A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PRINCIPAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

by

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ABSTRACT

CHRISTOPHER J. JONASSEN. A Qualitative Study of Principal Perspectives on the Implementation of Restorative Practices
(Under the direction of DR. WALTER HART.)

As student discipline has become a growing area of concern in public schools, the staggering number of office referrals and student suspensions has caused principals to seek alternative methods to address student misbehavior. Restorative practices aim to change negative student behavior and restore relationships following behavioral incidents by focusing on reflection, repair, and open communication. The purpose of this basic, interpretive qualitative study was to explore school principals' perceptions and experiences related to the implementation of restorative practices. The researcher hopes key findings will assist with future implementation efforts in schools and support principals seeking to change their practices from traditional discipline efforts to restorative approaches. The findings from this study revealed numerous implications for future research as well as recommendations for practice. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews with six public school principals revealed that there are advantages, processes, and pitfalls that can guide future research and implementation efforts. Findings include that relationships, expectations, accountability, professional development, and mindset all play an important role in successful implementation. Additional research investigating the balance of restorative practices and traditional consequences is still needed. The findings also discussed the connection between relationships and restorative practices. Additional research would benefit future implementation efforts in these areas.

DEDICATION

"Family is not an important thing. It's everything."

– Michael J. Fox

To my wife, Sara. Thank you for standing by me. Together, anything is possible. Thank you for being flexible during late nights and for supporting me during many years of studies. It is your support that has gotten me through. I love you.

"Believe you can and you're halfway there."

–Theodore Roosevelt

To my son, Travis. Don't ever give up on your dreams. You can do anything you want in life with hope, passion, and dedication. As you grow older, stay dedicated to your commitments and to the journey and you will go far in life. I can't wait to see what your future holds as you grow into a young man. I love you.

"My mother is my root, my foundation. She planted the seed that I base my life on, and that is the belief that the ability to achieve starts in your mind."

−Michael Jordan

To my mother. Thank you for supporting me throughout the years. From musical instruments, skateboards, hobbies, to student teaching. You have always been there for me and have been supportive in all I do. I wouldn't be where I am today without you in my life.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IRB	Institutional Review Board
ISS	In-school-suspension
RQ1	Research Question 1
RQ2	Research Question 2
RQ3	Research Question 3
RQ4	Research Question 4

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Throughout history, schools have relied on traditional discipline practices which heavily focused on the suspension and exclusion of students to maintain order in schools. More recently, a growing area of concern in public schools is the staggering number of office referrals and student suspensions following incidents of student misbehavior. Many scholars have recognized that suspending students does not change negative behavior, yet many schools continue to suspend students and utilize these traditional practices (Classen & Classen, 2008; Morris, 2017; Schiraldi & Ziedenberg (2001). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), over 2.5 million students were suspended during the 2017-2018 school year. The use of these traditional, exclusionary discipline practices has raised questions about how school leaders handle discipline. While excluding misbehaving students may provide a short-term solution, the overwhelming number of suspensions suggests that new, more effective approaches to student misbehavior are warranted. Discipline data from across the nation show a need to reduce suspension rates and keep students in classrooms learning.

According to Clifford (2015), restorative practices serve as an alternate method for managing student behavior that involves shifting from a punishment-oriented mentality in response to student misbehavior. They hold promise for improving the management of student behavior in schools. By understanding how restorative practices factor into today's pedagogy on managing student conduct, it may be necessary to understand the implications that restorative practices can have on student discipline. Rather than traditional, authoritarian modes of instruction and discipline, which rely on distributing punishments for misbehaviors, restorative practices consider several factors affecting a student's behaviors. Given pressures on school

officials to reduce the staggering numbers of out-of-school suspensions (OSS) and manage student behavior more effectively, restorative practices have quickly become a dominant topic and primary focus area of alternative methods to handle student discipline in schools. This heightened interest in restorative practices and the potential benefits that restorative programs may have toward managing student discipline in schools makes this topic relevant and warranted for doctoral-level research (Clifford, 2015).

An increasing number of studies illuminate problems related to traditional, exclusionary discipline. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2013), data suggests that exclusionary discipline practices are not effective in reducing occurrences of misbehavior. Additionally, they are not equitable. Research has also found racial gaps in discipline data, which is a reflection on how discipline is handled in schools. These inequities have been noted in use of traditional discipline practices in numerous studies (Skiba, 2002; Skiba, 2011; Noguera, 2003; Raffaele et al., 2003; Wallace et al., 2008). These disproportionate suspension rates nationwide suggest that educators must change how they handle student discipline (Morris, 2017; Noguera, 2003; Raffaele et al., 2003; Skiba, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008).

Research on restorative practices places an emphasis on its impact on student discipline data. These studies have consistently found positive outcomes in student discipline following the implementation (Bazzi, 2021). Furthermore, Bazzi (2021) indicates that restorative practices develop stronger teacher-student relationships. Despite the positive outcomes related to student behavior, some research studies suggest that restorative practices do not clearly impact student achievement. One study found that academic achievement decreased after implementing restorative practices in a middle school (Jain et al., 2014).

As with any new program, successful implementation is vital to program success. This is particularly true in schools that may move toward restorative practices. Garnett et al. (2019) suggested that the rationale behind restorative practices is essential for successful implementation. Everyone within the school building must understand the reasoning behind implementation. Of course, principals are the key figures in implementing restorative practices (Garnett et al., 2019).

There has been limited research regarding the role of the principal related to restorative practices. Yet the principal is critical in determining the vision and overall plan for implementing restorative practices and is essential for its long-term success (Garnett et al., 2019). As such, additional research is needed to uncover the impact that principals have toward the implementation of restorative practices.

Statement of the Problem

Many schools nationwide are looking closely at suspension rates and seeking alternative ways to handle student discipline (Anyon, 2016; Buckmaster, 2016; Fronius et al., 2016). Restorative practices derive from restorative justice, which was originally designed to help reduce suspension rates of student misbehavior and improve relationships between students and staff (Smith et al., 2015). Restorative practices work to repair the harm done to people in a reflective, more positive approach. They allow for the development and repair of relationships rather than solely providing consequences (Zehr, 2015*).* This model of managing student conduct also aims to change the culture by focusing on trust and respect throughout the school. Educators must change their beliefs, attitudes, and mindsets to successfully implement restorative practices (Jackson, 2014).

Evidence indicates that discipline practices, such as out-of-school suspensions, are not effective against reoccurrences of student behavior (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013). Therefore, educators must utilize disciplinary practices that will help change behavior. When using the restorative approach, students and staff work together to identify how the student misbehavior impacted them. They work together to determine the appropriate actions to repair the harm (McGarrell & Hipple, 2007).

There is limited research on many aspects of restorative practices. Research in the field includes quantitative studies that analyze discipline data to track implementation success (Morris, 2017; Noguera, 2003; Raffaele et al., 2003; Skiba, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008). Qualitative studies have also been conducted to review teachers' and students' perspectives (Adorjan et al., 2022; Bazzi, 2021; DiCintio & Gee, 1999; Dietrich, 2021; Dyson et al., 2022; Garnett et al., 2020; Mullet, 2014). However, research that reviews and analyzes school administrators' perceptions to better recognize the beliefs and practices that lead to successful implementation is still lacking.

Studies have revealed differing outcomes in schools that have implemented restorative programs. Several studies have shown positive outcomes in reducing student discipline (Buckley & Maxwell, 2007; Gonzalez, 2015; Kane et al., 2008; Lewis, 2009; Riestenberg, 2013; Wong & Mok, 2011). International studies reviewing disciplinary office referrals and OSS have been conducted in New Zealand (Buckley & Maxwell, 2007), Scotland (Kane et al., 2008), and China (Wong & Mok, 2011). These studies noted overall declines in student discipline following the implementation of restorative practices. Declines in office disciplinary referrals and out-of-school suspensions have also been noted in the United States in Denver, Colorado (Gonzalez, 2015), Minneapolis, Minnesota (Riestenberg, 2013), and Philadelphia (Lewis, 2009). However,

Jain et al. (2014) revealed that student achievement did not increase following implementation. In fact, grades in middle schools worsened after restorative practices were implemented.

Research suggests that program timelines and roll-out plans play a key role in the fidelity of implementation. Implementing restorative practices may initially result in a reduction in student discipline, however no program will transform school culture unless those implementing it see the work as purposeful and meaningful (Sergiovanni, 2000). Limited research has been conducted to examine the relationship between school culture and restorative practices. There is also insufficient research on how principals successfully navigate restorative practices amidst pressures to maintain order in their schools. while keeping teachers' content (Bronson, 2013). According to Bronson (2013), a cohesive school vision with an understanding among all stakeholders is crucial in maintaining conditions that promote success in learning and student behavior.

Theoretical Framework

Restorative practices are reinforced by the Sensemaking Theory (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). This theory suggests that school staff make sense of policy based on their schema. They make decisions, act, and react based on what they know. This explains why new policies may be implemented in very different ways.

The idea of sensemaking is focused on the search for school employees to find meaning in dealing with the uncertainty of changes in policies or practices (Mills, 2003). School employees struggle with sensemaking whenever current practices differ from what they know or what is expected. When the situation feels different from what is typically expected, an unexpected discrepancy occurs. For example, educators have a specific view and expectation of

how school discipline will be handled, and they experience dissonance when it is dealt with in a way that is not the norm.

Another theory that has laid the foundation for restorative practices is the Reintegrative Shaming Theory. Braithwaite (1989) argued that to prevent repeat recidivism by the offender, one must put the offender to shame by the community. Rather than just resorting to shame, this theory has evolved in its role in restorative practices to include managing the shame of all individuals involved. This includes the victim and the community after an offense has occurred. During restorative conferences and circles, all parties openly discuss their role in the situation. By opening up and communicating effectively, the offender can see first-hand how the behavior affected others. This awareness and keen sense of putting the offender on the spot is an example of the Reintegrative Shaming Theory (Harris et al., 2006).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore school principals' perceptions and experiences related to the implementation of restorative practices. The researcher hopes that findings will inform policy and practice in schools. Specifically, the findings may benefit principals who seek to implement restorative practices.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What do principals perceive to be the advantages of restorative practices in schools as compared to traditional, exclusionary discipline practices?
2. What do principals perceive to be the problems associated with restorative practices in schools as compared to traditional, exclusionary discipline practices?

3. What are the processes that principals perceive contribute to successful implementation of restorative practices in schools?
4. What pitfalls did principals experience that impeded the successful implementation of restorative practices?

Overview of Research Methodology

This study was a basic interpretative qualitative study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) held that this type of study is the most common type of qualitative research as it allows researchers to understand how individuals interact with their experiences. The basic interpretive qualitative research design provided the means to better understand how principals navigated the perceived beneficial contributions and pitfalls associated with implementing restorative practices.

Data in this study were generated via purposive sampling of active school principals who had in-field experiences using restorative practices. Six principals were interviewed. The researcher engaged participants in individual interviews using semi-structured questions. Each participant also completed a survey to gather demographic and contextual information.

Overview of Research Site, Participants, and Data Collection

The study was conducted in six schools in North Carolina. These sites were chosen because they were past the initial phase of implementing restorative practices and were within an 80-mile radius of the researcher's location. The researcher hoped to be able to connect with and reach out to potential participants.

According to Ravitch & Carl (2016), participants must be chosen strategically when utilizing purposeful sampling. The researcher's goal was to interview six principals with experience leading schools that were using restorative practices to gain critical insight for future schools seeking an alternate method to traditional discipline and consequences. Because there

were a limited number of schools implementing restorative practices, the researcher included only two requirements for participation. First, participants must have been the principal serving in the identified school. Second, they must have implemented the main components of restorative practices, which included restorative circles or restorative conferences. Due to the limited number of high schools implementing restorative practices in the area, the high school participant was the only participant who did not implement restorative circles. This school only implemented restorative conferences. Nonetheless, this participant was included in order to have the high school perspective. The other five participants implemented both circles and conferences. Participants also must have implemented restorative practices for at least two years, which included professional development before implementation. These requirements aimed to help gain access to a larger pool of participants, as no other requirements were needed.

According to Ravitch & Carl (2016), interviews are one of the most common forms of data gathering in qualitative research. Doing so allows participants to share their lived experiences and insights. In this study, semi-structured interview questions that were aligned with the research questions were used. Doing so helped the researcher compile trends that answered the research questions.

Significance

This study was worthy of dissertation research due to its specific focus. A gap in research about restorative practices exists. While studies examine the relationship of restorative practices to student discipline in schools, there is a scarcity of literature that reviews the perspectives of principals who used restorative practices as an alternative response to discipline. This study seeks to fill that gap.

In addition to adding to existing literature, this study has practical implications. This research is an original study intended to provide an additional understanding of the factors contributing to the successful implementation of restorative practices. It also examined how restorative practices contribute to the overall school culture and management of student behavior. This study can potentially impact implementation practices by understanding the perspectives of principals who have experience with this endeavor.

Delimitations

According to Creswell (2003), delimitations help narrow the research focus. The researcher identified several parameters in this study. First, data came from only six principals within North Carolina public schools. All participants led schools that had implemented restorative practices. Furthermore, as restorative practices are a relatively new initiative, the pool of potential participants was limited. Second, because the pool of potential candidates was limited, selected principals varied in the implementation phase and duration of implementation. Third, this study focused only on principals' perceptions. The decision to not include teachers and other administrators was made because principals are critical in leading change initiatives in schools. Finally, the limited number of potential participants also meant that there was no attempt to consider other personal or professional characteristics of participants, such as gender, race, or years of experience.

Assumptions

According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), assumptions are educated guesses and plans that are acknowledged as practical for research. This study has embedded assumptions. The first assumption was that participants were upfront and honest in their responses. Second, it was assumed that the interview protocol would elicit the responses needed to answer the research

questions. To encourage forthright answers, participants were informed that neither they nor their schools would be identified in this study. Third, it was assumed that participants had the experience and training needed to effectively lead the implementation of restorative practices. Finally, it was assumed that participants' reasons for implementing restorative practices included the desire to manage student behavior better by reducing recidivism and suspensions.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions of terms apply to this study:

Circles: A restorative circle is a practice in which participants sit in a circle and share their feelings with each other. It is a structured way to increase communication and social well-being and sense of belonging (Follestad et al., 2019).

Conferencing: Conferencing is when students (victims and offenders) meet to deal with the offense at hand. According to Toews & Zehr (2003), conferencing increases the development of relationships and perspectives. It also allows for students to reflect, discuss and learn from their mistakes.

Equity in school discipline: Equity in schools is the elimination of bias that exists between groups of students. Literature suggests that inequities exist due to bias and the use of zero-tolerance policies (Hickey, 2004; Keleher, 2000; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015).

Exclusionary practice: Exclusionary practice is the practice used by school administrators to remove a student from the learning environment. Common methods of exclusionary practice include suspension and expulsion (Green et al., 2018).

Mediation: Mediation involves two individuals coming together to discuss a conflict. Victim-offender mediation allows victims the opportunity to meet with the offender to address

the issue. It allows for both parties to reflect on how their actions affect others (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001).

Reintegrative Shaming Theory: A theory that uses shame to help infuse and regulate thinking, feelings, and behaviors regarding the acceptance of others (Mills et al., 2010).

Restorative justice: A program or system in criminal justice that focuses on the rehabilitation of offenders. The system allows the victim and offender to come together to discuss harm (Weaver & Swank, 2020).

Restorative practices: Restorative practices are an alternate approach to school discipline in which students, teachers and staff come together to discuss and reflect on harm. The practices allow students to reflect on behaviors to help prevent reoccurrence (Gregory et al., 2016).

Sensemaking Theory: The Sensemaking Theory describes how two people with the same amount of information about a policy can implement that policy differently based on their own mental model (Weick et al., 2005).

School climate: School climate is the feel of the school. The atmosphere can vary in levels of positive or negative (Griffith, 2000).

School culture: School culture refers to the values, beliefs, and norms of the school. School culture is formed by the environment that creates common understandings of the way business is typically conducted (Setiyati, 2014).

School to prison pipeline: The trend of students leaving schools and entering jail or prison (American Civil Liberties Union, 2012).

Zero-tolerance: Zero-tolerance policies are policies that are designed to hold a "no tolerance" stance on specific types of incidents or misconduct in schools. They do not consider

context or specific details of the situation. They are often seen as severe in nature (Buckmaster, 2016).

Organization of the Study

This study was organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction including an overview of restorative practices and the background of the study, statement of the problem, theoretical framework, purpose, research questions, overview of the research methodology, significance of the study, delimitations, assumptions, definition of terms, and the organization of the study. Chapter 2 contains a literature review, including an introduction, restorative practices, the history of restorative practices, zero tolerance, the need for equity, commonalities of successful implementation and professional development, student perspectives, teacher perspectives, theoretical framework, and a summary of the literature. Chapter 3 includes the research design, participants, context and setting, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 reveals the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 consists of discussions, implications, recommendations, and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

History, practices, and results of restorative practices in education are becoming widely important in schools nationwide. Implementing restorative practices has been a rising trend as schools attempt to address disproportionate suspension, ensure equitable disciplinary practices, and improve school culture. Suspension data shows that inequities exist for Black, Latino, and Native American students. They are more likely to be suspended then White students due to the processes, procedures, and viewpoints surrounding discipline in education (Fisher, Frey, & Smith, 2016; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

The principal's role in implementing restorative practice in schools is vital. Administrators must know how to strategically address student behavioral issues by teaching appropriate behaviors through conversations rather than immediately resorting to suspension (Wearmouth et al., 2005). Suspending students without allowing both victims and offenders to see how their actions affect others does not help educate them or prevent future occurrences of negative behavior (Wearmouth et al., 2005).

The restorative practices model embeds restorative justice practices into schools and follows the belief that relationships are affected when students misbehave and display negative behaviors (Smith et al., 2015). It teaches students that their actions cause harm and embeds a process to allow students to understand that it is their responsibility to repair relationships when such instances occur. Restorative practices also teach students responsibility and accountability (Smith et al., 2015).

Literature on student and staff perspectives on restorative practices has helped educators examine and fine-tune plans for successful implementation (Adorjan et al., 2022; Bazzi, 2021;

DiCintio & Gee, 1999; Dietrich, 2021; Dyson et al., 2022; Garnett et al., 2020; Mullet, 2014). To understand the principal's perspective on the implementation of restorative practices, additional research is required. Research in this area will facilitate a better understanding of implementation efforts in public schools and help determine the factors that drive a successful implementation plan. The aim is to better understand the methods that schools use to create and maintain a successful restorative justice program.

The following literature review will examine the origin, objectives, and key philosophies of restorative practices, which are derived from the Sensemaking and Reintegrative Shaming Theories. This literature review also discusses the history behind zero tolerance policies, discipline in schools, and the reasoning behind developing restorative practices programs as an alternate approach to discipline. Table 1 summarizes the topics and research sources that were reviewed.

Table 1

Literature Topics and Subgroups

Theme	Sources
Restorative Practices Defined	General: Watson & Pranis, 2020; Dignan, 2007; Kidde, & Alfred, 2011; Losen et al., 2015; Riestenberg, 2006; Schiff, 2013; Wachtel, 2013; Zehr, 2002 Mediation: Baker, 2009; Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001 Circles: Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2020; Costello et al., 2008; Costello et al., 2010Follestad et al., 2019; Kaveney & Drewery, 2011; Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2010 Conferencing: Drewery, 2004; Toews & Zehr, 2003

Table 1

Literature Topics and Subgroups (continued)

History of Restorative Practices	Classen & Classen, 2008; Fronius et al., (2016); Gavrielides, 2014; Hall, 2007; Kidde & Alfred, 2011; Liebmann, 2007; Strutzman et al., 2005; Wenzel et al., 2008; Zehr, 1990
Zero-Tolerance	American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Bowditch, 1993; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Educational Intolerance, 2001; Ewing, 2000; Osher et al., 2001; Raffaele-Mendez, 2003; Sellers, 2015; Skiba, 2008; Skiba and Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Stearns & Glennie, 2006; Tobin et al., 1996; Torpy, 2005
The Need for Equity	DiCintio and Gee, 1999; Dwyer et al., 1998; Frey, 2014; González, 2015; Greenberg et al., 2003; Gregory et al., 2011; Hickey, 2004; Keleher, 2000; Knoff, 2003; Mcbride, 2020; Monroe, 2005; Morris, 2017; Mullet, 2014; New York Civil Liberties Union, 2011; Nichols, 2004; Noguera, 2003; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Raffaele et al., 2003; Skiba, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; Stenhjem, 2005; Tolan et al., 1995; Townsend, 2000; Walker et al., 1996; Wallace et al., 2008
Commonalities of Successful Implementation of Restorative Practices	Anyon, 2016; Anyon et al., 2016; Gregory et al., 2016; Kusek & Rist, 2004; Metz & Albers, 2014; Meyers et al., 2012a; Scaccia et al., 2015; Sherman et al., 1997; Wanless & Domitrovich, 2015
Student Perspectives	Baker, 2008; Ball et al., 2019; Kervick et al., 2020; Mauro, 2022; Scales, 2010
Teacher Perspectives	Adorjan et al., 2022; Bazzi, 2021; Dietrich, 2021; Dyson et al., 2022; Garnett et al., 2020

Table 1

Literature Topics and Subgroups (continued)

Theoretical Framework	Sensemaking Theory: Anyon, 2016; Ball et al., 2019; Coburn, 2001; Coburn, 2005; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2020; Spillane et al., 2004; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005 Reintegrative Shaming Theory: Braithwaite, 1989; Harris et al., 2006; Mills et al., 2010

Restorative Practices Defined

Restorative practices are derived from restorative justice, a program used to help change behaviors for at-risk offenders (Zehr, 2002). The interventions used in both restorative practices and restorative justice are closely related since restorative practice interventions are based on restorative justice principles. Like restorative justice, restorative practices focus on accountability. They allow offenders to review and reflect on their behaviors and how it impacts others (Schiff, 2013). Zehr (2002) contends that restorative justice emphasizes the needs of all the parties involved. Restorative practices also teach students how their actions affect others and how to manage these negative behaviors and assume responsibility (Zehr, 2002). Many fundamental principles of restorative practices coincide with other programs focusing on improving school culture. These fundamentals provide behavioral support and teach specific skills to students so they can manage their own behavior (Riestenberg, 2006).

Restorative practices regularly aid in finding other ways to handle traditional discipline, particularly exclusionary practices like suspension that lead to harmful consequences (Losen et al., 2015). Zehr (2002) suggested that the beliefs of restorative practices, such as working with offenders on addressing needs and obligations and engaging others in solving issues, can assist

students by providing a beneficial framework for handling conflict. Furthermore, the skills an offender utilizes during the restorative justice process enable them to become socially aware (Kidde & Alfred, 2011).

Ted Wachtel (2013), the president and founder of the International Institute for Restorative Practices, views restorative practices as a way to utilize interventions and strategies to deter negative behaviors from happening. Restorative practices are proactive and help schools create a positive culture focused on learning from mistakes to prevent the reoccurrence of negative behaviors. One of the essential purposes of using restorative practices is to create a respectful environment that allows students and staff to feel safe (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2020).

There are three main techniques that serve as the foundation of restorative practices. These three include mediation, circles, and restorative conferencing. All three are important elements within the structure of the program. In North America, victim-offender mediation, or mediation, is the most popularly used restorative intervention (Dignan, 2007). According to Dignan (2007), there are five specific goals of mediation which include healing, accountability, empowerment, understanding, and mutual agreement. It is important that the offender is held accountable and that there is healing for the victim. Additionally, there must be an understanding of the impact and mutual agreement by both the victim and offender.

Mediation

Mediation is used when conflict occurs between two or more individuals. Victim-offender mediation allows the victim and offender to meet and address how the situation impacted them. It also allows the offender to understand how their actions affect others (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001). Victim-offender mediation is used across the nation as one of the

main components of restorative practice programs. For example, Denver Public Schools implemented a variation of Victim-offender mediation. They called this technique "restorative group conferencing" (Baker, 2009). This proactive strategy allowed students to address an issue and fix a problem before any consequence was given. Restorative mediation took place after individuals made restorative agreements in which they committed to following up with restorative conferencing in the form of mediation. According to Baker (2009), all three schools that participated in the Denver study reduced their out-of-school suspension rates and expulsion rates during the first year of implementation with a positive trend in declining recidivism.

Circles

Circles also serve as a key strategy in restorative practices programs. A restorative circle allows for structured, two-way communication in which participants are able to enhance their communication and improve their social competence and social skills. Participants have the opportunity to talk with each other and not necessarily to each other, therefore enhancing overall communication skills (Follestad et al., 2019). During circles, members in the school community sit in a circle and participate in a structured process to connect effectively and positively (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2020; Costello, McCluskey et al., 2008; Wachtel & Wachtel, 2010). Circles can be used to address a specific incident or any ongoing issues that may impact others (or certain members of the community). They can help eliminate negative behaviors or feelings in the classroom (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2020; Costello, McCluskey et al., 2008; Wachtel & Wachtel, 2010;). Circles aim to help establish respect and increase the likelihood and development of positive relationships within the classroom. Although circles vary in length of time and topic, the predominant goal is to create a safe place for participants so that they can effectively communicate with one another. Participation in circles promote student expression,

understanding and communication with each other *(Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2020)*. They also promote self-advocacy, problem-solving and leadership abilities. (Kaveney & Drewery, 2011).

The authors of Circle Forward, a restorative practices curriculum, explained that using circles as a routine is a critical practice in implementing restorative practices in schools. It assists in relationship building and many other critical components of effective communication and behavior management (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2020). The curriculum has allowed teachers to use and employ circles daily, weekly, and as needed. The Circle Forward curriculum includes key skills such as relationship building, effective communication and focuses on the impact of bullying and trauma. Circles typically include a "circle keeper" who is responsible for setting the norms for the circle, leading the process, and being an active participant. By sitting at eye level, students increase their sense of belonging, trust and a more inclusive environment ensues (Costello et al., 2010).

Conferencing

Restorative conferencing can serve as an effective way to resolve conflict that occurs within the classroom. Conferencing focuses on respect for all parties involved, including the victim and the offender. The conference places students (victims and offenders) together to deal with the offense at hand. During the conference, both groups work together to determine next steps toward repairing the harm. They concentrate on this idea rather than consequences. This allows for restoration to take place with a focus that remains positive. According to Toews & Zehr (2003), it is possible to transform relationships using dialogue. Dialogue between groups focuses on perspective and ensuring that parties understand the perspective of others. Dialogue also ensure that the victim and offender take active roles in discussions (Drewery, 2004). An intentional focus must also remain on the demeanor and the manner in which each person speaks

to each other. Participants typically include students, victims, and teachers. At times and as needed, they can even include parents and other community members. The purpose of the conference is to determine the core problem and how to move forward to ensure the offense does not happen again. The primary focus should be a plan to restore the situation (Drewery, 2004). Conferencing allows the victim's needs to be met by providing them with a voice as they meet with the offender. Restorative conferencing encompasses the notion that structured processes can help with productive conversations. Varying perspectives in dialogue, when carefully facilitated, can lead to dynamic discussions focused on repairing the harm (Drewery, 2004).

History of Restorative Practices

Restorative justice has been used by different cultures around the world for thousands of years. It remains a form of ancient philosophy that that has explored the processes of healing Fronius et al. (2016). Fronius et al. (2016), Hall (2007), and Kidde and Alfred (2011) noted that these ancient cultures explored various replacements for harmful punishments that aimed to focus on accountability and healing rather than simply delivering punitive penalties. In modern times, Restorative Practices began in the Western hemisphere in Canada.

The first recorded victim-offender and reparation service in recent times took place in Canada in Kitchener, Ontario in May 1974. A probation officer, Mark Yantzi, took two juvenile offenders to victims' houses that they had vandalized; they apologized (Zehr, 1990). This was replicated in the United States in Elkhart, Indiana in 1978 (Liebmann, 2007). The idea of restorative justice began to develop in the United States and Canada, leading to the establishment of victim-offender reconciliation programs. Throughout the 1970s, restorative justice emerged and was carried by those who questioned punitive justice. They felt the criminal justice system excluded specific groups (Gavrielides, 2014; Wenzel et al., 2008). It was during this time that

other restorative justice projects were developed. There were 773 projects in the U.S. by 2002 and 123 in Canada by 2005 (Liebmann, 2007). Restorative practices quickly transcended into schools with the premise that school discipline issues damage relationships rather than a violation of the student code of conduct. Expanding on Zehr's Mennonite traditions and network, a structure for restorative discipline was eventually created for schools (Classen & Classen, 2008; Strutzman et al., 2005).

Zero-Tolerance

Throughout the nation zero-tolerance policies have played a major role in the development of restorative practice programs. The term zero-tolerance was developed from polices in the 1980's that focused on federal drug enforcement. With an increase in violence in schools at the time, school officials followed politicians and aimed to create similar policies in school districts. The philosophy of zero-tolerance became widely spread and became more precedent in schools in the early 1990s as schools began to implement and enforce policies that included predetermined consequences. These consequences were often punitive, severe, and deliberate in uniformity, which used a "one size fits all" approach regardless of the circumstantial or contextual factors that influenced or affected the situations (Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

The purpose of zero-tolerance policies was to keep students and the total school environment safe. Those who sought to implement these policies believed that as long as schools were consistent and specific in minor and major offences and what constitutes a suspension, students should be treated equally and receive identical consequences (Sellers, 2015). According to research by Skiba and Peterson (1999), little evidence has since supported the theory that zero-tolerance policies increase school safety or improve student conduct. While the purpose was to

provide a safer environment, they argue that consequences from zero-tolerance policies have a harmful effect on students (Skiba, 2008). Stearns & Glennie (2006) contend that advocacy groups need to review alternate methods of handling student discipline because zero-tolerance policies are not equitable. They do not differentiate consequences for minor and severe violations. A fundamental notion of zero tolerance is that excluding students when they misbehave will help produce a safer climate in schools (Ewing, 2000). Rather than eliminating disruptions, school suspensions generally predict an increased rate of student discipline for the students being suspended (Bowditch, 1993; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Raffaele-Mendez, 2003; Tobin et al., 1996).

Skiba (2008) reviewed the work of the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force. He argued that the increase in violence in schools has made it hard for school administrators to maintain safety while ensuring students receive a free and appropriate public education. The American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) deemed that the zero-tolerance policies intended to keep students safe but "conflicted with current theories on child development." Zero-tolerance policies have harmfully affected students by negating the concepts of more recent adolescent brain development. Isolation and strict consequences can lead to inadequate feelings and further discipline issues, which lead to recidivism (Skiba, 2008).

The American Psychological Association (2008) zero-tolerance task force also determined that these zero-tolerance policies do not follow best practices with school discipline because the consequences of isolation do not deter bad behavior. Researchers have concluded that there is a negative relationship between traditional exclusionary practices and academic

achievement even when demographic and socioeconomic status are controlled (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Raffaele-Mendez, 2003; Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

Zero-tolerance policies have also created tension for parents of special needs children. The lack of differentiation with zero-tolerance polices has created major conflict and frustration for parents of students with disabilities. These students often have issues with fully understanding how their behaviors lead to negative consequences. These policies serve as an injustice to this group of students because they are not adaptable for students with special needs. Special considerations must be taken when reviewing discipline situations for students with disabilities. A lack of flexibility has resulted in cases in which parents have sued school districts because of inequitable treatment of their children (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Skiba & Peterson (2000) contended that discipline policies only work if the consequences teach students how to use problem-solving skills to help control their tendency toward violence. They also suggest that zero-tolerance policies are "symbolic and are put in place to give administrators and parents peace of mind" (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). They concluded that implementing intervention strategies that allow students reflect on their behavior is more effective than providing only exclusionary consequences.

There have been several cases across the United States of America in which the media has scrutinized zero-tolerance policies. One example was reported in the St. Petersburg Times. A 10-year-old girl had a knife in her lunchbox. It was determined that her mother placed it in there so she could cut her apple. As soon as she discovered the knife, she notified her teacher. Due to the school system's zero-tolerance policy, she was expelled from school for the possession of a weapon at school (Educational Intolerance, 2001). In another case, a student was expelled because he was talking to his mother on his cell phone during school, which was prohibited. This

student's mother was on deployment as a soldier in Iraq, and they had not spoken to each other in 30 days (Torpy, 2005). Cases like these in which zero tolerance policies were employed with disregard to situational circumstances have been negatively publicized and have created disgruntled students, parents, and communities.

Rather than zero-tolerance policies, schools should utilize discipline approaches that focus on deterring and eliminating repeat offenses in schools. Many successful programs focus time and energy on student reflection and supporting students in the understanding of how their behavior affects those within the community (Osher et al., 2001). Improving the school community and placing a focus on student belonginess may help solve the issues and challenges caused by zero-tolerance polices (Skiba, 2008).

The Need for Equity

There is an ongoing need for equity in schools. The development and spread of restorative practices are grounded by the push to fix the disparities that are evident in racial disproportionality around the country (Frey, 2014; González, 2015; Mcbride, 2020). Existing literature suggests that inequities exist regarding discipline in schools. Bias and zero-tolerance policies have contributed to this issue (Hickey, 2004; Keleher, 2000; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Research has found that students of color are at higher risk for suspensions and expulsions (Gregory et al., 2011; Knoff, 2003; Monroe, 2005; Nichols, 2004; Noguera, 2003; Raffaele et al., 2003; Townsend, 2000). Skiba (2002) contended that disproportionality exists in the administration of school discipline based on socioeconomic status, gender, and race, with some populations having a greater suspension rate. Boys are often suspended more often than girls, and Black students receive more severe consequences and are suspended for more subjective reasons than any other student group. Wallace et al. (2008) noted racial and ethnic differences,

with Black, Hispanic, and Native American students being more likely to be sent to the office and suspended than White students. Additionally, Raffaele Mendez and Knoff (2003) observed that Black male students in middle school were at the greatest risk for suspension and, subsequently, repeat offenses.

Morris (2017) suggested that Black girls have also been affected by what is called "pushout, the excessive use of zero-tolerance policies and punitive practices that keep students out of school for being insubordinate, disrespectful, and uncooperative." Subjective reasons for disciplining students and cultural bias play an important part in fairness and equity in schools. Research also shows that Black male students are more likely to experience consequences than any other group, which causes concern about the fairness and equitability of the consequences issued to students (Noguera, 2003; Raffaele et al., 2003; Skiba, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008).

Discipline data taken by the New York Civil Liberties Union (2011) showed disproportionality based on race. 53 percent of Black students were suspended in New York City Public Schools during a ten-year period, while this subgroup only made-up 33 percent of the population. This data displayed a gap in equity of 20 percent. During this same time ten-year timeframe, White students made up 15 percent of the total enrollment and data showed that only 8 percent of White students were suspended.

This data suggests that inequities exist, as White students during this time frame were suspended at a much lower rate compared to Black students. The data also represented during this ten-year timeframe showed that most suspensions were issued for non-violent offenses, including insubordination and inappropriate language. More recently, during the 2018-2019 school year, Black students made up 25.5% of the total population of New York City Public

Schools. During that school year, that subgroup made up 42% of all school-level suspensions and 52% of all district level, superintendent suspensions. During that same year, White students made up 15.5% of the total enrollment and made up 9.9% of all school-level suspensions and 5.6% of all district level, superintendent suspensions. The same trend exists in the over suspension of Black students. This data illuminates the need to review and reflect on the fairness of school suspensions and implement practices to ensure equity for all students (New York Civil Liberties Union, 2011).

Several research studies have examined behavior prevention strategies. The findings of both Greenberg et al. (2003) and Tolan et al. (1995) have been reliable in identifying strategies that have effectively promoted school safety and reduced the potential for negative behaviors. (Dwyer et al., 1998; Tolan et al., 1995; Walker et al., 1996) all suggest that effective school discipline must include three levels of intervention. These include strategies targeted for all students, strategies for students exhibiting at risk behaviors, and strategies for students who have a history of negative behaviors.

Stenhjem (2005) suggested that "school officials must consider race, cultural background, and disability of the child" when utilizing restorative practices. Schools must promote a safe and trusting setting for both the victim and offender. Stenhjem (2005) concluded, "If the offender believes that the odds are stacked against them, they may put little energy into resolving the conflict between them." Mullet (2014) and DiCintio and Gee (1999) both agree that acceptance is essential in fostering a healthy climate. They also concur that a self-regulating environment is imperative in promoting the acceptance all students. Students must feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions and the environment must involve the idea that students' opinions matter.

Empirical evidence shows that when discipline is handled punitively, it has the tendency to reinforce negative student attitude toward the school (Skiba, 2002).

Restorative practices reduce the number of suspensions and build relationships between students and staff to help prevent continued student issues and conflict (Morris, 2017; Noguera, 2003; Raffaele et al., 2003; Skiba, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008). Restorative practices can serve as a connection to the racial inequities that plague our nation's schools (Noguera, 2003; Raffaele et al., 2003; Skiba, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008). Equity must be a primary focus for schools that seek to keep children in school and reduce recidivism (González, 2015).

Commonalities of Successful Implementation of Restorative Practices

Findings throughout several studies revealed an overwhelming need for additional professional development in order to ensure successful implementation of restorative practices. Throughout surveys and teacher interviews, individuals expressed the need for additional professional development to increase understanding of and buy-in for restorative practices. According to Anyon (2016), there appears to be a disconnect between an individual teacher's own understanding of restorative practices and those of coworkers. Most respondents in one study revealed that 59% reported having a clear understanding of restorative practices, while only 11% of respondents reported that other teachers at their school have a strong understanding of restorative practices. Surveys also revealed that few teachers believed that other teachers at their school similarly understand restorative practices. They cited challenges to implementing restorative practices that are sometimes at odds with the recent work on the topic (Anyon et al., 2016; Gregory et al., 2016). Leaders must focus their time to ensure that adequate professional development is provided with a consistent focus on the "why" or the reason for implementing the

program or model in the first place. A definition of restorative practices should be created at the school level to ensure understanding by all stakeholders.

Another opportunity for schools implementing restorative practices is for them to identify or create fidelity checks to ensure the program is successful and on track with its intended goals. Anyon et al., (2016) suggested that many schools did not track whether, for example, disciplinarians followed the eligibility protocols when using restorative practices with students during discipline incidents. Moreover, the dataset in this study did not indicate to what degree each school experienced pressure to implement (Anyon et al., 2016). Further review of principal perspectives and this idea of "pressure to implement" must be analyzed.

According to findings in multiple studies, evidence suggests that organizational readiness directly influences the success of implementation (Kusek & Rist, 2004; Meyers et al., 2012a; Scaccia et al., 2015; Wanless & Domitrovich, 2015). Scaccia et al. (2015) stated that "readiness results from an organization's motivation to engage in the implementation process" are needed for the effective implementation of restorative practices. Readiness results directly determine the capacity that an organization must have to ensure it is ready to implement the program with fidelity. An organization's motivation is created by a shared vision among staff and their willingness to engage in the implementation process **(**Scaccia et al. (2015).

Future research would be strengthened by including indicators that measure successful implementation. Metz & Albers (2014) ask, "What does it take?" and suggest that "successful implementation starts with selecting the right intervention to implement, using a stage-based approach for implementation, establishing effective collaboration among stakeholders, and using data to inform decision-making and continuous improvement". These factors are important

factors of successful implementation and are specifically related to implementation fidelity. These factors also include the perspective of the school principal.

Furthermore, Wanless and Domitrovich (2015) advised that "training is one of the most common activities designed to improve a number of implementer readiness factors including intervention buy-in and knowledge." Schools can benefit from investing in further training and coaching sessions and should be sure to include teachers, younger students, and parents. Leveraging the existing restorative capacity within schools can increase reliability. According to Sherman et al. (1997), developing a core team of expert staff to train others can lead to increased fidelity.

Student Perspectives

Students' perspectives play an important role in ensuring the success of restorative practices. According to Ball et al. (2019), students felt that restorative practice circles were helpful in addressing behavior issues and conflict on a universal scale. Their findings suggested that age is a factor in determining restorative practices influence on addressing behaviors. Older students in this study suggested that eighth graders had fewer positive feelings than fifth graders, which is somewhat unsurprising since middle school-aged students often have interpersonal difficulties (Scales, 2010). They also suggested that the type of strategies included in this implementation plan could have altered outcomes and the perspectives of students, as they only focused on implementing restorative circles. Other factors, such as relationships between student and teacher, and discipline policies were not changed during implementation (Ball et al., 2019).

Kervick et al. (2020) reported results from the perspectives of elementary students. The majority of students included in this study reported that their main frustration was that not all students were engaged in circles. They reported that the students who needed circles the most

used it as a time to disengage, which was frustrating to many who participated. Results from this same study reported that nearly seventy percent of students said that they participated in circles and shared their feelings.

Baker (2008) reported on students' perspectives during a study of three Denver schools. When surveyed, eighty-six percent of students agreed that restorative practices meetings were a great way to share their feelings. Additionally, Seventy-seven percent of students agreed that their viewpoints and judgments of other students or individuals improved due to the meetings. Also, eighty-five percent of all students in these restorative practices programs agreed that the restorative agreement was a fair process. Eighty-four percent of participants reported being pleased with the results (Baker, 2008).

Mauro (2022) conducted research on secondary students' perspectives on relationships and belonging following the implementation of tier 1 restorative practices. These tier-one restorative practices consisted of using restorative circles for proactive measures. Tier one circles occur solely as a proactive measure and do not result from negative interactions or situations in which harm has been done. The purpose of this study was to review the relationship between a sense of belonging and tier one restorative circles. The researcher found that there was a positive correlation between the implementation of tier one circles and the sense of belonging. Students felt positively about relationship building and school climate. Although the researcher could not directly attribute these positive results related to belonging, positive relationships and positive school climate to restorative practices implementation, these positive school attributes might have been partly due to the implementation of restorative practices (Mauro, 2022).

Teacher Perspectives

Research conducted by Bazzi (2021) shows that restorative practices help build better relationships with students. According to all five teachers who participated in this study, restorative practices helped each teacher build stronger relationships with colleagues and students. It was concluded that relationships were strengthened when there was a keen focus on the reflection of negative situations. This included allowing both victims and offenders the opportunity to reflect on the understanding of wrongdoings and helped students learn from their mistakes (Bazzi, 2021).

Garnett et al. (2020) reported the views of teachers and other staff. Common concerns included difficulty with the allotment of actual staff needed to adequately run circles with fidelity and weariness that the program was just another "new" thing that would soon be gone. The abundance of these comments indicates that the "why" may not have been cohesive among the staff in this study. The need for stay buy-in and support is crucial for the implementation of restorative practices. All staff throughout the building must know and understand the reasoning behind implementation.

Another challenge that staff face with the implementation of restorative practices is time constraints. Many teachers feel as if they do not have adequate time to fully implement circles and conferences in their classrooms. They admit that there is a need to implement, but the process can be very time-consuming to do with fidelity (Garnett et al., 2020).

In a study conducted by Adorjan et al. (2022), it was determined that challenges were consistent across the sample from Cyber City and Cyberville. Staff surveys reported that these challenges included educator "burnout", differences in professional development for restorative practices, and the variations of administrator support in implementation. A major discussion of

restorative practices at the school level should include both policy review and the role of principal. The current study focuses on the experiences and perceptions of restorative practices.

Dyson et al. (2022) found that school educators' perspectives on restorative practices aligned well with Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs. Teachers reported that it served as a solid, reliable way to build relationships among students because it focused on the development of relationship skills (Dietrich, 2021). Teachers also reported that restorative practices helped students control their emotions. It aided them in showing empathy, developing self-management skills, social awareness, and responsibility with decision-making (Dietrich, 2021). Educators recognized that building strong relationships was a vital part of learning.

Theoretical Framework

Sensemaking Theory

The theoretical framework that encompasses the research on this topic is the Sensemaking Theory (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Within this theory, it is suggested that the ways in which an organization (and those who comprise it) interpret a situation actually have an impact on behavior. For example, research indicates that individuals change their practices based on their understanding and experiences related to policy and they interpret policy based on what they know to be true and believe (Coburn, 2001). This can be applied in schools as employees, such as teachers, act based on their schema or knowledge base. They make decisions, respond, and react based on what they know. Prior knowledge and an individual's experiences help shape their interpretation of new policies (Coburn, 2001).

Sensemaking Theory also describes how individuals with the same amount of information can view things in different ways. Often, new ideas are difficult to understand and can be misunderstood (Spillane et al., 2004). New policies and programs, such as restorative

practices, that draw on philosophies of discipline connect the interpretive process of sensemaking (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2020). This makes it extremely important for schools to have conversations about the philosophy of restorative practices before implementation. When staff learn new strategies or programs like restorative practices, they are likely to rely on prior knowledge or experiences, and conversations can help bridge gaps in knowledge and understanding to ensure a common language exists. Educators should be aware that when there is a huge variation in philosophies of discipline strategies, implementation of restorative practices can be difficult because it can be harder to gain staff buy-in. Variants in beliefs on discipline can lead to increased suspension and office referrals (Anyon, 2016; Spillane et al., 2004).

Research indicates that sensemaking is social. Sensemaking about a policy or program spreads formally and informally throughout the environment (Coburn, 2005; Spillane et al., 2004). Exchanges between teachers and students also lead to the production of new meaning (Ball et al., 2019). Teachers make sense of restorative practices in relation to the experiences they encounter with using restorative practices (Ball et al., 2019).

Reintegrative Shaming Theory

Another theory that has laid the foundation for restorative practices is the Reintegrative Shaming Theory. Braithwaite (1989) argued that in order to prevent repeat recidivism, an offender must actually be put to shame by the community. Shame is thought to help infuse and regulate thinking, feelings, and behaviors regarding the acceptance of others. It is the tool used to measure a person's self-worth and value in the judgement of others (Mills et al., 2010).

Rather than just resort to shaming, this theory has evolved in its role in restorative practices to include managing the shame of all parties involved. This includes the victim and the

community after an offense has occurred (Harris et al., 2006). This theory allows a group of students to come together to fully understand the situation at hand and how offenses include other people besides the offender. Restorative practices allow for all students to come together to discuss and share their feelings regarding situations. The group is able to look at and focus on more than just one viewpoint (Harris et al., 2006).

Summary

The implementation of restorative practices has been a rising trend in schools as more educators realize that traditional consequences do not work. Administrators must know how to strategically address social and racial issues by implementing plans that focus on having conversations with students and teaching appropriate behaviors rather than immediately resorting to suspension. Despite this increasing trend, little research has been conducted that reviews the principal's role in implementing restorative practice in schools. This study seeks to fill that gap.

This chapter has provided a review of the literature surrounding restorative practices. It described problems associated with traditional, exclusionary discipline practices, particularly as related to concerns about inequitable discipline in schools. The chapter also provided a definition of restorative practices and the major practices associated with it. The perspectives of students and teachers about the implementation of restorative practices were also delineated. Finally, a description of the theoretical constructs that form the foundation of this study was included. The following chapter will describe the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Schools across the nation are looking for alternatives to traditional discipline consequences in an effort to reduce recidivism and promote equitable practices. Restorative practices are designed to help reduce suspension rates and improve relationships throughout the school (Smith, Fisher, & Frey, 2015). The focus of restorative practice is to repair harm done to people and relationships rather than punishing offenders (Zehr, 2015). This model of managing student conduct also aims to change the culture by focusing on trust and respect throughout the school. Educators must change their beliefs, attitudes, and mindset to ensure successful implementation of restorative practices (Jackson, 2014).

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2013), evidence specifies that exclusionary discipline practices are not effective or equitable against reoccurrences of student behavior. It is imperative that educators utilize disciplinary practices that will help change behavior. The restorative approach provides guidance to students and teachers as they work collaboratively to identify and respond to the impact the incident and offender had on others and how harm can be repaired to all parties (McGarrell & Hipple, (2007).

Research in the field includes quantitative studies that analyze discipline data to track implementation success. Qualitative studies have also been conducted to review teachers' and students' perspectives. Research is still lacking that reviews and analyzes the school principal's perceptions. We must have this data to better understand the practices that lead to successful implementation and effective programs from a leadership standpoint.

Implementing restorative practices may initially result in a reduction in suspension rates but in order for the work to lead to effective long-term outcomes, principals and staff must see

their implementation efforts as a way to change the culture of the building (Sergiovanni, 2000). Disproportionate suspension rates across the country prove that educators must change how they handle student discipline. Data also reflect racial inequities with traditional discipline practices (Morris, 2017; Skiba, 2002; Noguera, 2003; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Wallace et al., 2008; Skiba et al., 2011). Everyone within the school building must understand the reasoning behind implementation, and this starts with the principal.

Principals have several duties relating to the climate and culture of their schools. Some of their main duties include overseeing school discipline and creating a positive school climate and culture for students and staff. Reviewing and determining the principal perspective is crucial because the principal sets the tone and climate of the building. This qualitative case study examined principals' perceptions of implementing restorative practices in rural and suburban North Carolina schools.

The purpose of this study was to explore school principals' perceptions and experiences related to the implementation of restorative practices. Research in the field includes quantitative studies that analyze discipline data to track implementation success (Morris, 2017; Noguera, 2003; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008). Qualitative studies have also been conducted to review teachers' and students' perspectives (Adorjan et al., 2022; Bazzi, 2021; DiCintio & Gee, 1999; Dietrich, 2021; Dyson et al., 2022; Garnett et al., 2020; Mullet, 2014. Research that analyzes the school principal's perceptions is still lacking. Therefore, the researcher hopes that findings from this study about principals' perceptions of restorative practices implementation can help educate school leaders about the policies and practices that lead to successful implementation. To accomplish this purpose, the

study focused on interviews with principals who had previous experience implementing restorative practices in their schools to identify best practices with the principal lens in mind.

The research questions for this study include:

1. What do principals perceive to be the advantages of restorative practices in schools as compared to traditional, exclusionary discipline practices?
2. What do principals perceive to be the problems associated with restorative practices in schools as compared to traditional, exclusionary discipline practices?
3. What are the processes that principals perceive contribute to successful implementation of restorative practices in schools?
4. What pitfalls did principals experience that impeded the successful implementation of restorative practices?

Research Design

The methodology for this study was a basic interpretive, qualitative study. Qualitative studies allow researchers to explore phenomena and understand complex issues (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe that qualitative studies enable researchers to understand the constructed meanings and perspectives of others. Qualitative research is an effective way for researchers to understand how participants develop meaning from their lived experiences (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Francis, 2021; Hinds, 2016; Kingsberry, 2015; Pruitt, 2015). The qualitative design also provided the researcher with an understanding of participants' perspectives. Therefore, a qualitative design was selected for this study as it helped determine the principals' lived experiences of the implementation of restorative practices in their schools.

This qualitative research utilized a structured interview method to gain insight on the lived perspectives of principals during and after implementation. Additionally, the researcher's

aim was to ensure that participant responses provided a complete understanding of the research questions.

Data in this study were generated via purposive sampling of active school principals who have in-field experiences using restorative practices. The principals had experience with implementation efforts of at least two years. They also had to utilize two key components, including restorative circles and restorative conferences. Six principals were interviewed in a structured setting. The researcher engaged participants in individual interviews and a survey with Likert-type questions for the demographic survey (APPENDIX A).

Research Questions

The research questions were created after detailing the purpose of the study. The following qualitative research questions helped the researcher facilitate interviews that allowed for in-depth answers related to the principal's perspective of restorative practices. Four research questions guided the implementation of these qualitative interviews. The research questions for this study included:

1. What do principals perceive to be the advantages of restorative practices in schools as compared to traditional, exclusionary discipline practices?
2. What do principals perceive to be the problems associated with restorative practices in schools as compared to traditional, exclusionary discipline practices?
3. What are the processes that principals perceive contribute to successful implementation of restorative practices in schools?
4. What pitfalls did principals experience that impeded the successful implementation of restorative practices?

Positionality Statement

I am a White male, and I am currently a middle school principal in rural North Carolina. Before obtaining this position, I served as principal at the middle and high school levels for five years in two small districts in North Carolina. During that time, I analyzed data on student removal from school due to exclusionary practices like suspensions. I witnessed the consistent negative impact these practices had on students. The suspensions rarely led to changed behaviors, and recidivism seemed consistent.

I have served in public education for 14 years as a teacher, instructional coach, assistant principal, and principal. During my time teaching, I often had students with high behavioral needs. I never gave up on them and kept them in my classroom because I knew the value of receiving instruction and the harm that would occur if they were out or suspended. My enthusiasm for supporting my students with challenging behaviors carried into my time as an administrator. However, I learned quickly that not all teachers thought like I did. I saw firsthand how a toxic, punitive school culture created a negative climate where exclusionary practices for minor, subjective offenses were justified by many staff members.

As principal and as a researcher, I want to spread awareness and contribute to further research on topics such as restorative practices that will help keep students in school and learning. Students need to be in the classroom and must learn from their actions; this can be done in other ways besides exclusionary methods of handling negative behaviors. As a school principal, I have knowledge of several schools in several districts where the principals utilized restorative practices to reduce recidivism and suspension rates. I am interested in principal perspectives of restorative practices of those who have implemented or are in the process of implementing.

Ethical Considerations

This study began after approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte. After approval, the researcher implemented procedures to ensure ethical and standardized practices were maintained throughout the research study. For example, the researcher worked to establish a trusting relationship with all participants. Each participant signed a Consent to Participate Form (APPENDIX B), which explained the purpose of this study and what the results will be used for. Participants were told that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any given time. To protect the participants' identities, their names were kept confidential, as well as the actual name of the school where they worked. Pseudonyms were assigned for reporting. Additionally, all demographic and interview data remained on a secure, password-protected device that could only be accessed by the researcher and the dissertation chair.

Purposeful sampling was used to select six principals for this study. According to Creswell (2013) purposeful sampling is used to ensure that participants can provide feedback needed to answer the research questions because of their knowledge, position, or experiences. In this case, participants had to be principals of schools that had implemented restorative practices. Therefore, the researcher identified schools that were at any stage of implementing restorative practices. However, they had to have been in implementation for at least two years before the interview. This information was verified during the interview as well as by the demographic survey. The researcher researched and reviewed schools that had implemented or were implementing restorative practices within an 80-mile radius by completing online searches and by reaching out to school leaders and district connections. The researcher made phone calls to principals that were identified. He also sent recruitment emails to the principals of these schools

to recruit their participation in this study. The Recruitment Protocol (APPENDIX C) was shared with possible participants via email after initial contact during the recruitment phase. He began with a form of convenience sampling by reaching out to those he was already familiar with who had experience with restorative practices. He then researched, sent emails, and attempted to gather additional principals to interview as needed. Because the number of schools implementing restorative practices was limited, there was no attempt to limit participation beyond being the principal of the school, having two years of implementation in the school, and utilizing the key components of restorative practice programs (circles and conferences). Age, gender, race, and tenure were identified in the reporting but were not factors limiting participation. Additionally, snowball sampling was used to gain two participants. This was a technique in which those who participated in the study were asked if they would assist with identifying additional participants (Creswell, 2013). Once participants expressed interest in participating, the researcher emailed the Recruitment Follow-up Script (APPENDIX D).

Data Collection

This study sought to review the principal's perspective; therefore, interviews were the data source used in this research. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with six principals. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), one-on-one interviews are perfect for interviewing participants who are not afraid to speak, articulate, and share their ideas comfortably. The researcher estimated that it would take about one hour to conduct each interview. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and shared with participants to ensure consistency. The researcher conducted the interviews during the fall of 2023 and finished research in the Spring of 2024. Interviews were conducted at a site and time that were conducive to each participant. One interview was conducted in person, and the other five were conducted

virtually using Google Meet. The option of a virtual interview was offered because doing so enabled participation from a broader geographic area, and for convenience, many participants preferred virtual meetings.

The Interview Protocol involved a set of pre-determined, open-ended participant questions (APPENDIX E) so that participants could share their perspectives about the implementation of restorative practices. A semi-structured format was used, meaning that all participants were asked the same questions. The researcher provided additional prompts or asked clarifying questions to gather more information as needed.

The interview protocol was broken into three phases. First, a series of background questions was used. These five questions served as a warm-up, and they provided some demographic and contextual information about the participants. Next, seven participant questions that directly aligned with the research questions were used. This section of questions sought insights into the positive and negative aspects of the implementation of restorative practices. A final category of questions sought to gather participants' perspectives about the advice they would give to other principals who may be considering the implementation of restorative practices. This last question gave participants the opportunity to summarize their insights and reveal additional information. Collectively, the interview protocol contains 13 participant interview questions.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves several vital components. These components include identifying, examining, and interpreting patterns and themes in the text to determine how these patterns and themes support the research questions (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This inductive analysis was used to make meaning of the data. Inductive analysis involves narrowing

the focus by reviewing and referring to the research questions (Azungah, 2018). According to Creswell (2014), this process includes six steps. The six steps are: (a) the data (interviews) should be collected and organized, (b) the data should be prepared (reading transcripts multiple times to obtain a general sense), (c) the coding process begins (considering patterns/themes), (d) the data are codes by assigning codes to relevant patterns/themes, (e) the redundancy of codes that will be used in the research report should be reduced, (f) codes should be collapsed into five to seven themes to be used in the research report.

The first step in analyzing and making sense of the data collected for this study was reading the transcripts and listening to the interviews several times to identify common responses. The second step involved coding the text from the interviews to identify the participants' perceptions by looking for trends and patterns. Coding is the process of assigning codes or labels to text so that the data can be organized in a meaningful way and further analyzed into themes (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The next step involved transferring similar codes into categories. These categories were then coded to identify themes. These themes captured the essence of principals' perceptions about implementing restorative practices in their schools.

As participants explained why they chose to implement restorative practices, it was evident from the interview responses that each used their own schema to made meaning out of how their experiences shaped their philosophy for student discipline. The Sensemaking Theory helped shed light on the lived experiences of each participant. Each participant’s stance on restorative practices was evident in their responses.

The other key component of the theoretical framework for this study was the Reintegrative Shaming Theory. As participants responded to questions about the process they used for restorative circles and conferences, it was evident that these principals used an approach

that took all perspectives into account following incidents of misbehavior. By considering these multiple perspectives, offenders were able to see how the victim was affected by the harm.

Trustworthiness

A noteworthy task for qualitative researchers is ensuring high quality and accuracy when conducting and recording research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that trustworthiness helps add value to a research study. Trustworthiness includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. It also ensures that the research is not shaped by any bias or interests of the researcher. Creditability ensure helps make sure the findings of the study are accurate and correct. Transferability refers to the ability to apply the research to other contexts. Dependability refers to the ability to reproduce the results with consistency, and confirmability refers to the level in which the research is accurately depicted within the results.

The researcher established protocols to confirm the trustworthiness of the study. First, the researcher ensured that participants were in principal positions during the time restorative practices were implemented in their corresponding schools. Second, member checking was used by reviewing timelines and demographic information from the interviews and surveys. Each interview was recorded, and all participants received a copy of the transcribed report following the interview to ensure the accuracy of their responses. Third, the researcher provided detailed descriptions of the steps involved in the research and detailed descriptions of participants' responses. Finally, the beginning researcher sought guidance from his committee throughout the research process, specifically the dissertation chair.

Limitations

Limitations are possible weaknesses or complications noted by the researcher in a research study. with the study identified by the researcher (Creswell & Guetterman, 2021).

Limitations can be helpful to researchers who may choose to conduct similar studies or expand upon previous studies. One limitation of this study was the number of principals interviewed and surveyed. The fewer the number of participants, the less generalizable the study will be. This study was limited in that it only included six participants. All participants were Caucasian, which limited a multi-cultural perspective on restorative practices in relationship to the principal. However, like most qualitative research, generalizability was not the primary purpose of this study. The researcher wanted to review the in-depth perceptions of principals. Additional studies and research are still warranted to expand upon and determine the accuracy of the results yielded in this study.

Another limitation involves the honesty of the participants. For many reasons, the participants may not have been honest about their true experiences using restorative practices. The researcher aimed to ensure participant confidentiality and build rapport with participants to ensure they felt comfortable enough to speak freely during the interviews. This was a limitation since the researcher did not have previous relationships with all participants.

Summary

The goal of this study was to inform principals who are contemplating the implementation of restorative practices in their schools. Investing in restorative practices can potentially change their schools' culture related to student discipline. This study used a basic interpretive qualitative approach to contribute to the research related to restorative practices. Illuminating the experiences of principals who were experienced in implementing restorative practices may assist other school principals who wish to implement restorative practices in their schools or are currently doing so. As principals lead the transition from zero-tolerance policies to

nonpunitive, restorative practices, it is crucial to understand the principal's perspective in the implementation process.

This chapter included a description of the research methodology and design. Specifically, the researcher used a basic exploratory design. Semi-structured interviews of principals who had experience implementing restorative practices was used to gather data. This chapter also included a description of the data analysis processes that were utilized. Additionally, information about the protection of participants and the methods to ensure the study's trustworthiness were provided. Chapter 4 will reveal the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to gain insight into principals' perceptions about implementing restorative practices with the intent that findings will inform policy and practice in schools. Specifically, the findings may help guide principals who implement restorative practices by allowing them to learn from previous implementation efforts. The objective of this qualitative research study was to answer the following four research questions:

1. What do principals perceive to be the advantages of restorative practices in schools as compared to traditional, exclusionary discipline practices?
2. What do principals perceive to be the problems associated with restorative practices in schools as compared to traditional, exclusionary discipline practices?
3. What are the processes that principals perceive contribute to successful implementation of restorative practices in schools?
4. What pitfalls did principals experience that impeded the successful implementation of restorative practices?

In this chapter, a summary of the six principal participants is provided, as well as an explanation of the procedure that was used during the study. Themes and findings are discussed and reviewed by each research question, and commonalities by question are expounded upon. The chapter ends with a summary and transition into Chapter 5.

Participant Summary

The sample studied in this research was comprised of six PK–12 public school principals within the state of North Carolina. All participants were chosen because they had at least two years of experience implementing restorative practices in their schools. Participants were

purposefully selected after the researcher completed online searches and contacted other school leaders. Demographic surveys were provided to potential participants to ensure they had experience implementing restorative practices as school principals for at least two years. The minimum requirement was that the school principals had experience implementing restorative circles and conferences, which are typical practices related to restorative practices. However, one principal who served at the high school level was included even though she only had experience implementing restorative conferencing because it is difficult to find high schools that use restorative circles. For this reason, this high school principal was included to ensure that the high school perspective was added.

Based on the required criteria, data from this purposeful sample were collected from a demographic survey sent to each prospective participant's email address via Google Forms. Each participant was chosen because they met the criteria set forth by the researcher.

Table 2 shows cumulative, descriptive statistics for the participants based on the demographic survey that was administered via Google Forms. All principals were Caucasian. Participants spanned three different age brackets; however, half were 40 years old or older. Ages ranged from 40-44 years (33.3%), 45–49 years (33.3%), and 50-54 years (33.3%). The participants' gender was equally split in terms of male (50%) and female (50%).

Table 2

Participant Demographic Survey Cumulative Data

	Frequency	Percentage
Principal's Experience (years)		
4-5	1	17
6-10	5	83

Table 2

Participant Demographic Survey Cumulative Data (continued)

Total Experience in Education (years)		
16-20	2	33
26-30	4	67
Experience at the school where restorative practices were implemented (years)		
3-4	2	33
5-7	3	50
8-12	1	17
Highest level of education completed		
Master's	2	33
EdS	1	17
Doctorate	3	50
Experience in undergraduate coursework relating to student discipline (number of courses)		
0	2	33
1	4	67
Experience in graduate coursework relating to alternative consequences for student discipline (number of courses)		
0	4	67
1	2	33

Table 2

Participant Demographic. Survey Cumulative Data (continued)

Age (years)		
40-44	2	33.3
45-49	2	33.3
50-54	2	33.3
Race		
Caucasian	6	100
Gender		
Male	3	50
Female	3	50
Highest level of education completed by parents/guardians		
HS Diploma	1	17
Bachelor's	1	17
Master's	2	33
Doctorate	2	33

Table 2 also illustrates the participants' highest educational level achieved. More than half of the participants had doctorate degrees, and 67% had advanced degrees (EdS or doctorate). All principals who participated in the study had over 15 years of experience in education, and more than half (67%) were veteran educators with over 25 years of experience. All participants had at least four years of experience as principals, with the majority (83%) having six to ten years of experience leading schools.

Table 2 illustrates the number of years each principal served in the school where they led restorative practices. Two of the participants served in their school for three to four years (33%), three participants served in their school for five to seven years (50%), and one participant served in the school for eight to ten years (17%).

When reviewing courses related to student discipline, four participants shared that they only had one course pertaining to student discipline in their undergraduate teaching preparation coursework (67%), and two shared that they had no courses focusing on student discipline (33%). Two participants had a single course relating to alternate methods of discipline compared to traditional student discipline (33%), while the rest had no classes related to alternate methodology.

Finally, participants indicated the highest level of parent education (from both parents). One participant (17%) had parents with high school diplomas and no college experience. One participant (17%) had parents with education at the bachelor's degree level. Two participants (33%) had parents with education at the master's degree level. One (17%) had at least one parent with a doctorate.

In addition to cumulative data, individual descriptions of each participant are included. These descriptions allow for greater detail and context around data gathered from participants' responses. Additionally, each participant has been randomly assigned a pseudonym to ensure their identity remains hidden. This pseudonym helps to identify them throughout the study. Participant data can be referenced in Tables 3–6.

Participant 1 (Jessica) was a Caucasian woman between the ages of 40 and 44. She led an inner-city Title I elementary school in North Carolina. She held the principal position in this school for four to five years and implemented restorative practices in the same school for three to

four years. She had a total of 16-20 years of experience in the education field and held a master's degree. She reported having one undergraduate course on student discipline and zero courses at the graduate level related to alternate consequences for student discipline. The highest level of parental education was at the bachelor's degree level.

Participant 2 (Cindy) was a Caucasian woman between the ages of 50 and 54. She led a middle school in a rural small town in North Carolina. She had six to ten years of experience as a principal with a total of 26-30 total years in education. She implemented restorative practices for five to seven years and held an EdS degree. She reported having one undergraduate course focused on student discipline and one course at the graduate level related to alternate consequences for student discipline. The highest level of parental education was at the master's degree level.

Participant 3 (Tammy) was a Caucasian woman between the ages of 50 and 54. She led an elementary school in a rural town in North Carolina. She had six to ten years of experience as a principal with a total of 26-30 total years in education. She implemented restorative practices for a total of five to seven years and held a doctorate. She reported having no undergraduate courses focused on student discipline and one course at the graduate level related to alternate consequences for student discipline. The highest level of parental education was at the master's degree level.

Participant 4 (Robert) was a Caucasian man between the ages of 50 and 54. He led an elementary school in a rural town in North Carolina. He had six to ten years of experience as a principal with a total of 16-20 years in education. He implemented restorative practices for three to four years and held a doctorate. He reported having one undergraduate course focused on

student discipline and no courses at the graduate level related to alternate consequences for student discipline. The highest level of parental education was a high school diploma.

Participant 5 (Matthew) was a Caucasian man between the ages of 45 and 49. He led a middle school in a rural town in North Carolina. He had six to ten years of experience as a principal with a total of 26-30 years in education. He implemented restorative practices for a total of 8-12 years and held a doctorate. He reported having one undergraduate course focused on student discipline and no courses at the graduate level related to alternate consequences for student discipline. The highest level of parental education was at the doctorate level.

Participant 6 (Charles) was a Caucasian man between the ages of 45 and 49. He led a high school in a rural town in North Carolina. He had six to ten years of experience as a principal with a total of 26-30 years in education. He implemented restorative practices for a total of five to seven years and held a master's degree. He reported having no undergraduate course focused on student discipline and no courses at the graduate level relating to alternate consequences for student discipline. The highest level of parental education was at the doctorate level.

Table 3

Participant Demographic Survey Individual Data: Age, Race and Gender

Participant	Age	Race	Gender
Jessica	40-44	Caucasian	Female
Cindy	50-54	Caucasian	Female
Tammy	50-54	Caucasian	Female
Robert	40-44	Caucasian	Male
Matthew	45-49	Caucasian	Male
Charles	45-49	Caucasian	Male

Table 4

Participant Demographic Survey Individual Data: Total Experience in Education, Total Years as Principal, Number of Years Implementing Restorative Practices

Participant	Years in Ed.	Years as Principal	Years Implementing
Jessica	16-20	4-5	3-4
Cindy	26-30	6-10	5-7
Tammy	26-30	6-10	5-7
Robert	16-20	6-10	3-4
Matthew	26-30	6-10	8-12
Charles	26-30	6-10	5-7

Table 5

Participant Demographic Survey Individual Data: Education, Coursework and Parental Education Preparation

Participant	Education Degree	Number of Undergrad Courses on Discipline	Number of Grad Courses on Alt. Methods for Discipline	Parental Education
Jessica	Master's	1	0	Bachelor's
Cindy	EdS	1	1	Master's
Tammy	Doctorate	0	1	Master's
Robert	Doctorate	1	0	HS Diploma
Matthew	Doctorate	1	0	Doctorate
Charles	Master's	0	0	Doctorate

Themes/Findings by Research Question

The research questions within this study were designed to provide principals with feedback regarding practices that will help or hinder new implementation efforts for restorative practices in schools. Participants reflected on the advantages and problems of implementing restorative practices in their buildings. They noted key processes that led to successful implementation while providing feedback on the pitfalls that impeded successful implementation. The overall purpose of including these research questions was to gain authentic insights regarding what others can do to lead solid, successful restorative practices initiatives in their buildings. The major themes that emerged are outlined in Table 6.

Table 6

Theme Data

Research Question	Theme
RQ1	Relationships
	Voices Heard
	Reducing Time Away from Instruction
RQ2	Changing Mindset
	Restorative vs. Consequences
RQ3	Specific Professional Development
	Strategic Systems
	Making Relationships a Priority
RQ4	Accountability and Expectations
	Time
	Student Challenges

RQ1: What do Principals Perceive to be the Advantages of Restorative Practices in Schools as Compared to Traditional, Exclusionary Discipline Practices?

The first research question was designed to better understand the advantages that experienced principals found when implementing restorative practices in their schools. Identifying the benefits will allow others to gain insight when planning for their own implementation. A few themes emerged from examining the responses to interview questions. These included relationships, voices heard, and reducing time away from instruction.

Relationships

Answers to multiple questions from all six participants included one specific and common trend: Building positive relationships was essential when implementing restorative practices and played out as a key benefit to implementation. Positive relationships were established, built upon, or a key focus for the six participants when implementing restorative practices in their respective buildings. There was a consistent belief among participants that transforming relationships across the school was essential in establishing a restorative culture because it allowed for clear communication and repaired potentially strained relationships. Some participants even stated that nurturing positive relationships was the primary purpose behind implementation efforts. For example, when asked what led to restorative practices in his building, Robert explained that a big issue in his school before implementation was the lack of positive student relationships with each other. “They were comfortable doing harm to each other. Whether that was being ugly with words or their actions,” he said. He further explained, “They didn’t know kids who were in the same class with them. And so, something that we wanted to build is that sense of belonging in the elementary classrooms.”

Jessica also reflected on what led her to implementation of restorative practices. She noted that her school runs a program called an "All-Star School" each year. All-Star School happened during the first ten days of school each year. Teachers teach, review, and practice classroom expectations and procedures during these ten days. She explained, "The deal is teachers spend their day building relationships with students and setting up the expectations and procedures in the room." She added that making relationships a priority and allotting time to this allows teachers to, in turn, hold students accountable. She further noted, "Teachers build relationships with their students, with one another, and then we hold our kids accountable."

Tammy explained that she worked on stabilizing the school when she began serving as principal in her building in February. She was concerned about a negative climate that seemed pervasive. When discussing the atmosphere of the school when she was named principal, she said, "There were no positive relationships. It was very evident that nobody liked anything it felt like." She went on to explain that by adding restorative circles to the master schedule for the beginning of the following year, she could assign people to different circles, which helped build relationships. She also noted that improved learning and high academic achievement could not happen until "the noise was settled." By this, she meant that relationships had to be a top priority, which would eventually reduce student discipline problems.

Charles also reflected on the advantages of implementing restorative practices. When asked what he perceived to be the advantages of implementation, he stated, "Relationships, and that's the big one, hands down." He referenced the importance of student-to-staff relationships and wanted "students to realize that there are adults here who cared about them."

Voices Heard

Several participants discussed how allowing all voices to be heard after a damaging incident was essential to restorative practices. Rather than solely giving consequences for code of conduct violations, participants described the need for accountability and transparency between all parties involved in the incident.

Matthew illustrated this point. He talked about improving communication between the student and teacher or between students by allowing all voices to be heard following an incident. According to Matthew, this practice restored relationships and improved behavior. Matthew reiterated the importance of voices being listened to by explaining, "I think the biggest piece is that there's voices involved (…) when you think about proactive circles (…) we're giving kids a chance to speak and be heard (…) so there's no voice that can get left out of the room." Interaction and communication during restorative conferences were crucial in restoring relationships following behavioral incidents.

During the interview, Cindy described her implementation efforts. She explained that she started small when planning for implementation by only initially doing restorative work for one type of incident: fighting. When students had a physical altercation, they went through a four-day restorative program. She noted that on day three, the students got together, shared reflections, and devised a plan to ensure justice actions were in place. This included apology letters, if necessary. Once students discussed the incident and reflected upon what needed to happen with either a school or trauma counselor, they had to complete a project together. Day three was essential because it allowed for voices to be heard. She also discussed the need for student reflection, preferably immediately following the incident. A specific, detailed plan with a student reflection component allowed students to review their actions and share their feelings.

Jessica, Cindy, and Tammy all reported that including the voices and opinions of staff and ensuring they all had input on the non-negotiables and expectations were essential to creating a successful implementation plan. Understanding the rationale for restorative practices and consistent communication were also important aspects. Therefore, all three of these participants used a book study to spark conversations and motivate their faculties and staff to support the implementation of restorative practices. They all concluded that the voices of staff were equally as important as the voices of students.

Jessica utilized a book called *Hacking School Discipline* as her source of discussion and professional development with staff. Tammy engaged staff with a book called *Circle Forward*. Cindy used the book *Race Talk* to allow staff to explore cultural awareness and unintentional biases before any discussions of utilizing restorative practices. Cindy explained that engaging staff in a book study "created a sense of understanding. And it created a togetherness in my staff."

Reducing Time Away from Instruction

The need to reduce time out of class was shared across the implementation efforts of these six principals. The common theme was the importance of students being in the classroom rather than receiving extended, punitive consequences that stop learning. Engaging in restorative practices reduced the time students missed from school in each of these schools.

Charles discussed the evolution from an In-School Suspension Room to the Independent Learning Center at his school. He explained:

> We really wanted to examine what could we do to start to minimize the disruption to these kids and the impediments academically and behaviorally for them. We wanted to

> get away from the more punitive aspect of school consequences and really include a component of life coaching.

He explained that when students were struggling academically or behaviorally, they went to the Independent Learning Center to receive support, whether the need was academic or behavioral. This allowed for the continuation of learning to take place.

Cindy discussed allowing students to be in school during the restorative process. She made an analogy to family. “Whenever our own kids (…) get in trouble (…) it’s not like we kick them out of the family for ten days (…), so it needs to be the same thing in school,” she said. She went on to explain that on the first day of the four-day program (designed to restore relationships after physical student conflict), students would be sent home after their reflection and initial meetings with a member of the restorative team. That was the only day they were out of school. Students remained in school during the other three days of the program.

Robert discussed disciplinary consequences and restorative practices. He explained that his administrative team assigns consequences. As the principal, he clarified that he had to change the mindset of the administrative team at his school. “It was like if they did something wrong, suspend them out of school,” he said. He explained there were “too many people in the building who can help students in their context of the classroom and of the school to where we shouldn’t be suspending kids out.” He continued that “changing that mentality at the school level” was necessary. Robert added that once they implemented restorative practices, the number of out-of-school suspensions drastically changed. He explained, “I think at this point, we’ve suspended one kid for two days this year.” Robert noted that before implementing restorative practices:

> They were handing out out-of-school suspensions left and right. So, I think it's influencing them, starting with the leadership, and then working its way out to where people understand our goal is not to get them out, it's to keep them in.

During Matthew's interview, he frequently noted that students should not be out of school longer than needed. He felt strongly that a consequence had to be just for the behavior and that there needed to be layers of accountability. If a student is removed from a classroom, that teacher must follow up with the student. He stated, "If you decide that that child's absence is more important than their presence, you have an obligation to teach the kid how to do it differently when they come back." He was referring to the follow-up that teaches students to change their behaviors, thereby leading to less frequent removal from class.

Matthew also clarified that he had to work with his administrative team to ensure that disciplinary consequences and the length of removal were minimal. He explained that he reduced the size of the In-School Suspension room due to the decreased number and length of student removals. He explained:

> I told the administrators; you are not allowed to assign a kid to ISS more than an hour. That's the longest amount of time we're going to go, because (...) if the kid is misbehaving in math but was fine in English, there's no reason for him to miss English (…) they need to be in class."

Jessica also reflected on the advantages of implementing restorative practices, beginning with the statement, "Students need to be in the classroom. If students aren't in the classroom, they're not learning, and our job is to educate children." She explained that when students are taught and held to expectations while there is also allotted time for all to heal and reflect, a child can be reinstated into the classroom sooner. She shared:

> My goal is that when we get our kids back into the classroom as quickly as possible, but also give time for healing to take place for the teacher, for other students (…) that becomes a balance of trying to figure out when's the best time to reinstate a child back into the classroom. For me it is in short spurts. I don't want students out of the classroom all day.

RQ2: What do Principals Perceive to be the Problems Associated with Restorative Practices in Schools as Compared to Traditional, Exclusionary Discipline Practices?

Participants reflected on what they perceived to be the problems associated with restorative practices. Two main themes were evident when they shared these problems: mindset and balancing restorative practices with consequences. Each of these themes is described below in detail based on participant responses.

Changing Mindset

Five participants discussed the challenges of changing the mindset of stakeholders about restorative practices. Cindy explained that changing the mindset of the staff and ensuring that she had set up a conducive environment for success had to happen first. The faculty and staff needed to see things differently, which was not a priority for some. So, she used a book called *Race Talk* with the staff to develop shared understanding. She recalled, "It created a sense of understanding. And it created a togetherness in my staff (…) there was a newfound (…) a new perspective from my teachers." She concluded with, "It is very hard to change that solid mindset. So, if you don't work with that first before trying this, you're going to be hitting brick walls."

Jessica also reflected on the challenge of changing mindsets. She stated, "And so even having teacher buy-in, even having training, changing mindset is very different and that's hard to let go of." She explained how hard it could be for someone teaching twenty years to change after

doing it the same way for years. She explained, “For me to ask you to do something different tomorrow is not easy.”

Matthew continued this theme of changing mindsets. He stated, “Anytime you move from a system that for 150 years has been built on suspend, bring back, suspend, bring back, you’re going to bump into problems.” He continued, “Old school teachers” who have a lot of experience might be really good teachers, but there are some paradigm shifting that had to happen there.”

Robert also alluded to changing the mindset of staff as a problem when implementing restorative practices. Therefore, he described the importance of having student-centered teachers, stating, “If you’ve got a building full of people who are, get this kid out of my class kind of mentality, you need to really think about do they belong in your building?”

Finally, Charles discussed mindset as a challenge, noting that changing the perspectives of veteran teachers could be a challenge. He reflected on his views as a teacher before becoming an administrator. He said, “I was the same as a teacher (…). I don’t want them to have fun if I send them out. I never send them out, but if I send them out, well then, they need to be down there doing what I want them to do.” He then reflected on how his mindset had changed over time, stating, “Now they still need to be doing that, but at the same time, if they’re doing it, having fun while they’re doing it, or having a conversation with somebody that’s ultimately going to benefit them in the long run.” He explained, “Early on, some teachers wanted it more punitive.” Fortunately, Charles did not face too many teachers with a punitive mentality, and most teachers eventually realized the benefits of restorative practices.

Restorative Practices vs. Consequences

One theme from the interviews related to the balance between restorative practices and behavioral consequences. Participants shared that problems could erupt when the school focuses solely on restorative actions. Detailed below are the views of the participants.

Matthew addressed the importance of not swaying too far toward restorative practices. He said, “Everything should have a restorative piece to it, but you cannot take away accountability.” He described the need to ensure that consequences are balanced and that students are still held accountable for their actions. “Consequences and restoration are not mutually exclusive. I actually think they join hands really, really nicely,” Matthew explained. He further opined that the staff must give grace. “Every kid and every adult and every person has an opportunity for grace. What it doesn’t do is absolve you of consequences,” he added.

Tammy described how some staff wanted more punitive consequences while others wanted all restorative processes. She explained:

> In their minds, they thought it was black and white. Like, I either do restorative practices or we do punitive consequences. And so, if we’re doing restorative, then they think that should cure all. And as we know, there’s not a silver bullet.

Jessica discussed how she integrates restorative practices while following her district’s code of conduct, noting that problems can arise when the code of conduct is not followed. Therefore, she gives consequences within the boundaries of the code of conduct while also implementing restorative practices with students. She explained, “We have to follow the code of conduct, but then we also do things when they come back into the building to fix that harm with them.”

Finally, Cindy reiterated that her school still implemented a consequence for inappropriate behavior but also used a four-day restorative practices plan. Students only receive an out-of-school suspension on the first day of the misbehavior. Students attend school for the following three days and complete their restorative practices components. While punitive consequences are reduced, Cindy believed it was important that students still receive consequences for misbehavior. In some cases, the consequence was a project that students had to complete instead of an out-of-school suspension.

RQ3: What are the Processes That Principals Perceive Contribute to Successful Implementation of Restorative Practices in Schools?

Participants reflected on the processes contributing to successful implementation efforts in their schools. Three themes emerged after a thorough review of transcriptions. These themes included specific professional development, strategic systems, and prioritizing relationships. Each theme is described in the sections that follow.

Specific Professional Development

One theme relating to the third research question was the importance of professional development. Most of the participants discussed the need for specific professional development associated with the implementation of restorative practices. Participants discussed the relationship between quality professional development and buy-in from staff. Participants also described how effective professional development nurtured a sense of togetherness, ensured teachers understood the framework and protocol for restorative practices, and heightened implementation fidelity. Book studies were often a starting point for discussions among staff. Detailed below are the responses from participants.

Cindy discussed using a book called *Race Talk* to begin conversations about the inequities among subgroups. She led a book study for the staff and asserted that doing so set the school up for successful implementation. “It was very specific about race, white privilege, and poverty,” she explained. She discussed how this book study helped educate her staff and make them more aware of “unintentional biases and how those biases affect our performances in the classroom and how our students are affected.” She concluded that it brought forth a sense of togetherness in staff, allowing them to move forward and see the need for something different and more restorative.

Jessica utilized *Hacking School Discipline* as a book study with her staff to learn about the different components of restorative practices and understand the rationale for moving away from punitive consequences. “Our whole setup is through *Hacking School Discipline*. Our main theme for restorative practices is fixing the harm. To me, there’s nothing quicker and easier to implement than using *Hacking School Discipline,”* she explained. She further discussed her professional development efforts during the year of COVID-19:

> We went on to full on professional development for the rest of the school year. We spent a lot of time together (…) exhausted, but we had to set us up for success for the fall (…) so we pulled out *Hacking School Discipline*. We talked about what expectations we were gonna put into place.

Matthew also utilized a book study. However, he did the book study with his assistant principals because they were tasked with developing a restorative practices plan. He explained that he and his administrative team read a book on restorative practices by Alfie Kohn. They concluded that they would integrate the restorative practices model alongside some traditional behavioral consequences. They believed that doing so would hold students accountable for

inappropriate behaviors while garnering the benefits of restorative practices. Next, he sent a train-the-trainer team to the International Institute for Restorative Practices for professional development so they could lead the training for the staff. He said, "I just decided that these are the practices that are good for kids, and we're not gonna wait any longer on this."

Matthew explained that his goal was to ensure everyone was effectively trained. One of his assistant principals led the restorative practices professional development for the school. They rolled out their program in stages. Matthew explained:

> The assistant principal actually led all of that training around circles. And she did go grade level by grade level. So, we did six, then about a month later, we added seven and about a month after that we added eight (…) everyone in the building got trained (…) we trained the cafeteria workers, we trained the bus drivers. We trained everybody on conferences.

Tammy developed her professional development program and conducted a two-day training before implementation. She said, "The plan was we'll start implementing restorative practices as one of our core behavior structures." In doing so, she utilized the book *Circle Forward* to teach staff about implementing school-wide restorative circles. After she arrived at the school as the new principal in February, she explained how she saw the need for change related to student discipline:

> So, I did my research and really mapped it out in my head (…) talked with the APs. And then we did the professional development…and shared (…) this is how we're going to roll it out and you're going to be supported and we kind of just went from there.

Strategic Systems

Robert explained that his school's main goal was to implement a two-tiered system for restorative practices. Their main goal was to implement two different types of circles. He created a master schedule that included time in the morning that they called "Prime Time." During this time, proactive, community circles were implemented each day. He explained, "Every morning we started off with restorative circles (…) we start out with the morning greeting and the morning celebration. Then we pose a question or something to the class, do the check-ins, and do the closing ceremony." He also ensured that they had a plan to restore relationships due to negative behaviors, so he implemented a specific process for restorative circles as well. This ensured there "was a chance for students and/or teachers to come together." It was important that there was a plan and that it was communicated effectively to staff. Robert added:

> The biggest part that we implemented (…) was the restorative circle piece in the mornings. And so, laying it out for staff members in our staff handbook, it was few pages where I was very explicit, and I said this is what it should look like.

Charles, the only high school principal in the study, also mentioned strategic systems as a process to ensure the success of their restorative efforts. He explained how the Control Room (In-School Suspension room) was transformed into the Independent Learning Center, a multi-functional learning space. Students went there when they needed to reflect on their behavior, at which time they met with an adult (the success coach) in that space. The center was also filled with students who were there for various purposes, which helped to reduce the "institutionalized feeling." When describing the change to the environment, Charles said, "We wanted to remove the institutional feeling that some of our kids have when consequences are applied." By

strategically repurposing and changing processes for what happened in this room, they were able to create a multi-functional space.

In addition to consequences for violating the code of conduct, Charles also focused on other behaviors, such as poor work ethic, failing grades, and tutoring to boost confidence. School officials hold academic success conferences and meet with all students who are failing courses. Charles explained:

> Anyone who has failed three or four courses, they meet with me and our success coach. Anyone who has failed two classes, they're going to meet with their counselors and one class, they meet with their assistant principals. So, we do it academically and behaviorally.

Cindy alluded to a specific structure that made her school's restorative program successful. She felt it was important to start small, targeting one type of behavior. The plan for her school was to expand the program each year. Initial implementation focused solely on conflict among students, using a four-day program in which each day included specific activities. Cindy explained:

> It was a four-day program (…) it involved getting permission from parents (…) the first day was a cool off day (…) you had an initial meeting with (…) the ISS coordinator…to complete reflection forms (…) day two is individual counseling (…) day three was considered a group counseling and that's when students got together (…) and day four was restoration activities.

Cindy specified guidelines and procedures for each day of the four-day program. Students who had already been through the four-day program could not do it again for the same behavior. At that point, school officials considered other disciplinary options.

Tammy described the strategic processes they used for restorative practices implementation. First, she discussed providing professional development for all staff during initial implementation. She also highlighted an important process for training staff each year due to turnover. Also, she mentioned frequent check-ins with staff were essential to ensure fidelity. Second, Tammy discussed hiring a restorative practices coach. "Her main role was to support in the classrooms and (…) create plans (…) if teachers needed more structure (…). She also facilitated restorative conferencing," Tammy explained. Third, Tammy ensured her master schedule included time for restorative circles. Finally, she also noted that teachers had a plethora of resources. She highlighted that "logistics, professional development, and support" were the most important components to ensure success. "If we believe this is important, then we've got to set structures to make sure that reflects that," Tammy explained.

Jessica noted that ensuring high expectations were in place was of utmost importance. She said, "Because restorative practices are never gonna work if you don't have your expectations in place. You have to have expectations, procedures (…) kids have to know what's expected of them." Jessica reiterated the importance of ensuring expectations were consistent across the school and that teachers and staff had many opportunities to practice with students. She added that one structure she put into place was called "All-Star School," in which "teachers spend their day building relationships with students and setting up expectations and procedures in the room," She explained that they did this for the first ten days of school in every classroom. "We're just trying to get some things centered for our school building," she said.

Jessica also mentioned numerous times during her interview that a system had to be in place for the principal to monitor the implementation of restorative practices and to communicate with all staff. The way she ensured this was through one-on-one meetings with each staff

member. She began the individual meetings during her first weeks as principal and continued them each year. She explained:

> So what I did, I shut down the school for three weeks. I told them that I was here, but to forget, I was here, and I met with every staff member in the building. I did one-on-one meetings with custodians, cafeteria staff, teachers, anyone that was in our building met one-on-one.

She clarified that she strategically asked all staff members three questions to get their input and monitor the school's culture. Jessica made note of the following questions: “What is going well? What needs to be changed? What is needed to create consistency and calmness in the building?”

Matthew also discussed the need to have adequate systems in place. He described the intervention time in which students participated in circles, finally deciding that the morning was the most effective time. He reviewed the system he established to ensure it was effective:

> So initially, we put our intervention block in the afternoon, and it was terrible. We had restorative time built into circles the time. We had intervention blocks built in there. What we found is that afternoon was a disaster (…). We then moved it to midday, and we tested it in midday for a little while. We didn’t really love it in midday (…), so we landed in the morning with it (…). We set ours up initially two days a week, then to three days a week. Then to five days a week over a two-year run. So, we took our time scaling.

Matthew discussed, just as Cindy had, that scaling and gradually increasing the work was most effective for them. Both started small and had systems and processes to expand their work.

Matthew also discussed the systems in place following an out-of-school suspension. Upon returning to school, students visited student services and met with a school counselor for

reflection and follow-up activities. This was a critical piece as his goal was to ensure there was follow-up on “the back end.”

Matthew also found it imperative to designate a staff member as the champion for the restorative work. He gave the task of leading the restorative practices initiative to one of his assistant principals. From there, he utilized a team approach and ensured that all who would be working with students during restorative conferences had cue cards, which had the exact questions to use for student reflection. He explained that being systematic and having everyone using the same practices was critical to the program's success.

Making Relationships a Priority

The final theme for the third research question was making relationships a key priority. Every participant included positive relationships as a necessary component. Many participants had specific, purposeful processes to ensure relationships remained at the forefront of implementation efforts.

As previously mentioned, Jessica met one-on-one with each staff member. This served two purposes; one was to gain insight into the state of the school. The other was to build relationships by listening to everyone and seeking their input. She also implemented systems to ensure students and teachers had positive relationships. She implemented All-Star School, ensuring teachers and students spent time on expectations and relationship-building activities. When discussing her implementation efforts and the many support systems that are in place, she stated:

> You’ve created a relationship with this student. If you haven’t, nothing we do matters. If a kid doesn’t think you like them, you can give them $100. They’re

> still not going to act right the next day (…) so building that relationship is important (…) we have a lot of things in place.

Tammy described the need for positive relationships throughout the school, specifically with students. She said, "Kids don't learn from people they don't like. They don't have that connection, and so building those relationships (…) those positive relationships and (…) it's changed everything." She also discussed the need to include teachers in restorative conferencing following an incident. She said:

> After they conference (…) it was like, our relationship is back on the mend. And it's not (…) I'm sitting there teaching fuming because Johnny is sitting in my classroom again. And I am still mad at Johnny."

Tammy also reflected on her outcomes and shared the following:

> I think it's that combination of consistency with the structures or the systems and practices with Positive Behavior Intervention and support. But then that intentional focus on relationships. To me, that was magical. And so we did see a large reduction in office referrals.

When interviewing Robert, he reflected on the purpose of implementation in his building. He wanted a focus on relationships among students. He explained that students within the same class did not know each other and did not care if they harmed each other. He wanted to change this by focusing on restorative circles. He explained:

> They were comfortable (…) doing harm to each other (…) whether that was (…) being ugly with their words or their actions (…) the biggest thing I saw from implementing restorative circles (…) was that it developed relationships and the

> whole premise behind it was (…) it's harder to do harm to people that you have relationships with.

Charles also mentioned relationships as a measure of the success of his restorative practices efforts. When asked about the school's success, Charles explained:

> Relationships. And that's the big one, hands down. So that the students when they go in there, they realize it's not because somebody doesn't like them, or somebody has it out for them. It's like hey, what can we learn from our mistake (…) really encouraging students to advocate for themselves, but also for the student to realize that there are adults who care about them.

RQ4: What Pitfalls Did Principals Experience That Impeded the Successful Implementation of Restorative Practices?

Participants were asked to identify any pitfalls that impeded implementation. Themes included accountability and expectations, time, and student challenges. These themes are outlined in the sections that follow.

Accountability and Expectations

Jessica reflected on problems that can come up when implementing restorative practices. Common language and consistency can be issues without clear communication from the principal. Issues arise when leadership does not remain consistent with expectations. When discussing her approach with her staff, Jessica stated:

> We had a heart-to-heart of accountability (…). I think when we as admin are consistent with what we're saying (…), and we stick solid to it, and we're not wavering (…). They know when I stick my heels in the ground, I'm not budging.

She followed this statement by discussing the calmness and firmness in her approach when holding people accountable. She said, “Consistency is key for staff buy-in (…). If the expectation is we’re going to use restorative approaches (...), we’re going to use restorative conversations.” She reiterated the importance of using restorative language for both students and staff. She stated, “If they’re not seeing us model it and then us holding them accountable for it, it won’t be successful.”

Robert related accountability to his master schedule. For example, he included “Prime Time” first thing in the morning in the master schedule. Prime Time was the time of day in which classrooms engaged in proactive circles. Non-negotiables and expectations were specific. He communicated and practiced with staff to ensure fidelity. He modeled for staff and then monitored Prime Time to ensure it was being implemented correctly. He mentioned, “Hitting all of the non-negotiables, or the expectations for how morning circles are (…), it is easy to kind of gloss over some of those things.” When discussing the first steps to accountability, he pointed out that it was essential to paint a picture for staff as to what the circles should look like so that he could hold them accountable:

> So, I think there was power in showing them what it should look like, and then going back, and as we reviewed the staff handbook going over what the expectations were like, here it is. Here it is in practice, here it is on paper.

Robert also mentioned that if not properly monitored, it was easy for staff to get off track and gloss over the processes related to doing circles with fidelity.

Matthew reflected on the importance of “pre-teaching.” He clarified that school officials cannot hold students accountable for unclear expectations. He explained:

> So, when we're not pre-teaching (…), we're just getting mad about it (…) so when we begin pre-teaching, like here's how we stand when we leave the cafeteria. This is what this looks like in the hall outside the cafeteria. All of a sudden, there aren't any more problems in the hall outside of the cafeteria because we were just clear on what we wanted.

According to Matthew, expectations needed to be "crystal clear" and issues arose when staff did not specifically teach students what they expected. He also went on to discuss clarity with students regarding restorative actions and punitive consequences:

> A pitfall we ran through is we had to be. Really clear with kids about that too. Like, you are going to get a voice, but that doesn't mean that I'm going to change my decision on what's going to happen. I'm going to hear you.

Robert referenced accountability and expectations and the need to ensure that they were specific and listed in his staff handbook. He reviewed expectations with staff and even modeled them. He then reinforced his expectations by visiting classes during their "Prime Time." At his current school, he models circles during professional learning community times to ensure teachers remember their importance.

Understanding the importance of implementation fidelity, Cindy developed a detailed four-day program. Everyone knew exactly what to expect and who was responsible for the restorative components on each day. Cindy also clarified that every adult in the building was responsible for doing social circles during an intervention time allotted during the school day. She explained the process to ensure all staff were accountable. She said, "We had something called Tag (…). I split all of our kids up to every adult in the building. And then we had assignments for each week (…) one day was nothing but social circles." She added that

assignments were given based on social topics. She explained that even she, as principal, conducted social circles.

Tammy reflected on her implementation and shared some potential pitfalls. She explained that it was important to think through as much as she could before she implemented restorative practices. She also said, “You have to be very intentional with what you do and then reinforce it.” She explained how she created a walkthrough tool to hold others accountable and to ensure her plan was done with fidelity. She explained, “We created a classroom circle walkthrough tool. And so, while we were just looking for the circle elements to make sure those were there because everything has a purpose (...) so really monitoring that piece.” She also ensured that teachers were supported and explained how important it was not to jump to conclusions when holding people accountable. Communication had to be specific and open to ensure their plan was successful.

All participants mentioned the importance of open communication and transparency to hold people accountable and ensure program fidelity. This was an essential factor to note from transcriptions about potential pitfalls.

Time

Time factors were evident during several interviews. This seemed to be one pitfall that hindered success. Below are descriptions of participants’ responses.

Cindy mentioned time as a factor that made it difficult to complete everything with fidelity. She stated, “Sometimes it seems like we were too busy that we just could not get to them the first day because we were so incredibly busy.” She explained that she had to tell herself it was only the first year of implementation, and she knew she would have to work out some kinks. She shared, “We had to remember to give ourselves grace.” When discussing accountability for

social circles, she also mentioned that she knew she had to lead a circle, but remembered thinking, “God, I need to be in my office getting something done, but you know, you just do it.”

For Robert, time was a constraint for leading professional development. He would have liked to model circles in a larger setting but had to do so in smaller professional learning communities. He also explained the need to specify an exact amount of time for restorative practices, stating, “One of the big things was actually dedicating time. Saying that it is so important that we’re gonna take 20 minutes of every day, and everyone in the building is doing restorative circles at this time.”

Cindy and Jessica discussed the time it takes for professional development as a potential pitfall. Both conducted their initial professional development during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic when students were not in school. During this period, they had more time to work with staff. Taking the time for both participants was essential in setting up their school for success. Jessica mentioned, “We did a lot of professional development through COVID. I think that was a blessing in disguise. Not every staff loved COVID. We did. We actually grew immensely during this time.”

Matthew also explained how time could be hazardous to implementation. He cautioned that sometimes it just takes time to get things right. It takes time to review, reflect, and adjust:

> Restorative conferences, well that took a minute. That was not easy on the front end. The kids weren’t used to it. The teachers weren’t used to it, the counselors weren’t used to it. That took time for us to get it. What you saw is over time, it became cultural.

Student Challenges

While all participants spoke positively about restorative practices, they also acknowledged that the extreme behaviors of some students make restorative practices very

challenging. In some cases, student boredom became an impediment. In other cases, these well-intended participants struggled to meet the intense needs of their most troubled students.

Tammy discussed student challenges as a barrier to implementation. Specifically, some students did not want to participate in circles. She also discussed the need to keep circles interesting throughout the year because they can become redundant. Tammy said, "Groups of students (…) get bored with it."

Jessica reflected on ways she works to support struggling students. She said, "For the last two and a half years it has been repeat offenders and trying to figure that out. We have quite a few groups going. We do groups, we bring mentors in. For our struggling boys, we find male mentors (…)" She explained that students come to school "with a whole lot of trauma." She further noted, "Our students are dealing with a lot of trauma. They hear gunshots. They are dealing with a lot of gang violence. And so that's inundated in their life (…) when they come to school, it's not like they just forget that."

Matthew also discussed student challenges as a pitfall that made it more challenging to implement restorative practices. He explained how he reduced significant behavior problems "down to about eight to ten kids," but those students had very challenging behaviors that restorative practices did not work with. Matthew explained, "We did the best we can, but we've got to get more resources, more support around these kids (…) because we can't be asking the teacher in eighth-grade science to do this. He can't solve this problem." Matthew was referring to the need to do more with challenging students, but as a school, he could only do so much because of some students' intense needs.

Summary

This chapter detailed how participants responded to the study's four research questions. The questions involved the participants' perspectives about implementing restorative practices in their schools. The questions examined the benefits and successful implementation processes while also reviewing the problems and pitfalls. The study aimed to contribute to future implementation efforts by other principals interested in restorative practices. Through participant interviews, the research questions were designed to assist these future implementation efforts.

This chapter included an analysis of the responses given by the six participants to the interview questions associated with the four research questions. Results were analyzed, evaluated, and interpreted. Implications related to this study's findings and recommendations for future studies are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

Chapter 5 reviews the research study problem, purpose, methods, ethical considerations, and limitations. A detailed discussion of the findings by research question is also outlined in this chapter, with connections made to existing literature. The chapter concludes with implications and recommendations for future practice and research related to implementing restorative practices in public schools. It also contains suggestions for PK–12 principals resulting from this study's research discoveries.

Many schools nationwide are exploring alternative ways to handle student discipline (Anyon, 2016; Buckmaster, 2016; Fronius et al., 2016). Schools have often relied on traditional discipline practices focused on suspending and excluding students to maintain order. However, many have recognized that out-of-school suspensions do not change behavior (Classen & Classen, 2008; Morris, 2017; Schiraldi & Ziedenberg,2001).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), over 2.5 million students were suspended during the 2017-2018 school year. These traditional, exclusionary discipline practices have raised concerns about how school principals handle discipline. While excluding misbehaving students may sometimes be necessary, suspension alone is less likely to change student behavior. The overwhelming number of suspensions suggests that more effective approaches to student discipline are needed. Discipline data from nationwide show a need to reduce suspension rates and keep students learning in classrooms (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013).

This basic interpretive qualitative study aimed to investigate school principals' perceptions and experiences related to implementing restorative practices. The findings from this

research can inform policy and practice in schools. Specifically, these findings may benefit principals who seek to implement restorative practices.

The data from this study were collected through semi-structured, individual participant interviews with six principals who have experience implementing restorative practices in their schools. Emails or phone calls went out to six principals who qualified to participate. Participants committed to join via phone or email, and follow-up correspondences were provided by the researcher. The researcher sent each participant a Google Form demographic survey to complete at least one week before the interview. The semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually or in person, depending on each participant's needs and comfort level. A member-checking protocol was implemented, and interview transcriptions were shared via email for accuracy. The survey information and interview transcriptions provided multiple data sources to assist the researcher with developing findings.

According to Mertens (2020), the institutional review board (IRB) institutes a process to ensure ethical principles are in place during research studies. Throughout this study, the researcher considered and reviewed the three ethical principles of beneficence, respect, and justice. This study fully complied with the IRB review process at UNC Charlotte and protected human subjects. Throughout the process, no information about the participants was shared. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to protect their information and ensure anonymity. Also, participants were provided written and verbal notification stating that the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Finally, all study data were stored on UNC Charlotte cloud storage.

Trustworthiness is essential in establishing truthfulness and confidence during a research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout the research study, the researcher ensured

trustworthiness in several ways. First, predetermined, semi-structured interview questions were utilized to ensure consistency. Transcriptions were shared with participants, which allowed them to review the details of the interview questions and responses verbatim. This member-checking protocol allowed the researcher to receive confirmation of accuracy from each participant. Finally, the researcher was fully immersed in the collected study data and reviewed each data component multiple times before coding.

Limitations can be helpful to researchers who may choose to conduct similar studies or expand upon previous studies. Limitations are possible weaknesses or complications with the study identified by the researcher (Creswell & Guetterman, 2021). This study was limited due to the number of participants in the research. Six participants were included in this study, and the study was limited to principals in North Carolina. The small number of participants led to less generalizability. However, generalizability is not the primary purpose of this study. Additional studies and research are needed to expand upon and determine the accuracy of the results yielded in this study.

Another limitation involved the honesty of the participants. The participants may not have been forthright about their actual experiences using restorative practices. The researcher has no way to determine whether all statements made by the participants were accurate. The researcher acknowledges that the potential for bias may exist if participants want their responses to appear favorable. This was mitigated by ensuring participants knew they would not be identified in any reporting of findings.

Two theories make up the theoretical framework encompassed in this research study. The Sensemaking Theory (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) suggests that an individual's interpretation of situations directly impacts behavior. Therefore, individuals change their

practices based on their understanding of policy, with this understanding based on their frame of reference and prior experiences (Coburn, 2001). New policies are interpreted through prior knowledge and experience (Coburn, 2001).

The Sensemaking Theory has implications for schools that shift the student discipline paradigm from exclusionary to restorative practices. When educators decide on consequences for student misbehavior, they reflect and use their existing schema. They make decisions, act, and react based on what they know and within their comfort levels. In most schools, teachers are more familiar with exclusionary practices and may be reluctant to change. This dynamic creates challenges for principals who desire to move to restorative practices. However, despite some initial reluctance because restorative practices represent a new paradigm, exchanges between teachers and students also produce new meanings (Ball et al., 2019). Therefore, teachers will ultimately make sense of restorative practices in relation to their experiences using restorative practices (Ball et al., 2019).

The second theory that has laid the foundation for restorative practices is the Reintegrative Shaming Theory. Braithwaite (1989) contended that to prevent recidivism for student misbehavior, an offender must be put to shame by peers and those around them. Shame is thought to help infuse and regulate thinking, feelings, and behaviors regarding the acceptance of others (Mills et al., 2010).

Interview questions throughout this research study were purposeful in having principals reflect on their sensemaking and that of their staff. The researcher also gained insight from principals regarding the processes and structures they had in place related to the Reintegrative Shaming Theory. Participants discussed, described, and reflected upon the processes they had in place for circles and restorative conferences.

Discussion of Findings

RQ1: What do Principals Perceive to be the Advantages of Restorative Practices in Schools as Compared to Traditional, Exclusionary Discipline Practices?

This study found three main benefits resulting from implementing restorative practices. These included positive relationships, voice heard, and reduced time away from instruction. These benefits were expected outcomes from implementing restorative practices and its focus on building and repairing relationships.

Participants explained that implementing restorative practices puts a keen focus on relationships between students and their peers and teachers. Relationships were often a key focus from the very beginning of implementation, with relationships serving as the main reason principals in this study wanted to implement restorative practices in the first place. Previous literature suggests that one of the most important reasons to implement restorative practices is to create a positive climate in which students feel connected and respected (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2020). According to research and the participants in this study, building positive relationships improves the climate and culture of classrooms and schools (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2020).

According to participants in this study, many factors go into a successful implementation plan. Relationship building was one of the primary purposes of implementation and an essential component of a successful strategy. A prior study discussed the student perspective of restorative practices (Ball et al., 2019). While some students in the study found it helpful, others did not have a positive attitude toward the program, specifically in middle school. During this previous study, however, other variables, such as teacher-student relationships and school-level discipline policies, were not modified (Ball et al., 2019). Like the participants in this study, Ball et al.

(2019) suggested that relationships could play a key role in implementation and are a positive outcome of restorative practices.

Additionally, another study revealed that seventy-seven percent of students agreed that their viewpoints and judgments of other students and staff improved due to the implementation of restorative practices (Baker, 2008). Bazzi (2021) also showed that restorative practices help build stronger relationships with students. According to all five teachers who participated in Bazzi's study, restorative practices helped build strong professional relationships with colleagues and students. It was concluded that relationships were strengthened when there was a keen focus on reflecting on adverse situations. These previous findings about the positive impact on relationships mimic what was found in this study. All participants in this study noted that relationships are an important benefit of restorative practices.

Throughout this study, participants suggested that allowing all voices to be heard following an incident of misbehavior was also an advantage of restorative practices. It was important for the voices of students to be heard. This included the victim and the offender. By doing so, better relationships were formed or repaired. Teachers' voices were equally important. Implementing restorative practices allowed the teacher to follow up after an incident, which led to repairing strained relationships. It also allowed the student to understand and reflect on how their misbehavior affected others.

The Reintegrative Shaming Theory served as a vital part of the theoretical framework for this study. This theory allows individuals to view multiple perspectives. Restorative practices enable all participants in an adversarial situation to come together to discuss and share their feelings regarding what took place. The group can consider more than one viewpoint (Harris et al., 2006). The Reintegrative Shaming Theory relates to this study as all participants discussed

the importance of allowing all voices to be heard following an incident. This was a key advantage to the program's success at the participants' respective schools.

Most participants in this study mentioned reduced time away from instruction as an advantage of implementing restorative practices. Five of the six participants shared that the number of office referrals for students was reduced tremendously compared to the numbers before implementation. Participants attributed this reduction to the focus on relationships and student reflection. These factors created a positive learning environment in which students and teachers were happier, and one principal referred to it as “noise being settled.” The advantages were reduced office referrals, instances of misbehavior, and a change in how student behavior was handled. One participant referred to the proactive measures put into place with restorative practices in her building. She noted that students came to school with much trauma, and their idea of appropriate behavior was different based on their prior experiences and home life.

Across this study, participants explained that proactive measures were necessary to teach positive student behaviors and expectations. In time, proactive measures led to reduced time away from instruction. This follows the outcomes of numerous studies that reported an increase in positive relationships and decreasing rates of suspension (Morris, 2017; Noguera, 2003; Raffaele et al., 2003; Skiba, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008).

RQ2: What do Principals Perceive to be the Problems Associated with Restorative Practices in Schools as Compared to Traditional, Exclusionary Discipline Practices?

Two main themes emerged from this study’s second research question: mindset and balancing restorative practices with consequences. Participants discussed the problems relating to implementation efforts. Each of these is discussed below in detail.

Five participants discussed the problems associated with changing the mindset of stakeholders about restorative practices. Scaccia et al. (2015) stated that schools must engage teachers and staff in the implementation process and noted that organizational readiness was needed to implement restorative practices effectively. Five participants in this study referred to ensuring staff has the right mindset and a complete understanding of the rationale behind implementation efforts. The staff had to completely understand restorative practices and its purpose before implementation could be successful.

The Sensemaking Theory was part of the theoretical framework that governed this study because new ideas and programs like restorative practices can be misunderstood (Spillane et al., 2004). Therefore, the tenets of the Sensemaking Theory were an essential component of the framework associated with restorative practices success. Since staff relied heavily on their schema to review student discipline processes and determine fairness, participants emphasized that it was essential that staff had an appropriate understanding of the reasoning behind and the methods of restorative practices. This directly affected buy-in, according to participants. Staff had to have a mindset focused on repairing relationships and restoring the harm caused by student misbehavior. Several participants in this study referenced that staff must have a restorative viewpoint regarding what should happen to students when they misbehave. Since restorative practices do not follow the traditional approach to handling discipline, this may create a problem during implementation efforts. Mentioned in the results was the “paradigm shift” that must happen to get staff on board in handling student misbehavior in this different way.

The final theme that emerged from the problems associated with restorative practices is balancing the restorative practices and traditional consequences when working with students and establishing plans for school-wide implementation. Several participants mentioned that problems

arise when implementation plans do not include an accountability piece for students. Students still must have consequences even while restoring situations. Therefore, an important implementation component was ensuring that board policies were upheld following an incident. Participants urged the importance of ensuring schools do not sway too far toward restorative practices and that traditional student consequences should not completely disappear. When schools steer too far toward restorative practices, the lack of accountability will harm implementation efforts.

RQ3: What are the Processes that Principals Perceive Contribute to Successful Implementation of Restorative Practices in Schools?

Three themes related to the third research question in this study emerged. These themes were specific professional development, strategic systems, and prioritizing relationships. Each of these themes is further discussed below.

Five of six participants in this study mentioned the need for specific professional development. This further elaborates on the "mindset" theme discussed for the second research question. For this study's participants, specific professional development helped craft a vision for their schools and ultimately enabled them to receive buy-in from staff. As stated in the previous section, the Sensemaking Theory acknowledges that buy-in comes from each person's frame of mind. Therefore, staff must understand the "why" behind restorative practices, including its components and the rationale for changing the traditional methods of student misbehavior. According to Anyon (2016), developing a shared understanding of restorative practices is essential to implementation success.

For participants, discussion among staff, book studies, and specific professional development on restorative practices was essential before implementation. Participants explained

that conversations, meetings, and professional development were vital to the success of their programs. Additionally, they preplanned this professional development intentionally based on the needs of their staff.

The next theme was strategic systems. Participants expressed the need for specific, strategic systems and processes for success. Every participant expressed the need for a thoughtful plan that began with professional development and a structured process for restoration. Four of six participants expressed the need to ensure the master schedule included built-in time for restorative circles. The other two mentioned the need for a specific system; one was a four-day plan, and the other was a redesigned area for instruction, credit recovery, and misbehavior. Other specifics included having a set of question stems for reflection and processes to teach expectations to students.

Clear methods of accountability were also referenced throughout this study as a critical component of program success. Participants attributed their programs' success to accountability measures, such as a classroom walkthrough tool with specific expectations related to restorative practices, frequent administrator visits to classrooms, and continual monitoring of circles. Another critical structure was the methods by which participants sought out staff input. Transparency and open communication were essential components needed to implement the program with fidelity.

Finally, the last theme that emerged for the third research question was making relationships a priority. Based on participants' descriptions, ensuring that systems were relationship-focused was essential. This included seeking staff input and incorporating relationship-building activities during the school day. Participants also mentioned building in time to allow teachers to meet and follow up with students when the harm occurred. This was

important because the restorative conferences that included the teacher helped regain trust and respect and repair relationships. Establishing positive relationships with students and ensuring that processes were in place to mend that harm was essential. This included the circles component for both proactive and restorative measures. One participant summed it best. Tammy stated, “Students don’t learn from people they don’t like.”

RQ4: What Pitfalls did Principals Experience that Impeded the Successful Implementation of Restorative Practices?

Three themes related to the fourth research question emerged. These themes included accountability and expectations, time, and student challenges. These themes are further discussed below.

Several participants mentioned accountability and expectations as potential pitfalls during implementation. Expectations can either stimulate or inhibit implementation success. While several discussed expectations as a factor leading to successful implementation, many also discussed them as a potential pitfall. Therefore, principals must exhibit strong communication skills and be clear and transparent. Staff needed to understand the expectations for students and staff and the specifics of how the program would be implemented.

Keeping the momentum during implementation depends on the continuous accountability of staff. Several participants discussed holding to non-negotiables and methods of accountability. Student accountability had to be transparent to students and staff. Everyone had to understand student restoration and its consequences. This student accountability piece was necessary for success but could serve as a serious inhibitor.

This study found that components of the restorative program need to be clear, with staff training and awareness of what each part entails. Once that has been done, the principal must

continually monitor implementation. Participants asserted that successful implementation efforts included having a specific plan to monitor staff expectations. According to Anyon (2016), it was important for schools to identify or create fidelity checks to ensure the program was successful and on track with its intended goals. Anyon et al. (2016) also contended that many schools did not track implementation efforts effectively. This was a pitfall that participants referred to during this study as well.

Next, time served as a pitfall. As with previous studies referenced in the literature review section, time can make or break an implementation. One pitfall mentioned throughout this study was the need for a built-in time for circles. Moreover, reflecting on the time of day for this time was also critical. One participant explained that his intervention time was built into the day, and he had to change the time of day three times until they came up with a time that circles were most productive. All participants who utilized circles (all but one participant, the high school participant) utilized circles and had their master schedule built around this critical component of their program.

Aside from circles, it was important to note that completing restorative circles and conferences when an incident has taken place can be very time-consuming. Participants said it took time to ensure these components were conducted with fidelity. Some days, there was not enough time to get to all students as intended.

Additionally, time served as an important factor relating to professional development. Engaging staff with purposeful professional development took time, and finding the time to do so was challenging. Two participants utilized time provided during the COVID-19 pandemic that they would not have had otherwise. This helped their implementation, but finding time to revisit professional development with follow-up and training of new staff was necessary but challenging

to keep up with. A previous study by Garnett et al. (2020) concluded that many teachers felt they did not have adequate time to fully implement circles and conferences in their classrooms. Even teachers who were highly motivated to conduct the circles and conferences struggled to have time to do so. This holds true of the pitfalls described by participants in the current study.

The final theme from this study's fourth research question was student challenges. Participants shared that although restorative practices were successful in their schools, several challenging students still needed additional support. Restorative practices help students, but for a small percentage of students who need more intensive support, they may not be effective. Many of these students came to school with trauma that was difficult to address with current staffing. Participants still sought solutions for these students, but their needs took up much time.

Implications

The results of this study produced copious recommendations for practice and future research. The findings from the first research question can help practitioners and researchers as they highlight the advantages of implementing restorative practices in PK-12 public schools. This study suggests that implementing restorative practices can assist principals who want to improve relationships, reduce time away from instruction, and ensure that students and staff have a voice when students misbehave. Charles described the power of relationships: “Relationships, and that’s the big one, hands down.” He referenced the importance of student-to-staff relationships and wanted “students to realize that there are adults here who cared about them.” Because the core elements of restorative practices encourage all stakeholders to express their feelings appropriately, this study and other research have consistently found that relationships throughout the school can benefit from implementing restorative practices. This includes the ability of all stakeholders to express their feelings, which in turn enhances relationships.

When implemented effectively, restorative practices benefit schools by enhancing productive communication during incidents of misbehavior. Restorative practices can assist schools in establishing a healthy culture that allows students and staff to share their feelings effectively. As Matthew stated, “We’re giving kids a chance to speak and be heard (…) so there’s no voice that can get left out of the room.”

Finally, implementing restorative practices can assist future principals in reducing time away from instruction following behavioral incidents. This study and other research have found that proactive and restorative measures like circles and conferences can drastically reduce students' time away from school. It can reduce recidivism and improve student behavior by focusing on expectations, accountability, and reflection. Therefore, empirical studies about the impact on achievement as students miss less school are warranted.

The findings from the second research question can inform practitioners and researchers by highlighting problems associated with restorative practices. It is important to note that problems can be avoided, and action steps can be taken to minimize issues during implementation efforts. Principals who are considering the implementation of restorative practices can use the findings of this study to plan strategically. A key implication for practice is that principals must evaluate their schools and staff before implementation efforts to ensure they have the proper professional development.

The mindset of teachers about what constitutes appropriate responses to misbehavior was a potential problem identified in this and other studies. Ensuring that staff understand restorative practices' rationale, purpose, and processes is essential. Many participants referenced the need to create a shared vision for the staff. Cindy stated, “It is very hard to change that solid mindset. So, if you don’t work with that first before trying this, you’re going to be hitting brick walls.”

Therefore, principals must evaluate their staff to determine if implementation will be successful. If they are not ready, additional work must be done to ensure teachers have the skills and motivation to begin.

Another implication related to the second research question is the need to evaluate the balance of restorative work and more traditional disciplinary consequences. The findings of this study revealed that there must be a balance of restorative work with traditional consequences to hold students accountable. Matthew stated it clearly:

> Everything should have a restorative piece to it, but you cannot take away accountability (…). Consequences and restoration are not mutually exclusive. I actually think they join hands really, really nicely (…) Every kid and every adult and every person has an opportunity for grace. What it doesn't do is absolve you of consequences.

Future research could benefit implementation efforts by analyzing the balance between these two factors.

The third research question sought to explore processes that led to successful implementation. The first implication for practice includes ensuring that effective professional development is provided to enhance teachers' efficacy in implementing restorative practices. This professional development must ensure that teachers understand the rationale for shifting to a new paradigm and have the skills to implement the new program. The findings of this study and others imply that professional development will play a pivotal role in the effectiveness of implementation efforts.

Additionally, findings from the third research question led to implications for systems and processes. Is it essential that restorative practices implementation efforts include accountability measures for staff and students. Methods should be in place that ensure

appropriate student accountability for their actions, even as restorative practices are integrated into the school's culture. It was strongly implied that traditional consequences and restorative practices can operate together.

Another implication for practice is related to the use of time. Specifically, effective implementation will require principals to ensure adequate time is devoted to restorative practices. Otherwise, implementation efforts will likely not create the desired outcomes. Several participants in this study indicated that they established time during the school day for restorative circles. Finally, another implication for practice was ensuring the principal took the time to gather staff feedback and reflect on implementation efforts.

Finally, the findings from the third research question imply the need to prioritize relationships. Principals should consider including relationships as a critical component to success. They should review their school's culture as it relates to relationships when setting up restorative practices within their schools. Future research should be conducted on the connection between relationships and restorative practices.

Implications for practice arose from the fourth research question, which explored implementation pitfalls. First, principals must ensure that expectations are clear and processes are in place to monitor progress. While initial implementation efforts may have varying results, the entire staff must be held accountable for meeting expectations. Other implications related to potential pitfalls mimic some of the implications of successful implementation. Specifically, proper training must be accompanied by clear expectations, monitoring, and feedback. Again, it would be wise to implement the new program gradually, as participants cautioned against relying too heavily on restorative practices too quickly.

Finally, it should be remembered that while helpful and worthy of consideration, restorative practices are not a panacea. Therefore, expectations should be managed realistically. Some teachers will be more motivated than others and more accepting of a new paradigm. Even when restorative practices are implemented well, the behaviors of some students will continue to present significant challenges. Additional support may be needed from counselors, social workers, psychologists, and outside agencies in these cases. Despite these challenges, restorative practices offer an opportunity to improve school climate by prioritizing relationships, enhancing communication, and productively addressing student behaviors.

Conclusions

With student discipline becoming a growing concern in public schools, the staggering number of office referrals and student suspensions following incidents of student misbehavior have caused principals to seek alternative methods. A growing body of evidence specifies that exclusionary discipline practices, such as out-of-school suspension, are not effective or equitable against reoccurrences of student misbehavior (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013). Therefore, educators must consider a different approach. Restorative approaches allow students and staff to work together to problem-solve and identify actions that can repair the harm (McGarrell & Hipple, 2007).

This study was designed to explore the benefits, advantages, problems, and pitfalls related to implementation efforts by principals. It also reviewed the structures and processes that led these principals to successful implementation. It was the intent of the researcher to the researcher reviewed the perspectives of these experienced principals and their implementation plans.

The purpose of this study was to explore school principals' perceptions and experiences related to the implementation of restorative practices. The researcher hopes that findings will assist with future school implementation efforts and support principals seeking to change their practices from traditional discipline efforts to restorative approaches.

The findings from this study revealed numerous implications for future research and recommendations for practice. Recommendations for practice include prioritizing relationships and ensuring time is allotted daily for implementation. Additionally, accountability measures and clear expectations for students and staff are essential. Holding students accountable by delicately balancing restorative components with student consequences was also noted. Future implementation efforts should also include a plan to create a restorative vision for staff, including strategies to help shape the mindset of staff. Since staff views on restorative practices are based on their schema, shaping this schema is critical. Other recommendations for future practice include strategically choosing and engaging staff in professional development.

Additional research about restorative practices is needed. First, investigating the balance of restorative practices and traditional consequences is still needed because participants consistently said both were needed. The findings also discussed the connection between relationships and restorative practices. Additional research about the connection between relationships and restorative practices would benefit future implementation efforts. Finally, qualitative and quantitative studies must continue exploring disciplinary and achievement outcomes associated with restorative practices.

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APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

This survey was designed to collect demographic information pertaining to public school principals who have implemented restorative practices in North Carolina. Data collected from this survey will be used for dissertation research purposes only.

1. How many years have you served as a principal?
    a. 1-3 years
    b. 4-5 years
    c. 6-10 years
    d. 11-15 years
    e. 16-20 years
    f. 21-25 years
    g. 26-30 year
    h. Over 30 years

2. How many years have you worked in the education field overall?
    a. 1-3 years
    b. 4-5 years
    c. 6-10 years
    d. 11-15 years
    e. 16-20 years
    f. 21-25 years
    g. 26-30 year
    h. Over 30 years

3. How many years have, or did you serve as principal in the school you implemented restorative practices?
    a. 1-2 years
    b. 3-4 years
    c. 5-7 years
    d. 8-12 years
    e. 13-20 years
    f. 21-25 years
    g. 26-30 year
    h. Over 30 years

4. Indicate your highest level of education achieved:
    a. Bachelor's Degree
    b. EdS
    c. Master's Degree
    d. Doctorate Degree
5. How many of your undergraduate teaching preparation program courses included topics related to handling school discipline?
    a. 0
    b. 1
    c. 2
    d. 3
    e. 4 or more

6. How many of your graduate teaching preparation program courses, if applicable, included topics related to alternate consequence for student discipline as opposed to tradition suspensions?
    a. 0
    b. 1
    c. 2
    d. 3
    e. 4 or more
    f. I did not participate in a graduate program

7. Indicate your age range:
    a. 20–24
    b. 25–29
    c. 30–34
    d. 35–39
    e. 40–44
    f. 45–49
    g. 50–54
    h. 55–59
    i. 60–64
    j. 65+

8. What is your race?
    a. African American
    b. American Indian
    c. Asian
    d. Caucasian
    e. Hispanic
    f. Other:
    g. Choose not to disclose

9. What gender do you identify with?
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Other:
    d. Choose not to disclose

10. Please indicate the highest level of education achieved by your parent(s) **or** legal guardian(s):

Mother	Father	Legal Guardian
a. HS Diploma	a. HS Diploma	a. HS Diploma
b. Associate's Degree	b. Associate's Degree	b. Associate's Degree
c. Bachelor's Degree	c. Bachelor's Degree	c. Bachelor's Degree
d. Master's Degree	d. Master's Degree	d. Master's Degree
e. Doctorate Degree	e. Doctorate Degree	e. Doctorate Degree

APPENDIX B: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Title of the Project: *A Qualitative Study of Principal Perspectives on the Implementation of Restorative Practices.*
Principal Investigator: Chris Jonassen, UNC Charlotte
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Walter Hart

You are invited to participate in a qualitative research study. Participation in this research study is voluntary and the information provided is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. You are welcome to ask questions at any time.

Important Information You Need to Know

- The purpose of this study is to explore school principals' perceptions and experiences related to the implementation of restorative practices. The researcher hopes that findings can inform policy and practice in schools.
- I am asking public school principals who are or have implemented restorative practices in North Carolina to complete a simple demographic questionnaire, a 1-on-1 interview about the study topic and a brief follow-up email transcript confirmation. The interview can be scheduled either in an in-person or virtual setting. The total participant time of commitment will be approximately two hours. This includes 15 minutes to complete the consent form and demographic survey, one hour for the interview and 45 minutes to review the accuracy of the transcript.
- Some of the questions I will ask you may be considered as personal and sensitive given your connections to public schools. For example, I will ask you about topics related to your lived experiences regarding implementation. Your responses will inform the study about perceptions and experiences related to implementing restorative practice from your lens as a school principal. These questions are personal, and you might experience some mild emotional discomfort. You may choose to skip a question you do not want to answer. You may not personally benefit from taking part in this research, but our study results may help in better understanding first-year superintendents' challenges and strategies to address difficult situations.
- Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before you choose to participate in this research study.
- You will not benefit directly from being in this study beyond contributing to the field of research related to understanding the lived experiences of principals who have implemented restorative practices.

Why are we doing this study?

The purpose of this study is to explore school principals' perceptions and experiences related to the implementation of restorative practices. The researcher hopes that findings can inform policy and practice in schools. The insights gained through this study may lead to recommendations for practice while adding to the literature.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?
You are being asked to be in this study because you are a public school principal who has implemented restorative practices.

What will happen if I take part in this study?
If you choose to participate, you will complete a simple demographic questionnaire followed by a 1-on-1 interview about the study topic. The demographic questionnaire will ask you demographic questions (experience {specifically, as a school principal}, education level, age, race, gender, service years, preparatory programs, and parental education level) and the 1-on-1 interview will ask you questions about your knowledge base regarding the role principal, and how this construct relates to the implementation of restorative practices. I will audio record our interview and take brief field notes to ensure I capture your words accurately. If at any time during our interviews you felt uncomfortable answering a question, please let me know, and you are free to skip the question. You also can choose to answer a question and elect to not have your answer recorded. I would simply turn off the recorder. If at any time you want to withdraw from the study, you can let me know, and I will erase the recordings of our conversations. Your total time commitment if you participate in this study will be approximately two hours, which includes time for reviewing this consent form, completing the interview and demographic survey, and reviewing the transcript of your interview for accuracy.
What benefits might I experience?

You will not benefit directly from being in this study beyond contributing to the field of research related to understanding the lived experiences of principals who have implemented restorative practices. The researcher understands that there is a lack of benefit on the participant's behalf.

What risks might I experience?
You may find some demographic or interview questions to be personal or sensitive, as they pertain to your understanding of your own experiences as a public school principal. For example, I will ask you about the challenges you have experienced during your implementation of restorative practice. These questions are personal, and you might experience some mild emotional discomfort, although I do not anticipate this risk to be common. You may choose to skip a question you do not want to answer.

How will my information be protected?
To protect your identity and ensure confidentiality, I will assign a study ID code to your questionnaire responses in place of your identifiable information for example, your information may be coded as "Participant 1", for example. I will remove names and personally identifiable information from the questionnaire responses so the responses will only have this study ID code. I will use a digital audio recorder to record our interview. Immediately following the interview, I will transfer the audio file from the digital recorder to university password-protected cloud data

storage, and I will delete the audio file from the recorder. All your responses, survey responses and transcripts will be loaded to a secure data drive. Upon conclusion of the transcription, I will delete the audio files from the password-protected data storage. Each interview will be transcribed verbatim by the researcher or by using word processing software. The transcriptions will be stored in password-protected data storage until all personally identifiable information is removed. While the study is active, all data will be stored in a password-protected database that can be accessed only by the primary researcher and his faculty advisor. Only the researcher and the faculty advisor will have routine access to the study data. With approval from the Investigator, other individuals may need to view the information I collect about you including people who work for UNC Charlotte and other agencies as required by law or allowed by federal regulations.

How will my information be used after the study is over?
Following study completion, study data may be shared with other researchers for use in other studies. Your consent will not be asked for again if study data is needed as part of publishing our study results or used for other studies. The data we share will NOT include personally identifiable information.

Will I receive an incentive for taking part in this study?
You will not receive a financial incentive for taking part in this study.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?
It is your choice to participate in this research study, as participating is voluntary. You have the right to cease participation at any time during the study. You also are not required to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

Who can answer my questions about this study and my rights as a participant?

For questions about this research, you may contact:

Principal Investigator:
Chris Jonassen
Cjonass1@uncc.edu or (704) 244-9850

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Walter Hart
walter.hart@charlotte.edu or (704) 687-8539

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Office of Research Protections and Integrity at (704) 687–1871 or uncc-irb@charlotte.edu.

Consent to Participate

By signing this document, you are agreeing to participate in this study and that you understand what the study is about. You will receive a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team at the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

_____
Name (PRINT)

_____
Signature Date

_____
Name & signature of person obtaining consent Date

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT PROTOCOL

"A Qualitative Study of Principal Perspectives on the Implementation of Restorative Practices"
Chris Jonassen/ UNC Charlotte / Educational Leadership Department

Hello _____, this is Chris Jonassen, a UNC Charlotte Doctoral Student, and I am completing a research study entitled "A qualitative study of principal perspectives on the implementation of restorative practices." The purpose of this study is to explore school principals' perceptions and experiences related to the implementation of restorative practices. The researcher hopes that findings can inform policy and practice in schools. The insights gained through this study may lead to recommendations for practice while adding to the literature.

In your role as a public school principal, I would like to ask you to participate in an audio-taped interview on this subject. You have been selected because of your status as a principal who has had experience implementing restorative practices in your school.

Your participation in the project will take approximately 45 minutes-to 1 hour. This includes time for the demographic survey completion and the interview. Each of your responses during the interview will be recorded verbatim by me following the interview and an interview transcription will be created and shared with you via email. You will also have the opportunity to follow up on any details. I will also take a few field notes during the interview to ensure clarity and understanding. If you choose to participate, you will be one of approximately six participants in this study. I am happy to arrange the interview at a time and place selected by you to ensure comfort.

To ensure confidentiality, information about your participation, including your identity, will not be shared. The data collected by the researcher will not contain any personal identifying information or reveal your participation in this study. Also, I request that you not use identifying information of fellow school district colleagues, immediate co-workers, students, parents or others during the interview to ensure anonymity. Any information that is identifiable will be coded. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Currently, you have three options. First, if you are ready to agree to participate in the study, please confirm with me now and I can send the Consent Form using Docusign to you by email. Second, if you would prefer not to participate in the study, please confirm with me now. Third, if you have questions or need additional time to consider participating in the study, please confirm with me now. For the third option, I can email you the consent form that outlines study participation, to provide you with time to review it and help you make an informed decision. You would then be free to follow up with me via phone and/or e-mail to indicate your choice.

Researcher:
Chris Jonassen
Cjonass1@uncc.edu or (704) 244-9850

APPENDIX D: POSTRECRUITMENT PREINTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP E-MAIL SCRIPT

"A Qualitative Study of Principal Perspectives on the Implementation of Restorative Practices"
Chris Jonassen / UNC Charlotte / Educational Leadership Department

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study, *"A qualitative study of principal perspectives on the implementation of restorative practices."*

The purpose of this study is to explore school principals' perceptions and experiences related to the implementation of restorative practices. The researcher hopes that findings can inform policy and practice in schools. The insights gained through this study may lead to recommendations for practice while adding to the literature.

Please note and review the Consent to Participate Form that is attached to the body of this email prior to our interview. You are welcome to reach out to me directly with any questions you may have via email or phone. Additionally, I will bring an additional hard copy of this Informed Consent Form to our interview session for you to review, as needed.

Researcher:
Chris Jonassen
Cjonass1@uncc.edu or (704) 244-9850

If you have any concerns regarding this study, please contact the faculty advisor of the researcher.

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Walter Hart
walter.hart@charlotte.edu or (704) 687-8539

APPENDIX E - INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Project Title

A Qualitative Study of Principal Perspectives on the Implementation of Restorative Practices

Structure

This is a structured one-on-one interview with 5 questions designed to learn the background of participants. There are eight interview questions aligned directly with the research questions. The interviewer may ask probing questions if needed for clarification or to gain additional information from the interviewee during the interview process.

Procedure

1. The researcher will find a secure, comfortable, and appropriate space and meet the interviewee at the time and location selected by the interviewee to conduct the interview.
2. The researcher will ask the interviewee to complete the ten-question demographic survey (see Appendix E).
3. The researcher will ask if the interview may be audio recorded and if field notes may be taken by the researcher.
4. If the participant verbally provides his/her consent (paperwork has already been collected), the recording will begin.
5. The researcher will ask the interviewee questions found in the protocol as well as additional probing questions if needed.

6. The interview will record the interview for quality and consistency

Interview Guidelines

Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview as part of this research project. The purpose of this study is to explore school principals' perceptions and experiences related to the implementation of restorative practices. The researcher hopes that findings can inform policy and practice in schools. The insights gained through this study may lead to recommendations for practice while adding to the literature. I will ask you a series of questions. Your name will not be reported to ensure confidentiality. You are not required to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with and you are encouraged to answer freely as there are no wrong answers. You may choose to decline to participate in the study at any time before, during, or after the interview with no penalties applied. Following the interview, I will transcribe the interview, by typing verbatim both of our statements and responses. Do you have any questions? Please confirm that you understand the interview guidelines and that you are ready to proceed.

- If the interviewee states no, the researcher will stop the interview and ask whether the participant is willing to be interviewed at another time.
- If yes, the researcher will continue the interview according to the protocol.

Interview Questions

Participant Interview Questions

Background Information

How long have you been working in the education field, and what roles have you held?
During which year's did you lead a school that implemented restorative practices?
What is/was the name of the school(s) that you speak of during this interview?
What led you to the implementation of restorative practices?
How long did your implementation of restorative practices last (are you currently using restorative practices at your school) and what restorative practices do you use?

Restorative Practices Implementation

What do you perceive to be the advantages of restorative practice in schools as compared to traditional, exclusionary discipline practices?
Why did you choose to implement restorative practices in your school? What led to implementation?
Did your staff receive training on implementation? What was your approach to building buy-in with your staff?
What steps did you take prior and during implementation to prepare for the roll-out of the program?
How and what did you communicate to parents and key stakeholders about restorative practices implementation?
Please share the benefits or advantages that you noted following implementation at your school, if any?
What were the problems or challenges that you faced when implementing restorative practices in your school?

Advice for Other Principals

What advice would you give to other principals who want to begin or have just begun implementation of restorative practices?