers saying they were not yet ready to try

a whole class restorative circle. All 12 teachers in this case study shared that they use restorative conversations with students whenever an issue that needs to be addressed arises; these were done either one-on-one with the teacher and student or involving the teacher, the student offender, and the student who was harmed. The themes that were identified in why these teachers use restorative conversations are because it helps reduce the overreliance on punitive discipline, it helps to reduce the barrier and power dynamic between teacher and student, and these restorative conversations help teach the students the necessary skills they need to handle conflict in their lives.

Teachers in this study expressed concern about an overreliance on punitive discipline for students and the consequences of those actions. Participant 1 shared that they use restorative conversations to help students learn from their mistakes and avoid punitive discipline, saying:

I think there is always an opportunity to approach things in a restorative way, whether it's on the front end or the back end, where it's a more low-level issue. You know, things that students have received, say detentions for in the past, you know, actions toward a teacher disrespect, conflict with students in appropriate language, those types of things. I think that is where they more formalize, like, restorative conference (conversation) can happen where you're going through that process. So, students can be seen and heard, and you can set agreements to hopefully avoid that traditionary, traditional disciplinary action.

The significant factor driving many teachers in this study to employ restorative conversations was the aim to reduce punitive disciplinary measures within the school. Participant 8 stated, "There could be a lot less consequences needed if there's more of the restorative justice (restorative conversations) happening." Participant 4 shared that they relied on restorative conversations with students because misbehaviors and mistakes are inevitable with middle

school students. Having these conversations with students allows them to discuss the issue and reintroduce them back to the classroom with a better handle on the situation. Many teachers in this study acknowledged student mistakes and behaviors were going to happen because teenagers are pushing boundaries at this age, and how the teachers react to them could influence the outcome of a restorative conversation.

Participant 2 shared a story that took place earlier in the 2023-2024 school year, where a student was upset about a low score they had earned on a summative assessment. This student approached the teacher during independent work time to discuss it. The teacher shared that the student had clicked through the answers quickly the previous day and got most of the answers wrong, which led to the grade they earned. This student slammed their Chromebook on the teacher's desk, knocking over the teacher's things, and stormed out of the room. Participant 2 decided to try a restorative conversation with the student and their intervention specialist rather than write up the student and assign a punitive consequence. This is how they described the conversation:

> We had a follow up conversation, the three of us and we talked about what led to the
>
> behaviors. Just a big conversation and reflection on what happened. And then what we
>
> want to see moving forward and so that student got an opportunity the next day to
>
> reattempt the assignment and got every question right! There was never an
>
> acknowledgement from that student of, "Okay, thank you. You were right," right? But it
>
> was a really rewarding moment, where I feel like that restorative practice actually was
>
> effective and could immediately see the effects.

The next most common reason for the teachers in this case study to rely on restorative conversations is to better relate to the students and let them know that they are coming from a

place of caring rather than a position of power. The primary idea being shared is that these

teachers are looking to teach the students how to deal with their emotions and react in

challenging situations in their lives, similar to how they teach them their classroom content.

Participant 6 discussed this and related it to why they use restorative conversations with students

having issues or acting out in class, stating that restorative conversations:

> Should be the first course of action, if possible, right? Depending on the situation. And
>
> for a variety of reasons. Mainly, I mean student to student is so imperative that they learn
>
> how to communicate and be able to take a deep breath and see different sides to the same
>
> situation on it. For a teacher-student conflict, I think it's extremely important for students
>
> to see the human that is, behind the teacher, but also for the teacher.

Later, that teacher followed up by saying that using restorative conversations with students

creates the ability to have "open and honest communication and everyone walking away, maybe

not, you know, feeling like it was someone blamed." This teacher felt they had significantly

more successful outcomes than negative outcomes when using restorative conversations.

Participant 1 shared that they use restorative conversations to address situations that

might be starting to boil up or specific conflicts that are happening before more formal discipline

issues need to occur. They stated that:

> So, you know, there's disagreement between two students and having that circle
>
> (conversation) to say, "Let's talk about what's going on. Go through the process. What
>
> were you thinking about? How has that impacted you? Who's been affected?" Those
>
> statements that we know are part of restorative practice, I think there have been definite
>
> benefits. And students hearing that information to adjust their behavior. So, it's not an
>
> ongoing issue. And I think that's been effective. And I think students, at least in my

experience, have felt like they kind of know they have that or have experienced that

before.

They concluded that while these conversations might not always lead to no further consequence,

the teacher and the student have seen the benefit of these in cutting down on the reliance on

punitive discipline.

The idea of making connections with students and helping them learn from their mistakes

or harm they caused students was expressed by Participant 10 as well. They shared a story that

involved a few students who were friends, but one was given a nickname they did not like. The

other friends ignored the request not to use that nickname and called that student by this

nickname during class. Participant 10 addressed the class and said that no one should be using

that nickname going further, and students were receptive for a day. The next day, one student

used that nickname, and the teacher felt it was necessary to have a restorative conversation then.

They stated the conversation went as follows:

> I immediately took him in the hallway, and we more had a conversation. He immediately
>
> was like, "I know what you're going to say," and he's like, "Actually (redacted) and I are
>
> friends," Like, okay, you're friends, but you know he doesn't like to be called that. Why
>
> are you doing it? And he just kind of was like silent, and he was like, "I don't know. Just
>
> thought it was funny." It's like, well, "Was anyone laughing? Was (redacted) laughing?
>
> Am I laughing?" He was like, "No. We're really friends; I promise I don't wanna hurt his
>
> feelings." Like, yeah, but you're hurting his, you know? So, we kinda went through it,
>
> and I haven't heard it since.

After the restorative conversation and class finished, the student approached Participant 10 and

asked if they would contact their parents or get them in more trouble. Participant 10 stated that

they would not reach out to parents if this student felt that they learned from the restorative

conversation, understood why what was said was hurtful, and if they agreed they would not do it

again. This student said they learned from this situation and would not repeat it. Participant 10

perceived that by using a restorative conversation with that student, the student viewed that adult

as being reasonable and listening to them. This teacher followed up that they enjoy having these

restorative conversations and finds them critical to have with students because "I do like the idea

of bringing people together and talking it out because I find myself when I've had conflict with

people, it festers if we don't talk about it."

The other restorative justice-based discipline strategy that some teachers shared was

whole class restorative circles, but fewer teachers expressed comfort in leading these. In fact,

only three teachers (Participants 1, 3, and 12) stated that they had used whole class restorative

circles. These three felt comfortable doing this because they had had more training on effectively

running whole class restorative circles. Participants 1 and 12 are members of the middle school

Climate Committee, while Participant 3 feels that they are more advanced in their understanding

of and how to use restorative circles in class.

Participant 12 shared an example of using a restorative circle during the fall of 2023. The

class was broken into groups, and students worked on a project that involved designing and

building something with fine motor skills. Toward the end of the class, one student became

frustrated that they could not build the intended item. Eventually, this student snapped,

screamed, and threw a pair of scissors across the room. The class was very shaken up by this

outburst, which led Participant 12 to approach the student who had the outburst and ask if they

wanted a break to go to the restroom or get a drink, and when they were ready, they could have a

conversation. The student took the teacher up on the offer, and when they came back, the class

was ending. The teacher realized that they needed to fill out an office referral form but put in the comments that they wanted to have a restorative circle with them the next day before any punitive discipline was assigned. The next day, the class circled up. The teacher led the conversation to explain that they were doing this to welcome this student back, help them understand how their actions scared the class, and allow the student to speak and explain what could be done in the future if they were to get that upset again. They stated that using the circle was beneficial by providing:

> A way for me to understand the student more, and the student to understand, and also the way the student impacted the rest of the class. So, a restorative circle, the student can hear that we were concerned for you. We weren't mad. We're just concerned for you. We were scared. "The scissors flying across the room. That was scary," and so that that impacted us. That's an honest, impactful thing that happened. And so, we don't like to be scared. "What can we do where we all feel safe here?

Participant 12 spoke about how this student was very receptive to the classroom community, apologized for their outburst, and would do their best to manage their emotions. This led Participant 12 to share with me the benefits and rewarding aspects of leading that restorative circle:

> That circle gives that opportunity. I also like the idea of restorative justice in which I and they bear some of the responsibility together of what happened, and without taking that personally. Like, I didn't intend to make this situation hard on you, and I'm thinking the best in you. You didn't intend to scare the crap out of students when you threw scissors across the way. So, we're gonna work together to solve this and that. That gives that student some grace, right? Like gives them that. This place is a safe place for you. You're

allowed to make mistakes, and we're gonna figure out how to best manage where we are

at in the moment.

They concluded that after seeing how effective a whole class restorative circle can be, they want

to implement these more frequently when issues arise because they saw how the students

approached this conversation with caring for the student and empathy.

Participant 3 shared an incident where one of their previous students had a medical

condition that caused them to hallucinate. When that would happen, the student would think that

imaginary things were trying to hurt them. This student was hallucinating one day and started to

throw their possessions and chairs around the room, which led Participant 3 to use the safe word

to evacuate the other students and have those students tell the neighboring teacher to reach out

for administrator help. By the time the building administrator got word and made it to the

classroom, the student had stabbed Participant 3 with a pair of scissors. This student was

suspended for an extended period, but on their first day back, Participant 3 decided to run a

restorative circle with the class. This teacher spoke on how their students had been using circles

(community-building and restorative) throughout the school year and knew to come from a place

of caring rather than to assign blame, so they were comfortable participating in a restorative

circle on that student's first day back from suspension. When starting the restorative circle,

Participant 3 spoke about how the student was very receptive and:

> He apologized to the class. The students encouraged him to keep working on his goals,
>
> keep working on his strategies. Also they asked if they could help after I left. I was told
>
> that the students came back into the classroom and picked everything up. They didn't say
>
> anything negative on (redacted). They didn't say anything negative on me. They didn't
>
> say anything negative. Instead, they wrote get-well letters to (redacted) and to myself.

And so, I think that kind of speaks to the community that was built in that classroom

because of that restorative practice that we did every day.

Participants 1 and 3 felt that consistently using these practices builds confidence in students

partaking in and participating in restorative circles. Participant 1 shared that he is noticing

students are asking to have restorative circles when they notice conflict developing, sharing that

students are saying, "'Hey, are you, would you be willing to have a conversation with me and

this other person who you're having a conflict with?" and they're kind of like, "Yeah, let's do

it.'"

The perception that the teachers in this case study had about restorative justice practices

being used was more positive than negative, with 36 positive codes and 18 negative codes

identified in interview questions that aligned with research question three, giving positive a two-

to-one advantage. All 12 participants in this study spoke positively about using restorative justice

practices within a discipline context. Participant 5 stated that they felt, regarding discipline

practices, "I think it's been really effective." Participant 1 shared that they had students who

would refuse to engage in conversations or listen to teachers and administrators prior to the

administrators' implementation of restorative justice practices within discipline contexts. Since

the school implemented restorative justice-based discipline practices, this student is initiating the

engagement to have a restorative circle or conversation with their peers. This led Participant 1 to

say, "That's been a huge benefit to kind of bring the barriers down. So, I've really enjoyed that,

where there's kids that maybe avoided having conversations before. But now see an avenue that

they're comfortable going down." They then felt that the more these restorative justice practices

were done in a discipline context, the more students would understand why they were being

used.

Participant 2 has found it rewarding to use restorative justice-based discipline practices to help students learn proper ways to react to negative situations rather than simply assigning punitive punishments. Some teachers spoke about major discipline concerns from the previous school year, noting how this year had improved significantly. Participant 7 spoke to this, saying:

> I have a handful of students that I was afraid may have some behavior or learning challenges. And by trying to address those aggressively with restorative justice tactics, with conversations at home, conversations with administration, conversations with them and other students, I feel like, I think it's helping. I feel like it's kind of working. We're in the middle of our second quarter right now, so I don't want to speak too soon, but I feel like it has shown value at this point.

Some teachers are noticing the change in students as more restorative justice practices occur across classrooms. Participant 8 stated, "I see some attitudes changing with kids. I think it's very beneficial." This teacher added that, on top of teaching them their curriculum, they want to teach students how to develop into properly functioning and productive adults, saying that:

> This work is working on them being successful in school. But really, it's way beyond, like, "How do you interact with people? How do you heal? How do you have difficult conversations? How do you sit and listen to someone's perception that you do not agree with?" But this is relationships at work, personal family. It's everything and so to be able to guide, and help with that is, I think the benefits are huge for life.

Participant 3, who feels like they are more advanced in their skills of using restorative justice practices within classes, shared they have seen changes and growth in other teachers, not just students when it comes to using these practices. They told me how this year they have been paired with a teacher who is in their 32nd year teaching and tends to subscribe to the "old school"

method of teaching, where if a student is acting out, they are removed from the class. At the start of the second quarter, Participant 12 and the co-teacher were hearing that several of the students use the word "retarded" to describe other students when a mistake was made. The co-teacher had stated at the beginning of the year that they were not a fan of using restorative justice practices but changed their mind after seeing the effectiveness of the strategies that Participant 3 used in the first quarter. The co-teacher asked Participant 3 if they could help them lead a restorative circle with the class, and Participant 3 jumped at the idea of co-leading one.

The next day in class, everyone circled up, and the co-teacher started by saying that they were approaching this circle with the assumption that everyone in the room had their best intentions and did not understand the true meaning of that word and why many people would find that offensive. This teacher used the analogy of a football coach calling his players "ladies" as an insult and connected that to the slur students were saying. Participant 3 noted that each restorative circle that day went well, and they observed that each circle was:

> Pretty impactful and just hearing students then working in groups after hearing their language change. Be more inclusive, more from like an empathy standpoint versus accusatory, and the questions they were asking was more coming out of curiosity and wanting to learn versus questions to make you look dumb or silly in front of others.

After the circle was completed, Participant 3 shared how both teachers saw a change in the students; the teachers did not hear that slur anymore, and there was a genuine change in the classroom community. This outcome led the co-teacher to speak with Participant 3 and share that they were wrong about restorative justice practices; they can create a positive environment and promote positive change when giving the students the chance to rise to the occasion.

Participant 4 spoke about the positives of restorative justice practices within discipline because post-COVID, education is shifting, and what used to work for students does not necessarily work today. They rely on restorative justice practices for discipline issues because they know they need to reach the student and that fixing the issue upfront will save a lot of effort later. They stated:

> I think it is super helpful. I think it allows you to have, you know, like, when I was growing up, teachers were the teachers and students knew how to listen to them. Regardless, we're not in that culture anymore. And so, I don't think we can subscribe to just because "we said so" anymore. And I think the restorative circles allow us to have real conversations with kids to then again teach them, "Next time this happens, and you're feeling out of control, what do you need for me? What do we need to do to make it better?"

Several teachers in this study echoed similar comments on the positive aspect of using restorative justice-based practices within classroom discipline. They understand that the education landscape has significantly shifted since March 2020, and restorative justice practices can offer a positive solution to help curb negative student behaviors. Still, some teachers did have concerns about an overreliance on these practices regarding discipline issues.

While each teacher did speak to the positives of using restorative justice-based practices to help with discipline issues, some concerns arose. These concerns were coded as negative, challenging, or area of improvement. Despite teachers having some misgivings, the opinion of most teachers was that restorative justice practices should be included within the discipline context, but there are things to worry about. The primary concerns were holding students accountable, a lack of time to effectively use restorative justice practices when issues arise, and

buy-in from students and teachers. These factors were the things that were primarily mentioned

when teachers questioned if these practices are effective when used in a disciplinary context.

The top concern regarding the effectiveness of restorative justice-based discipline

practices was holding students accountable. Some teachers mentioned that they worried that just

having a restorative conversation with a student would not deter future misbehavior because

there was no punishment attached. Participant 2 shared that they do not see any negative to

having a restorative conversation, they did share that teachers have questions about this, saying:

> A lot of questions that we have about the follow through…I do think there was a lot of
>
> negativity in the past couple of years about this replacing any consequences and students
>
> feeling emboldened to act out. That there would be no follow through or consequences.
>
> And so, like I said, I think that, but both (restorative justice and punitive) are necessary in
>
> a school, and so I do feel like the pendulum swung a little too far in terms of not holding
>
> kids accountable. I almost honestly feel like we weren't quite prepared because, again,
>
> prior to 2020, we didn't have a lot of the behaviors that we're seeing now.

These interview questions made teachers consider what obstacles were getting in the way of

these practices' success.

Some teachers shared they worried about student accountability if teachers are now

expected to rely on restorative justice practices to handle student misbehaviors, and a few

mentioned building administrators, who teachers felt did not hold students accountable after

restorative conversations had happened. Participant 8 stated, "Last year was just a rough year

with discipline, and I would not say that it had to do with the restorative practices; I would say it

had to do with the ineffective or proper implementation of them." Participant 10 also spoke about

how there was a negative perception towards restorative justice-based discipline practices

amongst teachers in the middle school because it was perceived that one building administrator

was not on the side of teachers and actively did not hold students accountable, saying:

> A lot of the complaint was, and I didn't teach a lot of these kids, so I'm not saying I
>
> didn't share it, or I did share it, was that kids basically were just running everything. You
>
> know they were running wild. Because in an attempt more to talk through things and give
>
> them, you know, that we were just letting them get away with stuff. I think that was
>
> partly COVID, and that was just such a screwed-up time. But I think the perception of
>
> one administrator that we had was that she wasn't really on the teacher's side. And that
>
> obviously isn't what we want. I don't know what I want an administrator (trails off). I
>
> don't necessarily want them to just be on my side. I want them to be open to every side
>
> because, hopefully, we're all on the same side. But I definitely heard a lot about that.
>
> Which felt like her attempts to be doing these restorative practices. Other teachers, I felt
>
> like, perceived it as letting kids off. Just going to the office and getting a cookie and
>
> coming back to class, or whatever, you know? A metaphorical cookie. And so that
>
> negative, especially if kids perceive it that way, is a problem because, well, we want them
>
> not to fear administration. We definitely don't. We also want them to know it's not like a
>
> holiday to get out of class or whatever, and we want it to be taken seriously.

Teachers' lack of time was another negative perception when using restorative justice

practices within a discipline context. Some teachers spoke about how their day is already packed

with having five classes to teach, as well as a study hall where they are expected to do a

restorative justice or SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) lesson each day, on top of grading,

lesson planning, staff meetings, and reaching out to parents for a plethora of reasons.

Additionally, some teachers have multiple class contents they teach each day, leading to a need

for additional time to prep and plan. Participant 3 shared that deciding if and when a restorative

conversation should happen is sometimes tricky because "You're always fighting against time."

Participant 5 stated, "So, I feel like this is adding some unnecessary added stress and anxiety to

teachers." Participant 7 questioned what role administration has regarding discipline and how it

feels like there are no set procedures in place currently, saying, "The tough questions should be

thought about before they're asked in the middle of implementation for this year. As the phrase

goes, flying the plane as it's being like built." Then, following up on how they feel, the teacher's

primary focus should be on teaching, saying, "It adds a lot of stress. I don't think (it) needs to be

added to teachers like myself."

Lastly, the final concern involved buy-in from both teachers and students. A few teachers

in this case study shared they heard during the few professional development sessions they had

on implementing restorative justice practices in their classroom that if there was not complete

buy-in, then these practices could not be entirely successful. Participant 10 shared that they were

worried about these practices being ineffective because some staff members were openly saying

that they would not use them. Also, these other teachers stated they had permission from

administrators not to use them, leading participants in this study to say that more buy-in needs to

happen. Participant 12 shared that they heard some teachers saying they were allowed to opt-out,

and they were unhappy about that, saying, "I don't want anybody to have permission to not do it.

It feels like that's what they have." Then, going on to say that if this trend continues, they worry

about what will happen with restorative practices in the middle school, saying, "I'm hoping to be

wrong about that, but I get the sense that after this year, or maybe the year after, restorative

practices will be gone. Just because people may not know how to do them well enough yet."

They continued to state that it has been difficult to get full buy-in from all the staff members as a

Climate Committee member.

The other area of concern was student buy-in with restorative justice practices.

Participant 7 said they felt that most teachers have bought into these practices but questioned if

students across the middle school have. They stated, "I don't necessarily know if the students

have a lot of buy-in, and it's hard to tell if that's a symptom of how it's happening with the

teachers. If that's a symptom of just the dynamic of these students within their peers." Participant

2 outlined that without buy-in, students will continue participating in restorative conversations

without further consequences and not learn from their actions. This led them to say:

> It can't just be, "Okay, we're gonna have a conversation," and that's it. And then the next
>
> time, "We're gonna have another conversation," and then that's it. There really has to be
>
> a plan. Especially with reoffenders! I guess, students doing the same actions over and
>
> over again, where those conversations in those moments of reflection aren't settling, or
>
> we're not seeing an outcome. So, I think, balancing accountability and healing, but also
>
> follow through and consistency.

The primary message from teachers in this study is that students need to understand that these

restorative conversations and restorative circles are being used to help teach them proper ways to

respond to challenges and how to act. Still, if behaviors are not changing, further disciplinary

actions must occur.

Question 8, in the main interview section (see Appendix C), asked each participant if they

thought their administrators should always use restorative justice practices to handle discipline

issues and conflict. Three participants (Participants 1, 2, and 7) said yes to this question, three

participants (Participants 6, 9, and 11) said no, and six participants (Participants 3, 4, 5, 8, 10,

and 12) said yes, but there needs to be some type of conditions or consequences attached to certain student misbehaviors.

The participants who said yes felt that since restorative justice practices are required for teachers to use, the building administrators should also. Participant 1 said they know consequences are part of restorative justice practices. If students are removed from class or receive a suspension, these practices can help reintroduce the student back into the classroom, and from an administrative-led side, that student can learn from their actions. Participant 2 echoed something similar, saying they should be used because it "Has to be part of it, like, that debriefing and that healing and that moving forward." Lastly, Participant 7 was enthusiastic about administrators using these, saying, "Yes! Cause if you're gonna do it, you have to commit to it," then ending with, "They (the student) still need, in my opinion, to take the chance to sit down, reflect, and kind of build towards healthier behaviors like in the future." All three teachers understood that consequences could be blended with restorative practices, which not all participants realized.

Six teachers thought administrators should always use restorative justice practices but with certain conditions. Participants 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, and 12 were unaware that consequences could be blended with restorative justice practices or felt that they were not currently being blended at this middle school. The primary concern these teachers addressed was that these students should receive a more serious consequence for more severe student misbehaviors. These teachers mentioned classroom removals, detentions, suspensions, and possible expulsions. Participant 3 spoke about the need to blend the two, saying:

> However, there is a time and a place of where you have to make that decision for the
> safety of the students, and sometimes that is a suspension. Sometimes, that is a removal.

>That doesn't mean we didn't do restorative practice. That means the behavior or event was so severe that we needed a time to meet as a team to come up with a plan to support not only the student but also the community that they harmed. And no one deserves, no one has the right to make others feel unsafe. And not just physical safety, but your emotional, mental, and physical, all of that is inclusive.

Participant 4 stated that restorative conversations are worthwhile with students, but consequences are part of real life too, and students need to understand that, saying:

>There has to be discipline because that's life. Like no one's gonna sit down with me and like talk out why I hit that pedestrian walking across the street. Like, I'm just getting a ticket and getting in trouble for it. But that's kids. So in addition to any discipline action, I think having a kid understand their part in it, and what they could have done different, and where it could have been stopped.

The participant concluded that restorative justice practices and student consequences can be blended for the benefit of students, saying:

>I think it is important, when possible, especially if there's discipline involved in it, having a restorative. I think it is important because that's when the learning happens. It doesn't happen when the kids sit in the office getting suspended for four days. That's not the… he's not learning. He's not thinking about learning; he or she's mad, or sad, or scared, or whatever the emotions are, but they are not ready to learn, and so restore it, to me, is the part where we actually are learning.

These six teachers shared a similar sentiment of not wanting to punish students for misbehaviors strictly but blending worthwhile consequences with restorative justice-based practices so they can learn from their mistakes and hopefully not repeat them.

The final group of teachers in this study (Participants 6, 9, and 11) felt that the administration should not always use restorative practices to deal with conflict and discipline issues. The primary perception shared by these three teachers was that for some students, only the consequence matters for correcting future misbehavior and that these students do not learn from restorative conversations or circles. Participant 11 said that despite having used these practices in their class for years, they perceive that not every student is capable of learning from them, especially those who resort to violence. Participant 9 shared that they love the idea of relying on restorative justice practices, but "I just don't really see that possible, given our current setup, schedule, and the number of administrators or teachers that we have." Then, they call it a utopia, the idea of everyone relying on this and being genuinely effective. The one differing opinion in this group was Participant 6. Currently, they believe the administrators should not only use restorative justice-based practices to handle discipline because they felt the culture and climate at the school were not ready for that, saying some students just do not understand the messaging behind these conversations. But they believe that things might be different over time, saying, "Maybe in five years my answer would change, right? Because if it was much more of just embedded from K (kindergarten) up for this, you know, to occur that might be (effective to rely on)." This shows that even though some teachers have questions and doubts, they still see the benefit and understand that change and full buy-in will take time.
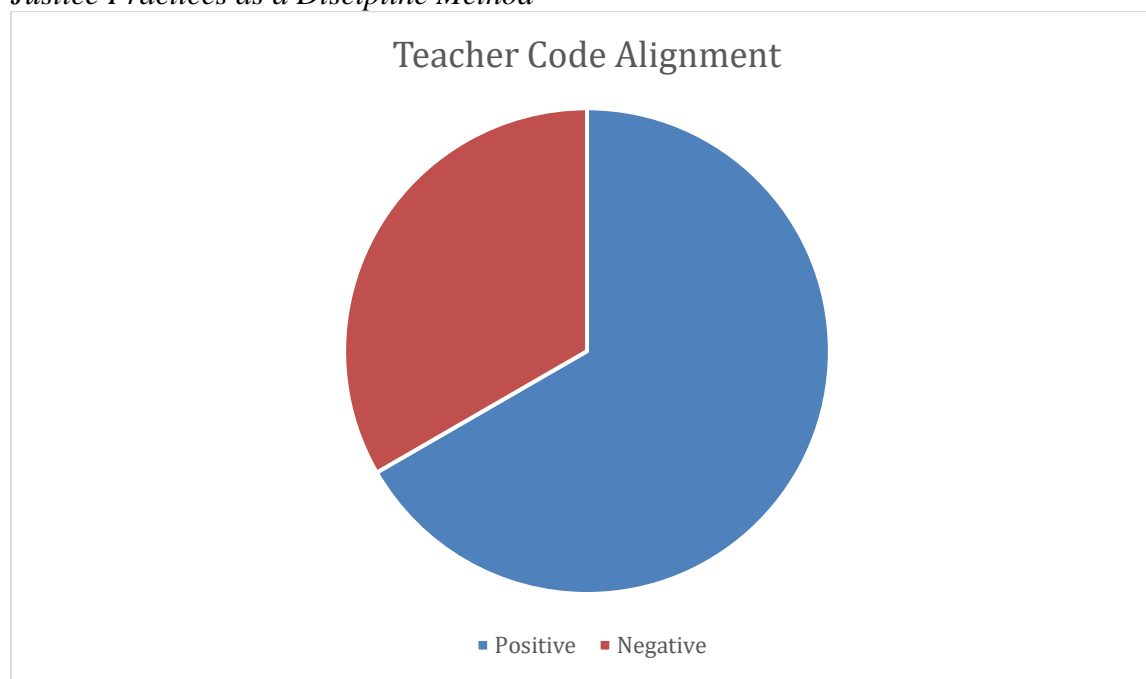
Figure 2.

Teacher Perceptions if Administration Should Always use Restorative Justice Practices to deal with Conflict/Discipline Issues
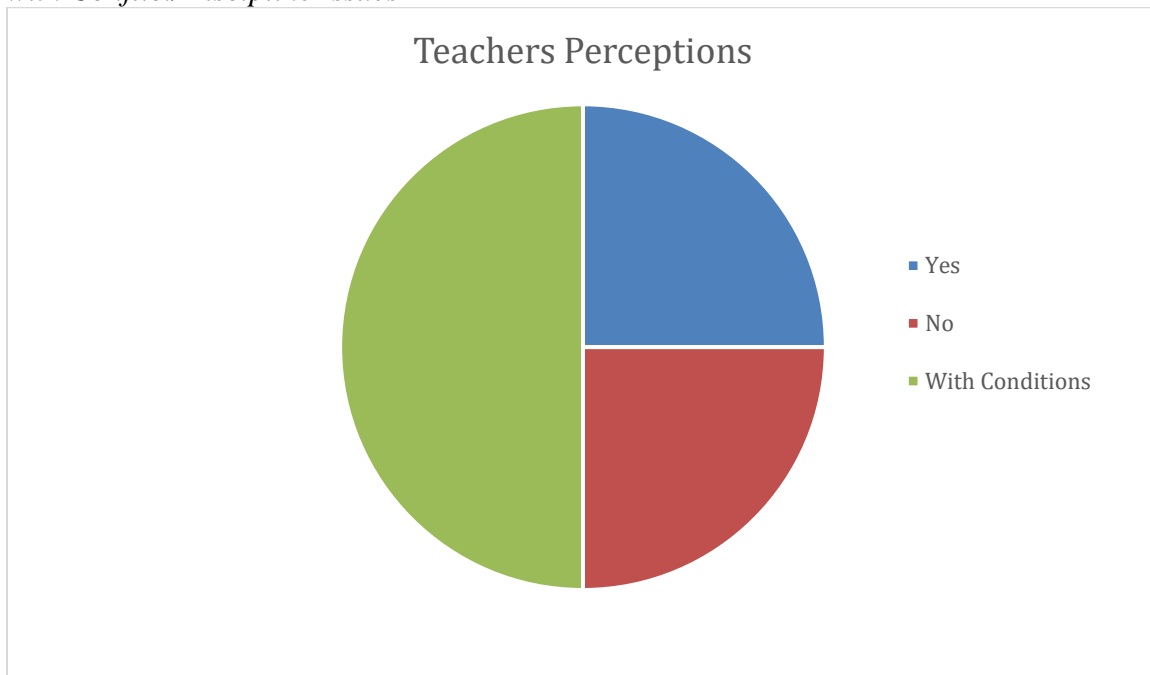
Note. Pie chart was used to display differing teacher perceptions.

Figure 3.

Teacher Code Alignment: Positive versus Negative – Regarding Perceived use of Restorative Justice Practices as a Discipline Method

Note. Pie chart was used to display teacher perceptions regarding positive and negative codes.

Summary of Research Question 3

     All 12 teachers in this case study have all tried using or are continually using restorative justice-based discipline practices in their classrooms as a means to resolve student misbehavior, address inappropriate statements students might be making, and use them as a general learning opportunity for students. While all 12 teachers stated they have used these practices and have seen benefits to using them, 11 of the 12 emphatically stated they use whatever strategies they can to prevent a student from being removed from class. The rationale was that most of the teachers in this study felt that a student's best place is in the classroom, and they do not want that student to lose out on their learning opportunities. The most common practice was using restorative conversations, either one-on-one with a teacher and student or with the teacher, the offending student, and the harmed student. These teachers spoke to the positives of these

conversations, citing that they rely on them to reduce the reliance on punitive discipline, connect better with the students, and teach them how to react to challenging situations in life outside of school. The other method that was mentioned was restorative circles. Only three teachers in this study felt comfortable leading these due to more advanced training on using restorative justice-based practices in their classrooms, explicitly being trained to run restorative circles with a whole group effectively. Still, other teachers stated that they would like more professional development on this so they could implement restorative circles in their classes when certain situations arise.

There was a two-to-one positive-to-negative ratio when teachers described how they perceived the effectiveness of restorative justice-based discipline practices. Several teachers spoke about how they felt that students appreciated a direct conversation from a position of caring rather than just assigning punitive discipline. Additionally, teachers spoke about how students became more comfortable partaking in these practices when an issue arose, eventually leading some students to ask for a restorative conversation with another student or circle with the whole class. This led one teacher to believe that a lot fewer punitive consequences could be issued if there is more restorative justice-based discipline within the school.

Despite the 12 teachers in this study perceiving that restorative justice practices are effective regarding discipline, some concerns arose. The primary concerns were a lack of student accountability, not enough time in the day to hold these restorative conversations or circles, and the lack of buy-in amongst students and teachers. The teachers who spoke about this stated that there should be more formal accountability and consequences connected to whatever restorative justice-based practices were used. With teacher schedules on school days already entirely filled, many worried about having the time to follow up with students with restorative conversations

and sacrificing curriculum class time to hold restorative conversations. Lastly, teachers perceived

a lack of buy-in from some students and teachers. If not addressed, that could cause further

issues where restorative justice-based discipline practices are viewed as ineffective and are

scrapped to return to strictly punitive measures.

The final component of research question three involved each teacher sharing their

perception on whether their building administrators should always use restorative practices to

deal with student conflict and discipline issues. Three of the teachers stated that they should,

without any further caveats. Six teachers said yes but with certain conditions. Those conditions

included consequences for more severe actions, such as classroom removals, detentions,

suspensions, and expulsions if necessary. These teachers were either unaware that consequences

could be blended with restorative justice practices or felt administrators did not include them

when following up on student incidents. Lastly, three teachers said no, they should not always

use them because they perceive that some students cannot learn from conversations alone and

need a more severe consequence to understand the severity of their actions.

**Research Question 4: How does the use of restorative justice practices impact teacher and
student relationships?**

Research question four examines teacher perceptions of how restorative justice practices

impact the teacher-student relationship. This research question directly correlates to demographic

question three and main interview questions 4, 9-13, and 15 (see Appendix C). Similar to

research question three, the teachers' responses and perceptions were viewed through the lens of

Norm Theory and examined through a phenomenological approach. The rationale for selecting

these methods is when examining how teachers perceive how restorative justice practices impact

teacher and student relationships, the only people truly capable of detailing how they felt about

this and what they experienced are themselves. Since all the teachers in this case study had been

using restorative justice practices in their classes for at least a year, each participant applied

backward thinking by recalling their previous experiences to make their perceptions of these

practices and their influence on building stronger relationships with their students.

When coding the interview questions that align with research question four, how does the

use of restorative justice practices impact teacher and student relationships, several codes and

themes were developed. These themes identified how community-building circles as a whole

class and restorative conversations after a discipline issue impacted the perception of

relationships between teachers and students. The teacher perceptions in this case study regarding

the impact of restorative justice practices on teacher-student relationships were overwhelmingly

positive, with the top three reoccurring codes being circles (community and restorative), positive,

and relationships. While there were codes identified that were negative in nature within teacher

responses to this set of interview questions (See Appendix C), those codes were primarily

connected to other factors, such as lack of time in class to conduct circles, students not wanting

to participate in circles, and the addition of restorative justice practices to a teacher's workload

being an increased stressor to them.

Table 7

Teacher Interviews – Coded Segment Frequency within "Aligned RQ4" code

Teacher Codes	Frequency
Circles	70
Positive	60
Relationships	40
Area of Improvement	40
Negative	40
Challenging	21
Rewarding	12
Restorative Conversation	12
RJP Used in Class	10
Discipline	8
Curriculum	4
Teacher Questions	3
Total Number of Codes	*320*

Note. Frequency includes the coded segments from all teacher interviews aligned with research question 4.

All 12 of the teachers in this case study spoke positively regarding the use of restorative justice practices in their classroom to help build teacher-student relationships, with 10 teachers speaking about how they view these practices as instrumental in building stronger relationships. The remaining two teachers stated that they see the benefit of using restorative justice practices in their classrooms, but they do not perceive an impact on teacher-student relationships, either positive or negative. The primary restorative justice-based practices these teachers spoke of when addressing teacher-student relationships were community-building circles and restorative conversations with students. The 10 teachers who said that restorative justice practices have a positive impact on improving teacher-student relationships spoke about how these practices allow them to learn more about student's personal lives, allow students to learn more about them on a personal level rather than seeing them as just "a teacher," and help reintroduce a student to the classroom and heal the harm between teacher and student post-discipline issue.

In this study, community-building circles were the primary restorative justice-based tool teachers mentioned using which positively impacted teacher-student relationships. Participant 8 spoke about how they have loved using community-building circles in their class because they immediately noticed how much quicker and deeper relationships develop between them and their students. They felt that these community-building circles allowed them to let students know from the first day of school that "You matter. You're important. You're worth talking to. You aren't a bother." Then, they said how they started using them in both study hall and their classroom content class, and through continual use, it has helped to create a calm and respectful classroom where students do not feel like they are being judged for their actions. Later, they followed up their previous comment, saying, "It's definitely been a positive" to build stronger relationships with students, and those strong relationships start from that first day using these practices.

Participant 4 spoke similarly regarding community-building circles and the impact on building stronger relationships with students because they get to know their students through circle topics they would never have brought up if focusing only on their classroom content. They felt that these provide one of the most significant impacts for the most negligible loss of time because it allows the students to talk about themselves and everyone gets the chance to know others in the class in a sense that does not have to only relate to the curriculum. They said, "You can just learn about them, and you can build connections…I wouldn't know some of that stuff," and "You can build those kinds of connections and talk about things that aren't always, don't always come up in a classroom." Other teachers noticed that they were getting to know students on a more personal level as they started using community-building circles more frequently. Participant 6 shared that they love the positive outcomes they have gotten from using community-building circles, saying, "I love it. It has me seeing kids in such different lights."

Similar to Participant 4, they go further, saying that community-building circles allow them to connect with students outside of just the curriculum, saying that while students might not love the content they teach, it enables another way to connect. They stated:

> But to even just find out and have some other kind of connection, or see what they do…I think they feel respected because they aren't seen as… "I'm just someone that's turning in homework or not turning in homework," or anything else, they become like, "Oh, wow! They, she, you know, I'm seen as a person." And then again, then they ask things about myself, and like we kind of connect maybe on an interest level. Or you know, I don't know, it's just big. It just changes the dynamic of the conversation you can have with a kid.

Participant 6 emphasized how great it is that their students this year have stated that they feel closer with them compared to previous teachers and that they feel seen and respected more.

The concept of trust being developed during community-building circles between students and teachers, leading to better relationships, was another factor mentioned by several teachers in this study. Participant 12 shared that they wanted to start using community-building circles to help break down barriers between students and teachers, especially students of color, who might have a tougher time trusting white teachers. They perceive these circles as "A great tool for trust to be built in the classroom!" Participant 1 stated something similar, saying:

> I think a much more effective use of the community circles is within the classroom settings where you're creating trust and relationships with kids. Between each other and with the teacher so that you can maximize the learning and the engagement that happens in that space.

Participants 2, 5, 6, and 10 also shared that they perceived that using these circles within their study hall and regular classes helped to create a stronger community and trust between them and their students, with Participant 10 saying that since doing more of these, "I do think more (students) trust me and we might be able to better have that conversation (community-circle conversations) because they have that buy-in."

Lastly, with community-building circles, when Participant 3 was asked if they felt these helped develop stronger relationships with students, they stated:

> I guess I can answer that by counting how many kids come to my office hours that do not need help, right? Like they just want to hang out, and I think that says a lot to the culture that I've been able to build.

They stated how it is not just them building stronger relationships and having more students come to office hours, but they noticed more students are coming to other teacher's office hours before school just to see the teachers they like. Then, they stated that some students are sharing that they feel more connected to the teachers who emphasize using community-building circles in their classes.

The other restorative justice-based strategy mentioned numerous times in helping develop stronger teacher-student relationships was restorative conversations. Several teachers spoke about how these restorative conversations allowed them to talk with students who had a discipline issue but approached it in a caring way. Participant 4 outlined how they use restorative conversations to "clear the air" of the problem, explain to the student why that action is not acceptable, listen to what they have to say, and let them know they can do better in the future. They stated that through these, "there's relationships you build genuinely with kids." The

primary idea they stated was that the adult comes from a place of caring and wants to see that student succeed.

Participant 8 explained how they use restorative conversations to relate to the students in a moment of frustration. When they start one of these conversations, they first ask about the student's emotional state of mind and express to them that it is okay to feel their feelings, but despite being angry, we cannot throw out hurtful words. Then, they follow up with asking, "So, how are we gonna figure this out?" and trying to come to a reasonable solution. They believe that offering students grace in times of crisis allows them to build trust and a stronger relationship with them because the students can tell this teacher cares about them. Participant 9 spoke to a similar tactic and how coming from a "reasonable place" when having a restorative conversation can positively impact student relationships, saying, "I guess it's helping more when I think of it. Like that it really is!" Similar comments were echoed by the other teachers in this case study when discussing the impact of restorative conversations on relationship-building with their students. They found that this strategy allowed them to convey their message to the students and show they were coming from a place of caring. By addressing concerns from this angle, they can reintroduce students into their learning environment and develop a better relationship with most students.

Figure 4.

Teacher Code Alignment: Positive versus Negative – Regarding RJP Impact on Teacher-Student Relationships
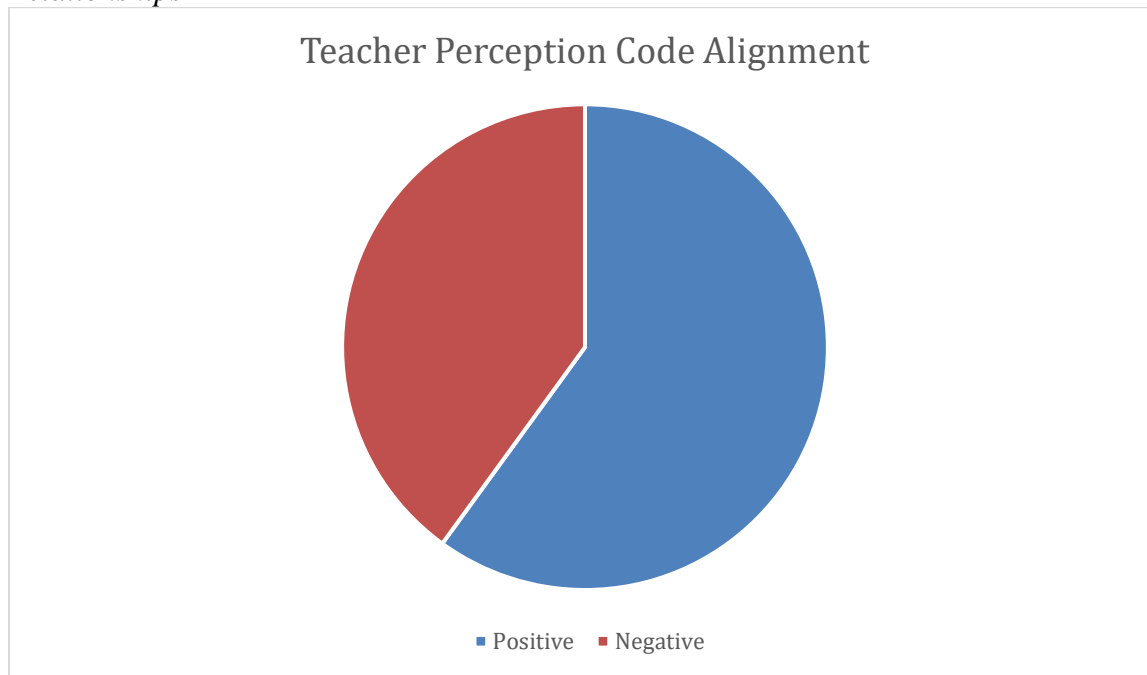
Note. Pie chart was used to display teacher perceptions regarding positive and negative codes.

Summary of Research Question 4

All 12 teachers in this study have been using restorative justice-based practices in their classrooms and have found them to be beneficial in various ways. In addition, 10 of the teachers in this study perceived that restorative justice practices positively affect their relationships with students. At the same time, the other two stated that they do not perceive an impact on teacher-student relationships, either positively or negatively. The primary restorative justice-based strategies these teachers mentioned that they use in their classrooms regarding relationship building with students are community-building circles with the entire class and restorative conversations when a discipline issue arises.

The 10 teachers who perceived these practices positively impact the relationship with students stated that these practices allow them to get to know their students better, enable

students to get to know them better, rather than "just a teacher," and develop trust between

themselves and their students. Additionally, these teachers felt that when discipline issues arise,

by using restorative circles, they are able to talk with the student from a place of caring versus

looking just to issue a consequence. These teachers perceive that through restorative

conversations like this, they can correct the student's behavior and build a stronger relationship

with that student.

Summary

While there is a summary section for each research question post-analysis, this case

study's research questions were thoroughly answered. Research question one found that every

teacher in this study had a favorable view, but each had a different definition of "restorative

justice practices." Several spoke of developing a sense of community, healing some type of

harm, and allowing amends to be made.

Research question two found that every teacher has been using restorative justice

practices within their classrooms and has found them to be beneficial. These teachers spoke

about using community-building circles, restorative conversations, and trying to implement more

restorative practices within their curriculum. While every teacher spoke about the benefits of

these practices, such as building stronger relationships and curbing negative student behavior,

several talked about some challenges. Those primary concerns are a lack of time to implement

them effectively, student pushback on not wanting to participate in community-building circles,

and insufficient training to feel like they are effectively running them.

Research question three found that all 12 teachers have used restorative justice practices

to address discipline issues and primarily perceive that they were effective as a discipline

method. The teachers in this study spoke about how they like using these strategies to avoid an

overreliance on punitive discipline and to keep students in the classroom, additionally stating that students appreciated these conversations more than strictly punitive punishments. Despite every teacher speaking positively of these practices regarding discipline, some teachers expressed concerns about the time needed to use these practices with students effectively, the lack of teacher buy-in, and the lack of buy-in from some students, leading to a lack of student accountability.

Lastly, research question four found that 10 of the teachers in this study found restorative justice practices helpful in building better relationships with students. In contrast, when using these practices, the other two teachers did not perceive a difference in their relationships with students. The primary strategies teachers used to try to build stronger relationships were community-building circles and restorative conversations. Those teachers who felt that restorative justice-based practices did impact teacher-student relationships found that these practices allowed them to get to know their students better and approach students from a place of caring when issues arose.

The next chapter will review the purpose of this case study by revisiting the research questions, methods used, and the findings. From there, the researcher will provide an in-depth interpretation of the results while connecting them to the similarities and differences reported during this study's literature review. The final aspects that the researcher will discuss in the final chapter are their conclusions, recommendations for future studies and schools looking to implement restorative justice-based practices, as well as potential limitations within this case study.

Chapter V. Conclusions And Recommendations

In the following chapter, teachers' perceptions of restorative justice will be discussed in relation to how teachers define "restorative justice practices," what restorative justice-based practices they use in their classroom, how effective restorative justice practices are as a discipline method, and the impact on teacher-student relationships. Findings from this case study indicate that teachers have positive perceptions of restorative justice-based practices, particularly relating to a perception of a reduced need for punitive discipline and improving teacher-student relationships by creating an environment that allows students to feel more respected, aligning with past research studies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; González, 2012; Hulvershorn et al., 2018; Thompson, 2016; Watts & Robertson, 2022). Additionally, this chapter provides a review of the case study and an overview of each research question's findings, lays out recommendations, outlines limitations of the study, and describes potential future research opportunities.

Review of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to explore teacher perceptions of restorative justice practices in their classroom setting, specifically looking at how teachers define restorative justice practices, what restorative justice-based practices they use in their classroom, how they perceive the effectiveness of it as a discipline method, and the impact of restorative justice practices on teacher and student relationships. Research has shown that in addition to helping with student discipline issues, restorative justice practices have helped teachers address cultural relevancy issues within student curriculum and build stronger relationships with students (Durlak et al., 2011; Gholson & Robinson, 2019; González et al., 2019; Knight & Wadhwa, 2014; Lustick, 2022). This study was designed to be a qualitative case study with a phenomenological approach

using semi-structured interviews. The rationale for selecting a phenomenological approach and

using semi-structured interviews was to create consistency with previous studies outlined in

chapter two, as well as being the best choice for understanding teacher perspective towards the

effectiveness of restorative justice practices within a classroom and school setting (Lustick,

2017; Lustick et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2022; Short et al., 2018). The 12 teachers who have

been using restorative justice practices in their classrooms for at least a year volunteered to

participate in a semi-structured interview. Each interview consisted of 18 questions connected to

this study's research questions and theoretical framework.

The results showed that while each teacher defined restorative justice practices

differently, they all held favorable perceptions of restorative justice-based practices within their

classrooms regarding student discipline issues and building stronger relationships with students.

Each participant spoke on how these practices allow them to avoid an overreliance on punitive

discipline, which helps keep students in the classroom. Further, the majority of teachers in this

study felt that restorative justice-based practices allow for better relationships to form between

teachers and students, enabling teachers to approach students from a place of caring when an

issue arises. The restorative justice practices that teachers in this study primarily relied on were

whole-class community-building circles and private restorative conversations with students.

While the results were overwhelmingly positive, the teachers in this study did address some

concerns and negative perceptions regarding restorative justice practices within their classrooms.

The main negative teacher perceptions and concerns were a lack of time to implement restorative

justice practices effectively, not having enough training to feel confident using these practices,

student pushback on not wanting to participate in community-building circles, a lack of teacher

buy-in, and the lack of buy-in from some students, leading to a lack of student accountability.

Discussion

In each of the following sections organized by research question, connections are explained with the current case study and past research. These findings are used to provide recommendations for future research and schools looking to implement restorative justice-based practices.

Research Question 1: How do teachers define restorative justice practices?

Research question one focused on how teachers define restorative justice practices. The building administrators where this case study took place had instructed the teaching faculty that they would be required to start incorporating restorative justice practices within their classrooms during the first 18 minutes of study hall every day, beginning in the fall of 2022. The middle school administrators' message was that these practices would help develop a stronger sense of community, curb negative behavior without a reliance on punitive discipline, and help students feel that they have more of a voice in their school. While some teachers in this case study had previous experience using restorative justice practices, all teachers in this middle school partook in a limited number of professional development sessions to help train them on using restorative justice practices in their classroom during the 15 months between the initial implementation and when this study took place.

While there are many definitions and terms used to describe restorative justice practices, as stated at the beginning of chapter one, this study used González's (2012) definition of restorative justice and King Lund et al.'s (2021) definition of restorative justice practices as the baseline definition for these terms. González (2012) defined restorative justice as:

An approach to discipline that engages all parties in a balanced practice that brings together all people impacted by an issue of behavior. It allows students, teachers,

families, schools, and communities to resolve conflict, promote academic achievement,

and address school safety. (p. 281)

Later González et al. (2019) added, "It is grounded in Indigenous traditions that emphasize

interconnectedness and relationality to promote the well-being of all its community members"

(p. 208). King Lund et al. (2021) outlined that restorative justice practices is a process used to

handle wrongdoing within a school or community; this practice allows the victim, the offender,

and the surrounding community to discuss the hurtful action, look to heal the harm, and enable

the offender to learn from their actions while remaining in the community.

Even though all 12 teachers in this case study had differing definitions of restorative

justice practices, and some struggled to define it, every participant had a positive perspective

when defining it. This struggle for how teachers define restorative justice practice aligns with

Kohli et al.'s (2019) study, showing that many teachers have issues defining it despite having

some training in it. Each teacher in this study connected some part of their definition with

discipline but within it, allowing for student behavioral issues to be corrected without an

overreliance on punitive discipline. Several of the teachers spoke of students learning how to

work through conflict in a positive manner, having more choices and healthier interactions when

discipline issue arises, and finding a way to heal the harm that happened within the community

that has been created in the classroom while using restorative justice practices, aligning with

previous studies (Lustick, 2017; Martinez et al., 2022; McCluskey et al., 2008; Short et al.,

2018). Despite the teachers' differing definitions from the definitions used in this case study,

these findings align with previous research on the overriding goals of restorative justice practices

to reduce the reliance on punitive discipline, such as classroom removals and suspensions, but to

also improve student behavior and school culture (González, 2012; Thompson, 2016; Watts & Robertson, 2022; Weaver & Swank, 2020).

Furthermore, while six of the teachers in this study only connected their definition of restorative justice practices to discipline, the other six teachers included within their definition that restorative justice practices go beyond just school discipline. These six included in their definition that there is a strong correlation between restorative justice-based practices and improving teacher-student relationships while developing a stronger community within the school. This finding is similar to one by Kervick et al. (2020), who found that teachers who bought into the idea of using restorative practices defined it as a way of building a stronger community within their classroom. These six teachers outlined how building trust and relationships with students was vital for restorative justice practices to be successful. One teacher spoke about how crucial it is to keep the classroom community intact and how they cannot lose any members of that community, so restorative justice practices allow them to develop stronger connections with students and show them that every one of them matters within that community. Additionally, another teacher felt that restorative justice practices align well with SEL standards (Social and Emotional Learning) and should be used together. This finding was similar to Hulvershorn et al.'s (2018) study, showing that restorative justice practices work well when combined with SEL practices. This study's findings align with previous research, showing that restorative justice practices have expanded beyond just discipline; it is also being used to build more positive relationships between teachers and students while increasing student resiliency and engagement (Durlak et al., 2011; Gholson & Robinson, 2019; González et al., 2019; Knight & Wadhwa, 2014; Lustick, 2022).

Research Question 2: How do teachers use restorative justice-based instructional strategies in their classrooms?

All 12 participants in this case study stated that they regularly use restorative justice-based practices within their 18-minute study hall block and regular classroom periods. They view their use positively and find these practices beneficial for students. The most reoccurring practices that these teachers used were circles (community-building and restorative), restorative conversations, and implementing practices within their curriculum, such as using more diverse and culturally relevant material. While the following two sections will examine teachers' perception of restorative justice practices connected to discipline and building teacher-student relationships, the teachers in this study felt that these strategies could be effective and worth doing.

The primary practices teachers in this study relied on were community-building circles and restorative conversations. Teachers were motivated to use these strategies within the classroom, and their rationale for using community-building circles was to build stronger relationships with their students, get to know students better from a non-academic perspective, discuss complex topics openly, and allow students to have a platform to express their views and opinions. This finding is similar to previous studies that outlined the benefits of teachers leading community-building circles to develop a stronger sense of community within a classroom (Gregory et al., 2021; Kervick et al., 2020; Lustick, 2020).

The other primary strategy that teachers mentioned they use frequently is restorative conversations. Teachers spoke about how they found these to be effective ways to help students who were disrupting class, off track, or breaking a school rule. The teachers in this study expressed that restorative conversations allowed them to address concerns with a student while

coming from a place of caring and helping them learn from their mistakes rather than remove

them from class or assign another type of punitive consequence. The use of restorative

conversations to help a student who is off track and show them how their behavior impacts the

class aligned with previous research studies (González et al., 2019; Knight & Wadhwa, 2014).

Lastly, the other restorative justice-based practice that some teachers in this study spoke

of was implementing aspects within their curriculum The primary strategy teachers shared was

using more diverse and culturally relevant resources within their curriculum. This approach

prioritizes incorporating diverse perspectives, including learning about different cultures, people,

and ideologies. Additionally, it includes more diverse authors and looks to disrupt the

traditionally Eurocentric-based curriculum required within state standards. While Amemiya et

al.'s (2020) findings showed that trust needed to exist between students and the teacher for

students to believe in the new content, the teachers in this study who spoke of updating their

classroom curriculum to include more underrepresented voices felt that the majority of their

students appreciated this approach and stated that students shared positive feedback on learning

about underrepresented populations.

Even though all 12 teachers spoke about the positives of using restorative justice-based

practices within their classroom, many teachers expressed differing concerns, which hindered

their abilities to use these practices more frequently. Numerous participants stated they had not

received proper training to use these practices effectively, making them uncomfortable and not

confident using restorative justice-based practices in the classroom. Still, several followed up by

saying if they could receive proper training, they would feel more confident and be more inclined

to use these practices more frequently, which aligns with other studies on schools implementing

restorative justice practices where teachers felt that with proper training, they would feel more

prepared and inclined to use restorative justice practices in their classrooms (King Lund et al.,

2021; Lustick et al., 2020). Additionally, many spoke about a lack of time in the school day to

use these practices. Some teachers expressed concern that they could not cover their required

curriculum effectively and include the restorative practices their administrators required. This

finding aligns with previous studies where teachers have expressed not having enough time or

training to implement restorative justice practices properly and effectively within their

classrooms and the need for additional training on how to use restorative justice practices

(Gregory et al., 2021; Kervick et al., 2020; King Lund et al., 2021; Kohli et al., 2019; Lustick,

2017; Lustick, 2020; Lustick et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2022; Short et al., 2018; Wang & Lee,

2019). This finding was of interest to the researcher because very few studies spoke of what

specific trainings were given to teachers to help them feel confident using these practices within

the classroom. Since teachers in this case study and numerous other teachers within the literature

review expressed they felt they did not have the necessary training to use these practices

effectively, it led the researcher to question what would be the ideal professional development

sessions to help teachers become subject matter experts in restorative justice practices and how

do administrators go about ensuring teachers receive that training?

Further, several teachers in this study expressed frustration that many of their students

pushed back on participating in circles, with some actively trying to disrupt them. These teachers

perceived this student pushback was due to either a lack of interest, students feeling self-

conscious sharing in front of a group, or just new teenagers trying to push back and be

contrarian. This finding aligned with previous research studies showing that younger students

liked using circles, but as students got older, students reported liking them less and viewed them

as less effective (Huang & Anyon, 2020; Reimer, 2020; Skrzypek et al., 2020). Still, some

teachers in this study expressed that student buy-in with using community-building circles was more based on the student's personality and who else was in the class, but with consistency and time, there was more student buy-in, aligning with previous research (Gregory et al., 2021; Kervick et al., 2020; Lustick, 2020).

Research Question 3: How do teachers perceive the use of restorative justice practices as a discipline method?

All 12 teachers in this case study have tried using or are continually using restorative justice-based practices in their classroom to help with and resolve student misbehaviors, as well as using these practices within classroom discipline as a learning opportunity for students. Each participant understood the reasoning for the cultural shift to use restorative justice practices within the middle school and felt that these practices could be an additional support system to help improve student behavior and school culture. Further, restorative justice practices could help them not have to rely purely on punitive discipline to correct student misbehavior, aligning with previous studies on the rationale for why schools around the country are shifting towards more restorative justice-based practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; González, 2012; González, 2016; Gregory et al., 2016; Thompson, 2016; Watts & Robertson, 2022; Weaver & Swank, 2020). When the researcher asked each teacher about a time they felt it was necessary to remove a student from the classroom for a disciplinary reason, 11 of the 12 participants emphatically stated that they use whatever strategies, including restorative justice practices, they can to prevent a student from being removed from class. While several teachers could provide an example of why they had a student removed, the teachers spoke about how they feel that a student's place is in the classroom and do not want that student to lose out on their learning opportunity. This finding connects to previous studies where teachers perceive that restorative

practices can help curb negative student behavior and keep them in the classroom (Lustick, 2017;

Martinez et al., 2022; McCluskey et al., 2008; Short et al., 2018).

The most common strategy mentioned in this study was using restorative conversations,

either one-on-one with a teacher and student or with the teacher, the offending student, and the

harmed student. Several teachers spoke to the benefits of using restorative conversations with

students, saying it allows them to address the issue with a student face-to-face respectfully, listen

to the student's side of the problem, help the student learn from their mistake, and then hopefully

correct future misbehavior, aligning with Short et al.'s (2018) study. While this finding showed a

positive teacher perception of using restorative conversations, it built upon Gregory et al.'s

(2016) study, which examined how students perceive restorative conversations with teachers.

While that study only looked at the student perspective of restorative conversations, this finding

provided the teacher's perspective. It mirrored back that teachers and students can benefit from

using restorative conversation when both sides come from a position of respect and want to make

positive changes.

The other strategy mentioned that teachers used as a method to help with student

discipline was restorative circles. While the use of restorative circles by teachers was mentioned

in the previous section, their purpose is to help bring the classroom community together to help a

student who is off track and help them understand how their behavior affects the entire class

(González et al., 2019; Knight & Wadhwa, 2014); only three teachers in this study stated that

they felt confident using this strategy. The three who felt comfortable using whole-class

restorative circles noted this was due to previous training and experience using restorative justice

practices before the fall of 2022 when all teachers were told they needed to use these practices.

Other teachers spoke of not feeling comfortable leading whole class restorative circles, so they

do not do them. Teachers not wanting to use whole-class restorative circles is due to a lack of training. Still, some stated they would use them with fidelity if they had professional development on running them properly. This theme aligned with previous findings that proper professional development is necessary for teachers to feel confident running whole-class restorative conversations; otherwise, teachers will not feel confident leading them, run them ineffectively, or not do them (Knight & Wadhwa, 2014; Lustick, 2020).

While the 12 teachers in this study perceived restorative justice practices as effective and beneficial in their school, some concerns arose. The primary concerns were a lack of student accountability, not enough time in the day to hold restorative conversations and circles, and a lack of buy-in amongst students and teachers. While the lack of time in the day was addressed in the previous section, some teachers expressed concerns about there being follow-through for student misbehaviors when teachers escalate issues to the building administrators because teachers state there is little follow-up on resolutions from administrators. Several teachers expressed concern that if administrators were not holding students accountable, students would view restorative justice practices as a way to avoid consequences. This concern aligned with previous studies where teachers expressed concerns about administrator follow-up and student accountability (King Lund et al., 2021; Martinez et al., 2022). The final concern teachers in this study expressed was a lack of buy-in amongst teachers and students. Several teachers expressed they believe there is not 100% buy-in among the teachers and students and felt that these practices are destined to fail without 100% buy-in from teachers and students. This theme aligned with numerous other studies on what is necessary for restorative justice practices to be successful within a school; without total buy-in, likely, the cultural shift to restorative justice practices within a school will not be successful (Amemiya et al., 2020; González et al., 2019;

Gregory et al., 2021; Holvershorn et al., 2018; King Lund et al., 2021; Lustick et al., 2020;

Martinez et al., 2022; McCluskey et al., 2008).

Despite the concerns that these teachers perceived, three teachers felt that the

administrators should always use restorative justice practices when handling discipline issues

without any further caveats, six thought they should but with certain conditions, and three felt

that they should not always use them. The six who thought that administrators should but with

conditions felt that consequences should be blended, including classroom removals, detentions,

suspensions, and expulsions if necessary. Lastly, the final three who said no stated that

administrators should not always use restorative justice practices because they felt that some

students cannot correct their negative behavior through conversation alone and need a

consequence to go along with it. These findings were of interest to the researcher because this

showed that most teachers in this study were unaware that consequences could be assigned to a

student when restorative justice practices were being used. This finding is an area that should be

addressed in future training and professional development sessions so that teachers can be

informed that consequences can and should be part of a discipline plan when using restorative

justice practices.

While these 12 teachers had varying opinions on this question, one new finding to be

added to the existing literature was that several teachers in this case study spoke of this being a

new era of education and how teachers and administrators cannot expect the same techniques and

strategies that worked in schools pre-COVID to work post-COVID. The teachers who spoke

about this stated that restorative justice practices would need to become the new norm in schools

because student voice needs to be included in almost everything school-related, including

discipline, and the adage of "because I said so" would not cut it anymore.

Research Question 4: How does the use of restorative justice practices impact teacher and student relationships?

Teachers' perceptions of restorative justice practices as a way of impacting and improving the relationships between teachers and students were viewed positively, with the majority of the teachers in this study finding them to be effective in building stronger relationships with students. For this reason, every participant stated that they felt restorative justice practices were worthwhile during their class time and the designated 18-minute study hall period. These perceptions led 10 teachers to state that restorative justice practices do positively affect their relationships with students; the remaining two stated that they do not perceive that restorative justice practices have an impact on the teacher-student relationship, but they do not hurt building teacher-student relationships. The primary restorative justice-based strategies teachers mentioned they used for building relationships with students were restorative conversations when discipline issues came up and whole-class community-based circles on various topics.

The 10 teachers who felt that these practices positively impacted the relationship with students noted that these practices allow them to get to know the students on a more personal level, allow the students to get to know them outside of just being a teacher, and develop a stronger sense of trust between students and teachers, leading to a potential improvement in school culture. This perception was especially true regarding discipline issues. Several teachers felt that having a restorative conversation with a student allowed them to make a connection and show they were coming from a place of caring rather than only wanting the student to get in trouble. These findings built upon and connected to previous studies where students believe that school climate improves and they have stronger relationships with teachers who use restorative

justice practices consistently (Cook et al., 2018; Grant et al., 2022; Huguley et al., 2022; Reimer, 2020). Additionally, the 10 teachers who perceived that restorative justice practices do have a positive impact on teacher-student relationships and allow better connections to be made with students felt that these practices go beyond discipline and building relationships but also allow for students to build more positive relationships with everyone in the classroom and increase student engagement. These findings aligned with previous studies, finding that restorative justice practices go beyond discipline and allow students to make better connections with teachers and peers while also improving their resiliency and engagement (Durlak et al., 2011; Gholson & Robinson, 2019; González et al., 2019; Knight & Wadhwa, 2014; Lustick, 2022). These findings interested the researcher because these responses showed that the teachers in this study were not only interested in teaching their assigned curriculum but also wanted to connect with students and teach them the necessary skills to be successful outside of school.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this case study and previous research, restorative justice practices have the capacity to provide significant positive change for students, teachers, and administrators. While the overriding goals of restorative justice practices are to reduce the overreliance on punitive discipline, such as classroom removals, suspension, and expulsions, these practices can also help with improving student behavior and school culture (González, 2012; Thompson, 2016; Watts & Robertson, 2022; Weaver & Swank, 2020). The results of this study on teacher perceptions of restorative justice practices were consistent with much of the existing literature on these strategies within schools, with the one notable addition: several teachers feel that this is a new era of education and that restorative justice practices will need to become the norm in schools because student voice must be included across all aspects of school,

discipline included. These teachers expressed that the previous "because I said so" method is no longer good enough for students to buy into consistently.

While some teachers struggled to define what restorative justice practice is, every participant perceived it favorably and thought of it as a way to provide students an opportunity to learn from their mistakes in a positive manner while not having to rely so heavily on punitive discipline. The teachers in this case study felt most comfortable using community-building circles and restorative conversations as their primary practices. Further, the teachers in this study used these strategies to handle discipline issues and build stronger relationships with students. Several times, teachers said they liked using these practices with students to show their human side and not be viewed as "just the teacher." These perceptions led most teachers to see the upside to using restorative justice practices and want to continue using them as a whole school.

While the perceptions of restorative justice practices were predominantly positive, several teachers in this study expressed concerns regarding the use of these practices. The primary concerns were teachers perceiving that they do not have adequate training to effectively use restorative justice practices, a lack of time in the day to use restorative practices while balancing their teaching load effectively, and student pushback and opt-out when using community building circles. These findings align with previous research on the importance of proper training for teachers in this field (Gregory et al., 2021; Kervick et al., 2020; King Lund et al., 2021; Kohli et al., 2019; Lustick, 2017; Lustick, 2020; Lustick et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2022; Short et al., 2018; Wang & Lee, 2019). With adequate training, teachers may feel more comfortable and emboldened to use restorative justice practices with fidelity.

Additionally, some teachers addressed that they understood that switching to a restorative justice practice model would not be an overnight change and that it would take several years for

the school to fully install them. Those teachers understood that for the school in this case study to implement restorative justice practices with a high level of fidelity, several factors would need to come together. Those factors would include full buy-in from students and staff, proper professional development and teaching of what this looks like for students and staff, and a long-range plan for what administrators want to see their school look like. This outline aligned with previous research, stating that administrators must plan for a three-to-five-year timeframe for a school-wide culture shift to adopt restorative justice-based practices fully (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; King Lund et al., 2021; Lustick et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2022; McCluskey et al., 2008). This finding leads to the importance of student and staff buy-in to this culture shift; otherwise, these practices will not be effective in the long or short term. Unfortunately, no long-term plan regarding restorative justice practices within the district has been shared with teachers at the location of this case study. It remains unknown whether a long-term plan exists, but it has not yet been shared or if one is currently under development. While it is regrettable that a long-term plan has not yet been created or shared with the teaching staff at the school in question, such a lack of long-range planning is not uncommon in school districts that claim to implement restorative justice practices post-COVID-19, according to discussions with teachers and administrators from other districts.

Recommendations

Based on the data from this study and existing literature regarding restorative justice practices and how teachers perceive these practices in schools, there are recommendations that stakeholders can use to effectively implement these practices within a district or school building while increasing the odds that teachers will view these practices positively. After reviewing the existing literature, it is understood that restorative justice practices go beyond just student

discipline; it is also being used to address cultural relevancy within school curricula for

traditionally underrepresented populations, build more positive relationships with peers and

teachers, and increase student resiliency and engagement (Durlak et al., 2011; Gholson &

Robinson, 2019; González et al., 2019; Knight & Wadhwa, 2014; Lustick, 2022). The first

course of action is that the administration must develop a detailed, long-range plan for what they

want their school's culture and climate to look like, how they are going to implement restorative

justice practices within the school and develop a project timeline with a phased approach,

outlining specific milestones within each phase. This plan should be a multiyear approach, which

aligns with previous literature, stating that the administration should plan on a three-to-five-year

timeframe for a school-wide cultural shift to implement restorative justice practices and to fully

benefit from them, as well as their desired outcomes (King Lund et al., 2021; Lustick et al.,

2020; Martinez et al., 2022; McCluskey et al., 2008). Having a plan with a multiyear and phased

approach allows administration, teachers, and students to create more substantial buy-in, feel

more confident learning how to use restorative justice-based practices in their settings, and allow

these practices to be built within the school climate and culture. In González et al.'s (2019)

study, they outlined how a high school in the Midwestern part of the United States followed this

approach, with a year-one installation for the school staff and then built upon that year after year.

This process eventually led to not only teachers and administrators fully buying into and using

restorative justice practices everywhere within the school but also students taking classes

connected to restorative justice and partaking in projects outside the school using these practices.

This study showed how a long-term plan, with specific yearly milestones, was highly effective

and led to the desired outcomes of emphasizing restorative practices within a school.

Regrettably, as mentioned in the previous section, the researcher is unaware of an existing long-term plan being rolled out or developed within the district where this study occurred.

The following recommendation is that any K-12 school looking to implement restorative justice practices within their buildings must provide thorough professional development and extensive training from subject matter experts. Several teachers in this case study and in the existing literature felt they did not have the proper training to use restorative justice practices effectively, leading them to perceive they are not successful at implementing and using these practices while giving them a potentially negative perception of restorative justice practices (King Lund et al., 2021; Lustick, 2017; Martinez et al., 2022; McCluskey et al., 2008; Wang & Lee, 2019). Some areas where teachers expressed feeling that they lack knowledge and confidence are in defining restorative justice, understanding how these practices are used productively, leading community-based and restorative circles, and improving student buy-in to restorative justice. Several teachers in this study expressed that they understood the benefits of shifting the school culture to use restorative justice-based practices more frequently. Still, the lack of training and professional development was one of the biggest complaints and concerns expressed by teachers in this study. These teachers wanted to be successful using them but felt they were set up for failure due to the lack of proper training. While the ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund) federal funding is dwindling post-COVID-19, schools need to budget and set aside funding to provide the necessary training on how to use restorative justice practices because, for many teachers, this practice is different than what they learned in college when training to be a teacher (Martinez et al., 2022). This training should be ongoing throughout the school year and should align with what phase the school is at on its restorative justice timeline.

Further, regarding ongoing professional development, it would be highly beneficial to have certain teachers within a building or school administrators receive additional training to become certified in training others on restorative justice practices. The researcher believes this additional training should be done in a train-the-trainer method, giving those participants the knowledge to teach these practices to other staff members. This strategy would allow the school district to have onsite professionals who could provide refresher training when needed, build upon the training sessions the outside experts taught the staff, and provide the necessary training for new staff members to be trained on systems used within the school. Additionally, having either a teacher or administrator with this training might make other teachers in the building feel more comfortable asking for help in implementing these practices in their classrooms. That is not to say hiring outside professionals to train all staff members would be wrong or improper. Since limited funds are always a concern to schools, there could be additional costs to districts if teachers had follow-up questions and were reaching out to outside organizations.

While academic coaching roles are becoming more popular in some school districts to help provide teaching and curriculum strategies, another recommendation is having an onsite restorative justice counselor or coach in a school building or district. This person's role would be to help develop internal professional development sessions, go into classrooms to help coach teachers on using specific restorative justice-based strategies, lead sessions in classrooms to help demonstrate what these practices look like, including to help teachers incorporate more culturally relevant content within classroom curriculum, run restorative circles and conversations when issues arise with students, develop topics for classroom community-building circles, and help ensure that the school or districts long-range plan is being correctly implemented and on track. Previous studies have shown that schools that use a social worker or counselor to help teachers

with these practices lead to teachers reporting feeling more comfortable and confident using these practices; they feel that it takes additional burden off them and helps with identifying students who need additional support, while also increasing commitment from the school community (González, 2012; Lustick et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2022). Similar to having other teachers or administrators in the building trained in training others on restorative justice practices, having someone in a strictly restorative justice coaching role would remove the time constraints that teachers and administrators traditionally have with other aspects of their positions.

The following recommendation targets students and has them understand what their role is regarding restorative justice practices within the school. While the recommendations up to this point have revolved around providing more thorough training for teachers, this recommendation involves providing instruction for students on what restorative justice practices are, what the short-term and long-term plans are for rollout, how students would use these strategies, sharing the ideal impact for school climate and culture, and outline the benefits for students in the immediate and future. Involving students appears to be a step that some schools skip when implementing these practices. The school where this case study took place did not bring the students together to share the plan regarding restorative justice practices, the benefits for students, or how they should expect it to look in the classroom. That step was left to the teachers to introduce what restorative justice is and the rationale for why the administrators wanted the school to start using these practices. As mentioned in chapter three, it was believed by the Climate Committee that not every teacher explained this to students during the first week of the 2022-2023 school year. The decision not to bring all the students together to illustrate this cultural shift was surprising because this school district is serious about including student voices

in high-level decisions. Previously, this school has brought in several students to be on panels to

interview potential teachers, administrators, and outside professionals for projects related to the

district. This school was adamant that they would not hire individuals whom students did not

approve of, so for them not to bring the students together to explain the shift to a restorative

justice model was perplexing and made this shift more challenging for students. Ideally, this

would be rolled out to students in phases to help them understand these changes and prepare

them for future phases where more will be expected of them in later stages, as in previous studies

(González et al., 2019). Including students in the process would help improve buy-in from the

beginning and keep that buy-in over time.

The final recommendation for K-12 schools, and probably the most challenging in the

United States, administrators need to find ways to provide teachers more time in their school day

to use restorative justice practices. This time could be used for teachers to have follow-up

restorative conversations with students, develop meaningful topics for whole class community-

building circles, incorporate more culturally relevant material within their curriculum, schedule

coaching sessions with the restorative justice coach or the trained teachers or administrators to

develop, and improve upon skills they want to use in the class. With the lack of time to use

restorative justice practices effectively being a primary concern expressed in this study and

previous studies (Kervick et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2022; Wang & Lee, 2019), administrators

finding ways to accommodate more time for teachers outside of their single planning period

could improve teacher perceptions on these practices and not have it feel like one more thing is

being added to their plates.

Lastly, outside of K-12 schools, the final recommendation is for universities to integrate

courses on restorative justice practices into all undergraduate education programs, mandating

that all education majors enroll in such a course as a prerequisite for obtaining a teaching

certificate. In Martinez et al.'s (2022) study, several teachers reported that restorative justice

practices differed from what they had learned in college when studying to become an educator.

Currently, more than half the states, including Washington DC, have implemented or are in the

process of implementing restorative justice practice as a primary discipline model (González,

2016). Since restorative justice practices go beyond school discipline, future teachers will likely

need to understand and use restorative justice practices at some point, making it necessary to

provide future teachers with this essential training to be successful in their career path.

Limitations

This study, like all studies, has limitations. The first limitation of this case study was that

it used convenience sampling, and all participants volunteered to partake, which included an

interview outside of school hours that would last approximately 60 minutes. The rationale for

convenience sampling was the researcher of this study works as a teacher in the building where

this study took place, and they did not want to appear to be pressuring coworkers to partake in

this study or provide specific answers that would align with the study. While the results of this

study were predominantly positive, it is possible this led teachers who had a positive perception

or better understanding of restorative justice practices to volunteer for the study, while teachers

with a negative perception or less of an understanding of restorative justice practices may have

chosen not to participate, potentially skewing the data to appear more favorable. Secondly, when

potential participants were told they would need to partake in an interview outside of school

lasting approximately 60 minutes, that might have been another factor leading to teachers not

wanting to participate due to time constraints in their personal lives. This limitation could be

mitigated in future studies if interviews were shortened or the study was designed to be

quantitative and a survey was assigned to participants that could be completed at their convenience.

Another limitation of this study was a lack of diversity among participants. While the breakdown of participants' gender in this case study aligned with the overall gender demographics at this middle school, all participants identified as white. While the number of teachers who identify as black where this case study took place is low (4.3%), no one who identified as black or another race other than white volunteered to participate in this study. While previous studies have shown that black students are more likely to receive harsher punitive punishments compared to white students (Gregory et al., 2016; Hirschfield, 2018), one of the primary reasons that schools have shifted restorative justice models was to counter the harmful effects of punitive discipline. Further, Gregory et al.'s (2016) study found that restorative practices could benefit all students, regardless of race. Based on this previous research, it would have been beneficial to have more diverse teachers to account for how they perceive the effectiveness of restorative justice practices in the classroom and school setting.

Lastly, a final limitation of this study was that while restorative justice practices were implemented 15 months prior to this study, very little training and professional development had been given to the teachers at this middle school. Most participants received their training and knowledge from two teachers who led the school's Climate Committee, while a few had participated in training outside of this district. This lack of training led to some confusion for participants when asked specific interview questions, leading the researcher to occasionally provide examples of certain strategies that align with restorative justice practices so the participants could fully answer the question. It would be beneficial to do this study at a school where formal training for teachers had taken place.

Future Research Opportunities

This case study is one of the early studies on how teachers perceive the effectiveness of restorative justice practices within their school and classroom in the post-COVID-19 world. As more schools are looking to combat against the known adverse outcomes of punitive discipline and incorporate more culturally relevant material for students of all walks of life, restorative justice practices will become more normalized in schools nationwide. Society and culture have shifted within the United States, and education is no different. The old mantra of a teacher saying, "because I said so," is no longer the effective practice it once was in the 20th century. Administrators and teachers will need to be prepared to use restorative justice practices with their students effectively. In future research, having a larger sample size of participants would be helpful. A larger sample size would increase the validity and reliability of how teachers perceive restorative justice practices. As more data is collected, it would be beneficial to see where teachers perceive gaps and then determine how to address them to improve these practices for teachers and students.

Further, it would be beneficial to repeat this study at the middle school where this case study took place once the administration implements the recommendations made in the previous section. These recommendations would include developing a long-range plan, sharing that plan with teachers and students, providing thorough training to the staff, and giving teachers more time to use these practices with fidelity. After 6-12 months, the study could be repeated with additional participants to see if teacher's perceptions changed regarding restorative justice practices or if they answered the research questions differently. This prospective study holds the potential to delve deeper into teacher perceptions of restorative justice practices within their classrooms, potentially adopting a longitudinal approach. Such an approach would allow for a

comprehensive examination of how teacher perceptions evolve over time, particularly as school districts allocate more resources toward professional development initiatives and enable teachers to apply these practices in their interactions with students.

Another future research opportunity would be to include the teachers at the elementary and high school schools in the district where this case study took place after proper training and professional development are provided for the teachers. While those buildings are a year or two behind the middle school regarding the implementation of restorative justice practices, having a comparison of how elementary, middle, and high school teachers perceive the effectiveness of restorative justice practices in those settings could be advantageous to see the difference between grade levels. This potential study would be interesting to see if teachers at those schools had similar positive perceptions and concerns as those in the middle school. Further, it would be beneficial to conduct a study to see how students and administrators within this district perceive restorative justice practices within their schools. This study could include how students perceive restorative conversations, whole class community-building circles, and having time set aside each day from their study hall for these practices. At the same time, administrators could share how they use these practices and their perceptions of the effectiveness across multiple areas, covering both positive and negative perceptions they have observed in their role. Examining teacher, administrator, and student perceptions in unison could lead to a better whole-picture view of how all stakeholders in the school perceive the effectiveness of restorative justice practices across the entire school level.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval

University of Findlay.

Institutional Review Board

Date: **October 23, 2023**

To: Amanda Ochsner

CC: Justin Dennen

RE: Teacher Perceptions of Restorative Justice Practices in a Classroom Setting

Project Expiration date: October 23, 2024

The University of Findlay Institutional Review Board (IRB) has completed its review of your project utilizing human subjects and has granted authorization. This study has been approved for a period of one year only. The project has been assigned the number 1779 .

In order to comply with UF policy and federal regulations, human subject research must be reviewed by the IRB on at least a yearly basis. If you have not completed your research within the year, it is the investigator's responsibility to ensure that the **Progress Report** is completed and sent to the IRB in a timely fashion. The IRB needs to process the re-approval before the expiration date, which is printed above.

Please note that if any changes are made to the present study, you must notify the IRB immediately. Understand that any proposed changes may not be implemented before IRB approval, in which case you must complete an **Amendment/Modification Report**.

Following the completion of the use of human subjects, the primary investigator must complete a **Certificate of Compliance form** indicating when and how many subjects were recruited for the study.

Please refer to the IRB policy and procedures manual for additional information. Please include the project number on any other documentation or correspondence regarding the study.

Thank you very much for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact IRB at (419) 434-4640 or email irb@findlay.edu.

Sincerely,

Landon Bellavia

Landon Bellavia, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Cc: IRB Office

Appendix B

Teacher Recruitment Letter

FINDLAY
THE UNIVERSITY OF FINDLAY

Institutional Review Board

Date: 10/23/2023

Dear Subject,

You are invited to voluntarily participate in a study of **teacher perceptions of restorative justice practices in a classroom setting**. I hope to learn, without prejudice, **how teachers perceive the effectiveness of restorative justice practices, how it has impacted relationships with students and perceptions of restorative justice practices as a discipline method.** You were selected as a possible participant in this study because **you are a licensed middle school teacher, teaching in grades 6th, 7th, or 8th or across more than one grade level at the location of this case study, and you have been using restorative justice practices in your classroom.** If you decide to participate, please reply to my email saying that you are interested in partaking in this study and will participate in a Zoom interview. Your reply to this email stating you are willing to be interviewed is implied consent. The interview is designed to **gain your honest perspective on the use of restorative justice practices in your teaching role.** It will take **approximately 60 minutes** *to complete the interview. I will work around your schedule, and you can choose the location where you feel most comfortable participating in the Zoom interview*. **Upon completion of the interview, I will review the transcript and provide a copy for you to review within a week. You can read through your transcript to ensure your responses are accurate.** Your responses will **help researchers understand how teachers view the effectiveness of restorative justice practices and what areas of improvement might be.**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you or anyone you mention will remain confidential and will not be disclosed. Your decision on whether or not to participate will not prejudice any future relationships with The University of Findlay or the (redacted). If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. You will be made aware of any information that varies from what has been provided to you and/or might affect your willingness to continue to participate in the project.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at The University of Findlay, which guarantees that research involving human subjects follows federal regulations. If you have any questions about your rights as a human subject, please contact the IRB chair at irb@findlay.edu.
We will submit the results of this study for publication in its entirety. The unprocessed data will be destroyed three years after publication. If you are interested in the project results, please email us with for information on retrieving the data. Please keep a copy of this email for your records. If you have any questions regarding this project, feel free to contact **Justin Dennen at dennenj1@findlay.edu or** my research adviser, **Dr. Amanda Ochsner – at** ochsner@findlay.edu.

This dissertation project is being completed as part of my graduation requirements for a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree. I appreciate your consideration of participating in my research.

Thank you for your time.

Justin T. Dennen and Amanda Ochsner, Ph.D.

Appendix C

Interview Guide Instrument

Demographic and Background Information

1. Can you state your name, current role, and the number of years you have been teaching?

2. What is your educational background? (Degrees, majors, schools you attended)

3. What roles have you held as an educator? (Coaching, department chairs, committees, etc., should be included)

Main Interview Questions

1. I understand that this school uses restorative practices in a couple of different ways: community-building circles in advisory and conflict resolution circles to heal harm. When and where were you first introduced to restorative justice practices?

2. How would you define restorative justice practices?

3. What restorative justice practices have you used in the classroom? What has been your experience using these practices?

4. What are your impressions of the community-building circles used in study hall/advisory? (Good topics, bad topics, effective, not effective)

5. What are some of the benefits and challenges you have experienced in your classroom in terms of the implementation of restorative justice practices in your classroom? How have you embraced and addressed the issues?

6. Tell me about a time when you thought removing a student from your classroom was necessary for behavioral reasons. What was happening, and what led you to the decision to remove them from the class?

7. What are your impressions of using restorative circles/restorative conversations to resolve disciple issues such as conflict and healing harm? Have you found it to be helpful? How so? (This can be student to teacher or student to student.)

8. Should the administrators/school district always use restorative practices to deal with conflict/discipline issues? Why or why not?

9. What impact do you believe the community-building circles have had when it comes to you building relationships with the students and the student building relationships with you?

10. What impact do you believe that restorative circles/conversations have had when it comes to building relationships with the students and the student building relationships with you?

11. In restorative practices, do you think students feel genuinely heard? Why or why not?

12. What positives in the school climate and culture have you noticed since implementing more restorative practices?

13. What negatives in the school climate and culture have you noticed since implementing more restorative practices?

14. Are there ways your administration/school/other teachers have supported you with implementing restorative practices? Ways they could have been more supportive?

15. What suggestions might you make for those wanting to implement or improve restorative practices?