RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: A CASE STUDY OF AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

By

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of Michigan - Flint in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Education Department

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2023, October

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my father, Tolbert H. Carter. Through his example and support, I found my motivation to complete this endeavor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my family for their support and sacrifice throughout this process. Thank you, Mom, Dad, Olivia, Henson, and Keith! I am so fortunate to have you all at my side—a special thank you to my best friends Nicole and Claire. You have inspired me and encouraged me for so long! I appreciate everything you have done for me and every word of encouragement.

I would want to thank Mary M. Meeker, who has been my greatest supporter during this entire process. Thank you for convincing me to pursue my doctorate in the first place; you are the best!

ABSTRACT

Here is a *qualitative case study* of an urban high school in Michigan to examine how school professionals perceive and apply *restorative justice* (RJ) practices. Through the lens of *critical theory* (CT) and *critical race theory*, this study investigated these issues. The research questions driving this study are as follows: (1) What are these school professionals' perceptions of the use of RJ? and (2) How are RJ processes implemented in an urban high school in Michigan? First, a survey of 50 school professionals was undertaken to assess their perceived use of RJ. Next, two administrators, one social worker, and four teachers were interviewed to gather data regarding their perceptions of RJ and how it is implemented at this school. According to the findings of this study, RJ is primarily used to restore relationships, but it is also used as a response to inappropriate behavior. Restorative techniques are also more effective when combined with a school-wide program such as *Culturally Responsive-Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports*).

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of zero tolerance in schools resulted in a disturbing trend of discriminatory discipline disparities between Black male students, students with disabilities, and students of lower socioeconomic status compared to their White, middle-class peers (Alexander, 2012; Carter et al., 2016; Davis, 2014; de Brey et al., 2019; Woods & Stewart, 2018). Minority students face greater punitive measures such as Office Disciplinary Referrals (ODRs), expulsions, and suspensions than their White peers. According to a study conducted by the Government Accountability Office, Black students accounted for 15.5% of all public-school students but represented about 39% of students suspended from school, an overrepresentation of about 23 percentage points (Mowicki, 2018). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics-Civil Rights Data Collection, 13.7% of Black students received out-of-school suspensions compared to 3.4% of White students in 2013–2014 (de Brey et al., 2019). Across all racial/ethnic groups, males were suspended at a higher rate than females. Race and difference issues continue to be embedded in our schools and society, reinforcing and replicating inequality in society, education, and school discipline (Carter et al., 2016).

Exclusionary methods such as suspensions and expulsions contribute to the so-called school-to-prison pipeline (Anyon, 2016; Carter et al., 2016; Gonzalez, 2015; Losen et al., 2015; Woods & Stewart, 2018). The school-to-prison pipeline occurs when a student's misbehavior in school is criminalized, and the student is introduced to the juvenile justice system. The consequences of this phenomenon are horrendous, with an overrepresentation of minority students being incarcerated or involved in the juvenile justice system. According to Fabelo's (2011) research on school discipline and student success, when students were suspended or expelled for a discipline violation, their likelihood of juvenile justice contact nearly tripled, and

they were twice as likely to repeat a grade as those who were not removed from school. According to a report from the Center for Civil Rights Remedies (2015), the pipeline goes on to cause voter disenfranchisement, degradation of health, degradation of culture, and a shorter life expectancy.

Restorative practices may be preferable to zero-tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline. The restorative approach permits offenders to hold themselves accountable for their misdeeds while remaining part of the community (Costello et al., 2019). Research has found that the presence of more Black children in a school reduces the likelihood of restorative justice practices such as student conferences, peer mediation, restitution, or community service (Payne & Welch, 2015). To address disparities, educators must develop specific strategies for enhancing student and teacher relationships as well as preventing and handling conflict (Carter et al., 2016). Using restorative justice (RJ) principles to train staff in structured problem-solving, and to identify contributors to conflict, offers a promising approach to reducing the discipline gap (Gonzalez, 2015).

Imagine two students getting into a fight in the high school setting. As a consequence, each of these students is suspended for the obligatory 5 days per the school handbook. When these students return to school, the issues have not been resolved, and the conflict may continue. This use of suspension may alienate the students from the school community. Imagine what would happen if the two young people were given an opportunity to express their frustration and anger in a controlled, safe environment. The students guided by a skilled facilitator might address how each was harmed and the steps they could take to repair the harm and mend the relationship. This is the potential of RJ.

What Is Restorative Justice?

The core principles of RJ include engagement (involving students in decision-making), explanation (providing a rationale for decisions), and widespread understanding of behavioral expectations and consequences for infractions (Gregory et al., 2014; Mullett, 2014; Wachtel, 2012). Similarly, Pavelka (2013) defines the core principles of RJ as repairing harm (victims and communities are healed of the harm), reducing risk (promoting the community's capacity to manage the behavior), and empowering the community (collectively addressing the impact of the wrongdoing and the reparation). This is accomplished through reparative conferences, peer mediation, letter writing, community service, and classroom conferences (Amstutz & Mullett, 2015; Zaslaw, 2010).

The foundation of the restorative practice lies in the sense of school as a community. When a student violates a rule, it is viewed as an affront to the relationships within the community. This is in stark contrast to the zero-tolerance paradigm of punitive methods, in which the student is viewed as a rule-breaker and deserving of a consequence. Restorative practice philosophy considers the need to repair relationships (Gardner, 2016; Gonzalez, 2015).

The use of affective language marks the beginning of restorative activities. A restorative response might be as simple as a sympathetic, "Are you okay?" rather than a reactionary, "What is wrong with you?" (Gardner, 2016). This type of language alters the dynamic between the teacher and student or between the teacher and administrator. The teacher uses affective language to describe how the incident affected them. "Affective statements" is another way of saying, expressing your feelings, or sharing how an event affected you (Costello et al., 2019; Gregory et al., 2014). According to Costello (2019), expressing your feelings, whether positive

or negative, is a crucial first step in fostering healthy group dynamics. Students may be able to improve or mend their relationships by learning how to express their emotions. A student's voice is honored in such an environment, and adults express care while being firm in shared expectations for behavior.

The school can normalize the use of affective language and other school-wide behavior. They can make students feel comfortable in the restorative circle process. Restorative techniques revolve around circles. According to Pranis (2005), circles have five fundamental structural elements. The first elements are the opening and closing ceremonies that mark the circle as a space apart from regular life. The guidelines are the second structural element. Participants make commitments or promises to one another about how they will behave in the circle. Next, the circle's structure includes a talking piece, which is essential in establishing a space in which participants can speak from a deep place of truth (Pranis, 2005; Amstutz & Mullett, 2015; Gardner, 2016). This talking piece is an object that is passed around the circle and held in the hand of the person speaking. The circle's structure also necessitates the presence of a keeper or facilitator. The facilitator's role is to provide a respectful and safe space and to engage participants in sharing responsibility for the space and their shared work (Pranis, 2005). The facilitator's role is not to influence the outcome of the circle but to uphold the circle's integrity (Amstutz & Mullett, 2015). According to Pranis (2005), the final structural piece of the circle is the decision-making consensus. In the circle process, consensus generally means that all participants are willing to live with the decision and support its implementation. These five structural elements create a space in which people can bring on the best in one another and connect at profound levels (Pranis, 2005).

Many states and schools are now turning to RJ methods. These methods are developed out of the traditions of Indigenous people in Australia, New Zealand, and North as well as South America (Mustian et al., 2021). In these communities, the circle is used to mend relationships, as well as the use of a talking piece to ensure that all voices are heard. Circles operate on the belief that everyone has inherent dignity and worth (Pranis, 2005). These Indigenous and spiritual traditions emphasize the interconnectedness of humanity. This view of RJ sees it as "an act of love, that seeks to make right relationships" (Vaandering, 2010, p. 146).

Restorative techniques work best when implemented throughout the school (Amstutz & Mullet, 2015; Bradshaw, 2008; Gregory et al., 2014). Restorative practices fit well in Culturally Responsive–Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (CR-PBIS) or Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) schools. These preventative models are evidence-based, school-wide programs that aim to prevent misbehavior and teach students how to behave responsibly before any misdeed can occur. One coaching model designed by the International Institute of Restorative Practice (IIRP, 2022) is based on an MTSS framework.

According to Bradshaw (2008), constant evaluation to maintain fidelity is an integral aspect of PBIS. Using student discipline data, educators may objectively determine a student's need and level of intervention and support and effectively allocate the appropriate resources (Cook, 2022). For example, the use of restorative and affective language as Tier I support and the use of reentry circles as Tier III support (Karanxha et al., 2020).

The CR-PBIS program at the school district under investigation addresses negative behaviors (and rewards positive ones) through a multi-tiered system (Cook, 2022). There are three tiers. Tier 1 interventions address school-wide expectations in a common language that all

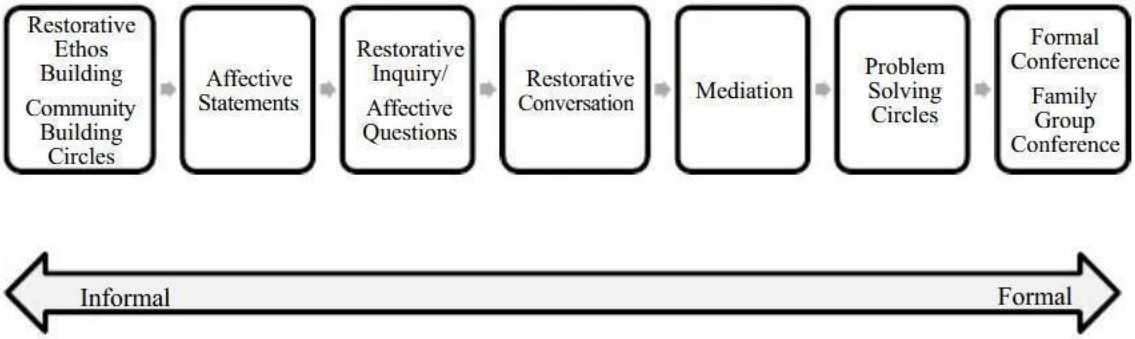
staff and students use to comprehend rules, procedures, and protocols in various areas of the building (e.g., classroom, restroom, cafeteria, hallways). This Tier would comprise 80%–90% of the students. Tier 2 interventions target staff or classroom-managed behaviors that significantly disrupt classroom instruction and/or prevent students from learning themselves (parent conferences, detention, community service, academic support, etc.). At this level, you would find 5%–10% of the students. Students identified as at risk of low achievement and/or dropout are served at the Tier 3 level through a variety of resources and programs (e.g., casework, social work, counseling). Office-managed behaviors (e.g., fights, assaults, weapon/drug possession, sexual harassment, etc.) are likewise addressed at the Tier 3 level. This category would typically include 1%–5% of the students. This proactive preventative method differs from a reactive approach in that it addresses the school's behavioral requirements before any misbehavior occurs. The school-wide PBIS model necessitates strong leadership, staff buy-in, and appropriate resources to track the school's behavior data (Bradshaw, 2008).

CR-PBIS is an evidence-based approach to being proactive about student behavior that is sensitive to different cultures and backgrounds. It is a method of positively empowering students and equipping them with the skills to handle issues (Cook, 2022; PBIS.org, n.d.). Despite being well disseminated, CR-PBIS has not resulted in a reduction in the racial discipline gap despite an overall reduction in the use of exclusionary discipline sanctions (Gregory et al., 2014).

Many teachers can use circles to both build classroom communities and figure out what went wrong within those communities. Restorative circles are not for blaming. They help in clarifying the individual's responsibilities without victimizing or blaming the offending student. Restorative practices can be seen on a continuum.

Figure 1 depicts a scale that begins with affective statements on the most informal end and formal circles on the other (Costello et al., 2019 p. 10). The more formal an action is, the more time intensive it is. Because they can be used daily in the classroom, affective statements and questions are informal.

Figure 1



Formal conferences require a pre-meeting to prepare the members of the circle. This activity in preparation for a meeting formalizes the conferences. Small impromptu conversations are semi-formal because they can be used to resolve conflicts without the need for a preconference.

Depending on the context, the word “restorative” is used with justice, practices, methods, and interventions. RJ was originally used in the context of the criminal justice system. Restorative practices, methods, and interventions are used to describe specific tools (e.g., circles, conferencing, mediation, restorative conversations, and affective language) used to achieve the desired goals of restorative work.

Background of RJ in Schools

Following school violence such as Columbine, federal and state legislators enacted zero tolerance measures for school violence. Zero-tolerance was implemented in schools in the 1990s as a policy requiring school administrators and officials to impose and enforce specific predetermined punishments or consequences irrespective of circumstances. These consequences were frequently viewed as rigid, severe, and punitive in nature, intended to be imposed indiscriminately and without consideration of the severity of the behavior, the context in which it occurred, or other mitigating factors (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016).

Zero-tolerance policies appeared to be fair and just when they were first implemented. However, it is increasingly being viewed as a failed social experiment (Skiba, 2014). The use of zero-tolerance is related to the emergence of punitive policies in which there are mandatory suspensions and expulsions for certain infractions of policy (Ryan & Ruddy, 2015). Zero-tolerance operated on the premise that strong enforcement of the rules would serve as a deterrent to inappropriate behavior. This sentiment was reflected by the Gun-Free Schools Act in 1994, which mandated particular punishments, such as suspension and expulsion, for crimes involving guns and weapons, regardless of the seriousness or circumstance of the offense (Skiba, 2014). According to Skiba (2014), there are no studies that demonstrate suspensions and expulsions work to enhance school atmosphere. The use of zero-tolerance as a disciplinary method in schools is highly controversial and has been associated with negative outcomes for students, and schools are not necessarily any safer (Heilbron, 2015; Payne & Welch, 2015).

Historically, misbehavior in school was dealt with by the principal and school officials. More recently, these behaviors are handled by public safety personnel or the police under zero-tolerance rules, criminalizing the offense (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017; Alexander,

2012; Carter et al., 2016; Fronius et al., 2019). The criminalization of school behavior can lead to negative outcomes for the student. According to Amstutz and Mullet, “A student’s misbehavior is part of a child’s normal development and should not be viewed as a crime” (2015 p. 11). Conversely, Mirsky (2011) emphasizes that restorative practices are not permissive, and wrongdoing is not tolerated as some may think. Solutions are arrived at collaboratively by the people involved (Karanxha et al., 2020). This sense of ownership over one’s behavior is crucial to long-term change. This change is difficult because schools in this country are institutions that operate under the world’s most punitive society (Gardner, 2016).

Things began to change in 2014. Schools were urged to take immediate and effective measures to reduce disparities in suspensions in a 2014 “Dear Colleague” letter issued by the Department of Justice and the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (Fallo, 2019). This prompted numerous states to develop their own actions. Michigan responded by enacting the Revised School Code (2016), which was modified to reflect the trend from punitive to restorative practices (Harrison, 2007). The code now states that seven elements should be examined before a student is suspended or expelled. One of these aspects is: “Whether restorative practices will be used to address the violation or behavior committed by the pupil” (Michigan Revised School Code, 2016, p. 262). These considerations are intended to limit the number of days a student is excluded from the educational setting and the school community. The exceptions to this rule are when a student brings a firearm, commits arson, or engages in criminal sexual conduct. According to Michigan law:

> Restorative practices may include victim-offender conferences that are attended voluntarily by the victim, a victim advocate, the offender, members of the school

> community, and supporters of the victim and the offender; and that provides an opportunity for the offender to accept responsibility for the harm caused to those affected by the misconduct and to participate in setting consequences to repair the harm. The restorative practice team may require the pupil to do one or more of the following: apologize, participate in community service, restoration, or counseling; or pay restitution. (Michigan Revised School Code, 2016, p. 262)

The Michigan code describes a formal restorative circle and precisely defines the restorative process and the desired outcomes. It also describes RJ as practices that focus on repairing the harm caused by a student's transgression to the victim and the school community.

Parkmore (pseudonym), the district chosen for this study, began an RJ program in 2004 in collaboration with the United Way. The program began with one pilot elementary school and had expanded to 19 schools in the district by the time Gonzalez's (2012) report was published. From 2004 to 2009, the district stated that approximately 1,600 days of suspension had been avoided (Gonzalez, 2012, p. 313). The pilot school reported a 15% drop in suspensions in 2005. Parkmore School District estimated that 1,500 students had participated in the program since its inception, with 507 of the 522 cases completed, 11 cases settled in lieu of expulsion, and more than 1,600 days of student suspension avoided. The Parkmore School District conducted long-term surveys with participants and reported that 90% of participants learned new skills to solve or avoid conflicts as a result of the restorative justice intervention (Fallo, 2019).

Unfortunately the Parkmore district received media attention for a negative post in 2022 when its Board of Education was presented with an audit conducted by its equity committee and WestEd a San Fransisco based research team. The audit found that Black and multiracial

students, “face more disciplinary action than their white classmates,” (Johnson, M. 2022). The data from this audit revealed that long term trends for this district were not in favor of the non-White students. These two media posts led the current research to this district and this school to study RJ where discipline and race are such critical issues.

Statement of the Problem

Following the failure of zero-tolerance policies, schools are exploring for alternatives to exclusionary discipline such as expulsion and suspension (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016). When students are expelled from school for disobeying the rules, they are unable to be a member of the school community. In today’s context, school misbehavior is often handled by the police or public safety officers. This is more common in urban schools and among Black males. Furthermore, Black children were perceived not only in a prejudiced but also in a dehumanizing light (Goff et al., 2014). Removing a student from school reduces the likelihood that the student will be successful when they return to school. According to Davis (2014), 75% of the nation’s inmates are high school dropouts. This shows how imperative it is for at-risk students to feel included and appreciated in their school communities.

According to Amstutz and Mullet, school-wide peace begins with including others and being included. They continued to acknowledge that “education is for and by the community” (2015 p. 3). Fortunately, a new trend is emerging, a philosophical change in how discipline is approached. Restorative practices meet the need for community and provide us with hope for peace in our schools (Gardner, 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to dive deeper into the RJ process by analyzing an urban school and the administration and staff's perspectives. Following the implementation of zero tolerance, it is important to evaluate the current trend for equity and effectiveness. By focusing on an urban, midsized, Midwestern city, it is intended to illustrate the essence of restorative practices with depth and texture.

Restorative practices are more than just formal conflict resolution circles. Within the school's behavior intervention system, peace circles or community circles can be formed. PBIS is a broad term that refers to methods that seek to improve important behaviors (NEA, Policy Brief, 2020). This system contributes to the restorative practice movement by attempting to prevent disruptions in the school by pre-teaching positive behavior expectations. Although restorative practice provides solutions to many of our schools' challenges, it has many critics (Mullet, 2014; Jain et al., 2014). This study examined the nature of RJ from the perspective of professionals in one urban high school. This study specifically addressed participants' perceptions of RJ, its intended use, and its implementation in the school.

Another purpose of this study was to examine RJ in one urban high school using the Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Theory (CT) lenses to investigate education professionals' perceptions and lived experiences with RJ. This study examines the elements of RJ (e.g., relationships, community building, accountability, empathy) and how they are perceived by school professionals in one Michigan urban high school. The findings of the interviews and the surveys reveal a wide range of perceptions and experiences. These findings indicate that RJ at the chosen high school is a very personal experience when it comes to dealing

with relationship and discipline issues. The current study also reiterated that making amends and restoring relationships are essential components of any form of RJ (Chang, 2017).

Summary

Discipline is administered differently to different racial groups, and Black students are suspended or expelled at accelerated rates. This poses a grave concern for our society as a whole, and specifically our school communities. The RJ apparatus, which has its roots in Indigenous cultures, is providing schools with a new way to address discipline. RJ is being touted as a solution to the school-to-prison pipeline. This is the mechanism by which minority students are introduced to the juvenile justice system because of over-policing in our schools. RJ is considered a means of mending damaged relationships among the members of the school community.

The tools of restorative practice (e.g., affective statements, mediation, informal and formal circles) can be used in any circumstance where there is a dispute or violation of trust. These practices can also be incorporated into a school-wide initiative such as MTSS, CR-PBIS, or PBIS. Restorative practices are frequently used in schools when dealing with disciplinary issues. However, they can also be used on a regular basis to promote a restorative mindset across the school in conjunction with school-wide behavior systems. The same practices that are used to resolve a conflict can be used to develop a community. One critical dilemma that schools operating under a restorative paradigm encounter is the limitation of time. Restoring takes longer time than punishing (Gardner, 2016).

Chapter 2 will present a literature review on restorative practices and issues surrounding school discipline. This chapter reviewed the literature on RJ and revealed multiple themes that

explain why restorative practices are becoming more popular in schools. Chapter 3 describes the methods used to perform this research. To investigate the research questions, a survey and semi-structured interviews were used. The educational professionals at an urban high school were interviewed and surveyed. Chapter 4 describes the results of the interviews and surveys. It describes similarities and variations between the responses of the school professionals. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings. It also delves into the literature to review themes and how they connect to the findings. Finally, Chapter 5 recommends actions for the school in light of the research and findings.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the 1990s, RJ has been used effectively and has been demonstrated to significantly reduce expulsions and suspensions (Crowe, 2017; Guckenberg et al., 2015; Pranis, 2005; Zehr, 2002). According to Gregory et al. (2014), RJ aims to transform the way students and adults interact with one another, resulting in a more positive school climate. Seen as a response to the demise of zero tolerance, a study by Armour implemented RJ. In their study, the school saw an 84% drop in the use of out-of-school suspensions and a 30% drop in the use of in-school

suspensions lasting 1–3 days. In that same study, the teachers who integrated RJ into the classroom discovered that they developed relationships with the students who had previously instigated class behavior breakdowns (2013).

Predominantly, this study will be evaluated through the lens of critical theory (CT) and critical race theory (CRT). CRT explores the idea that "racial disparities have existed in all aspects of the White-dominated culture of America since the country's inception" (Cama, 2019, p. 36). According to Vaught and Castagno (2008), CRT operates on three basic premises: racism is ubiquitous, racism is permanent, and racism must be resisted. They continue to describe that the White participants in their study (teachers) were unable to recognize that White racial power permeates every institution, including schools. Racism, according to CRT theorists points, is not an individual phenomenon; rather, it is a systemic structural problem that is larger and far more powerful than any individual (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). By keeping the concept of race in our minds, we can effectively examine the literature as it relates to RJ.

This chapter will be divided into eight sections to provide a better understanding of the RJ process: an overview of restorative justice, theoretical framework, response to zero-tolerance and punitive discipline, racial disparities, institutionalized racism and "racial gap," roadblocks to RJ, community building, and summary. Several themes emerged from a survey of literature on restorative practices. These themes will be investigated to comprehend why there is a global trend to implement RJ methods in schools.

Overview of Restorative Justice

RJ stems from First Nations and Indigenous communities in North and South America, as well as Indigenous tribes in Africa, New Zealand, and Australia (Gregory et al., 2014; Pranis,

2005; Ryan & Ruddy, 2015; Van et al., 2010). Several Indigenous communities continue to use circles to conduct tribal business. Restorative practices have been applied in numerous communities and countries across the world. For example, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa has roots in restorative practices (Zehr, 2002). Peace Circles were also featured in the usage of RJ in 1989 in New Zealand's juvenile justice programs. RJ was first used by non-Indigenous people in the United States in the Minnesota justice system in 1989 (Pranis, 2005). These practices have led to the use of restorative methods in the criminal justice system, and eventually in schools. The restorative mindset has easily found its place in schools alongside the quality curriculum. According to Ryan and Ruddy, "If you put the relationship ahead of the curricula, the entire curriculum will positively balance within a healthy climate" (2015, p. 257). Prioritizing restorative practices will result in a more peaceful school climate. Guckenburg et al. (2015) report that in their study, every teacher who used circles somewhat regularly reported a 50% reduction in time spent dealing with behavioral issues in class.

RJ intends to address "misbehavior within the context of which it occurred and with the people directly involved" (Rainbolt et al., 2019, p. 161). Activities such as restitution, volunteer work, or voluntary counseling can be used instead of a jail sentence or possibly in conjunction with a lesser sentence by involving all those affected by misdeed. Cama insists that RJ is not "just another phase of how schools deal with discipline," but rather a philosophical tradition (2019 p. 5). RJ rejects punitive thinking and asserts the notion that every incident is a learning experience with natural consequences (Cama, 2019). In RJ, consequences for misbehavior are agreed upon by all stakeholders to hold the offender accountable and restore their place within the community.

RJ is based on the offender admitting guilt for them to be held accountable to their school and community (Lustick, 2017). This gives the other participants the opportunity to express their feelings in response to the transgression. By doing so, the offender can mend the broken relationship with the community.

Divergence from the Punitive

The philosophical divergence of RJ from the punitive is the view that the guilty person broke not only a rule but also a relationship bond that needs to be mended. A misdeed is defined as a "violation of relationship, not rules" in RJ philosophy (Hantzopoulos, 2013, p. 8). RJ diverges from traditional punishment in that it focuses on empowering the school community to work together to achieve safe and just schools (Gregory et al., 2014; Reimer, 2011).

Under this paradigm, schools are encouraged to find a unique solution for each transgression. RJ affords teachers and principals to view misconduct as an opportunity to nurture the student's well-being. "They (the participants) will be able to work together in the future" with the support of the school staff (Crowe, 2017, p. 48). RJ's philosophy is future-focused rather than rehashing the past.

RJ is largely concerned with mending broken relationships (Amstutz & Mullett, 2015; Rainbolt et al., 2019). RJ can also help to foster empathy and positive relationships between staff and students (Rainbolt et al., 2019). When participants are allowed to create individual solutions suited to each participant and the transgression, they are free from the mandates of zero tolerance (Crowe, 2017). This individualization is crucial to RJ's success as it diverges from punitive models.

The welfare of the students and their relationship within the school community must be restored. It is important to understand RJ philosophy as a paradigm shift rather than a prescriptive program. Schools must develop ways to empower our young people and lead them along paths of life-changing possibilities. We must not replicate the societal repression and criminalization that has made the United States the world's most punitive nation (Gardner, 2016). Key RJ principles include focusing on the harms of the incident rather than the broken rule, understanding that these harms create responsibilities for the offender to remedy to the best of their ability, reestablishing broken relationships, showing equal concern for the welfare of the victim, and the offender, using inclusive processes based on whole-group agreement, and respecting all parties in the process of addressing and remedying harms (Hansen, 2005; Zehr, 2015).

Although these principles may appear lofty, their intent is clear and insightful. The RJ principles serve as a signpost for making our schools safer and more inclusive. "Suspension rates will decrease, and academic achievement will soar" if implemented with fidelity (Lustick, 2017, p. 309). This transformation could make a school healthier and create a more cohesive learning environment.

Whole School Approach

The IIRP (International Institute of Restorative Practices) has developed a 2-year professional development (PD) program to help schools implement RJ as a whole school. Formerly called "Safer, Saner Schools," it is now known as "The Whole-School Change Program." This program uses the language of 11 "Essential Elements." These elements are further classified as whole-school elements and "broad-based" elements. It is recommended that

one element from each category be learned at a time (quarterly) through regular PD days after an initial 2-day intensive training. A school is considered a "Restorative School" when it has successfully reached proficiency for each element. It is also recommended that staff form professional learning communities (PLCs) to help foster a culture of support and ongoing professional learning (IIRP, 2022; Mirsky, 2011).

Restorative methods begin with affective statements both in and out of the classroom. A key focus beyond affective language in the classroom is the school-wide use of affective language. RJ is a philosophy, not a set of practices or behavior modification techniques, that is best implemented on a wider scale rather than just in the classroom (Wachtel, 2003; Woods & Stewart, 2018). For a school to be restorative, it must also teach the students the desired positive behavior. This can be done in conjunction with CR-PBIS (Culturally Responsive-PBIS), SW-PBIS (School-wide PBIS), Response to Intervention (RTI), and MTSS. These programs strive to promote positive behavior while implementing interventions for students who are unable to maintain the behavioral and academic norms and expectations outlined in the school community (Bradshaw, 2008; Gregory & Fergus, 2017).

The critical elements of SW-PBIS are (a) the proactive teaching of school-wide behavioral expectations, (b) consistent reinforcement of expected behaviors, (c) consistent consequences for inappropriate behavior, (d) monitoring of student behavior in all school settings, and (e) use of data for decision-making concerning students' support needs (Vincent & Tobin, 2011). These programs' behavior and language are largely restorative and easily fit into the RJ paradigm (Karanxha et al., 2020). According to Gregory and Evans, RJ is a comprehensive, whole-school approach to shifting school culture in ways that prioritize

relational pedagogies, justice, equity, resilience-fostering, and well-being. A set of restorative values and principles, such as dignity, respect, accountability, and fairness, led this approach (Gregory & Evans, 2020).

Restorative practices are best used as a whole school approach (Gregory & Evans, 2020; Cama, 2019). Methods such as PBIS have been shown to significantly decrease discipline issues, improve successful student outcomes, and decrease at-risk behaviors (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016; Crowe, 2017). By implementing these strategies, "schools can play a crucial role in the social–emotional development and adaptive functioning of children" (Berkley, 2016, p. 17). A whole-school approach can increase the likelihood of positive student outcomes.

The Indigenous and cultural roots of fundamental RJ practices should be explicitly taught to students and should be authentically modeled. This can be accomplished at the school level by conducting a curriculum audit. The curriculum should be scrutinized for biases in favor of the White perspective. This would ensure that teachers and students have opportunities to teach and learn about traditions and cultures that challenge the characteristics of White supremacy (Mustian et al., 2021). The accurate representation of race and ethnicity in the curriculum is essential to both RJ and SW-PBIS.

According to a study of RJ implementation in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), major challenges for school-wide RJ implementation included limited time, training, buy-in, information sharing, unclear discipline policies for serious offenses, student attitudes or misuse of RJ, and inconsistency in the application (Greer, 2018; Jain et al., 2014). After implementing whole-school RJ practices, as well as peer restorative models, OUSD found improved conflict resolution skills, improved emotional regulation and social skills of their

students, and positive interaction between teachers and their students (U.S. Department of Education/Civil Rights, 2014).

Circles

Much of what is considered RJ involves circles. Classroom circles are classified into two types: proactive and responsive (Rainbolt et al., 2019). The proactive restorative process includes the use of emotional language and the preteaching of desired behaviors. Restorative classroom circles can also be used as a proactive measure. These circles can be a low-risk strategy to build a restorative community in the classroom. It has been demonstrated that using community circles as a preventative measure can alleviate many simple classroom problems that consume valuable time and hamper quality instruction.

Inevitably, there will be times when a more reactive approach is warranted (Reimer, 2011). When a student has seriously breached classroom or school norms, a formal restorative conference should be implemented. The formal restorative conference circle requires meticulous planning and preparation. Members of the circle should include both parties involved in the event, as well as family members or support persons for each party and a skilled facilitator. It is beneficial if the facilitator is not a principal or administrator. The facilitator is part of the circle but is not the official decision-maker. Each individual or representative is encouraged to share their truth about the event. Sharing their perspective of the incident "helps to alleviate any fear or anger the victim might have toward the offender" (Cama, 2019, p. 13). The outcomes of restorative conferencing are determined by the stakeholders present at the meeting and result in consensus decision-making. This contributes to the notion that "when people are engaged in the decision-making process, they feel a sense of fairness" (Costello et al., 2010, p. 16). The

facilitator's primary responsibility is to persuade people present that the meeting is a safe place and that sharing their experience may be therapeutic (Lustick, 2017).

The facilitator meets with each party to brief them on what to expect during the circle before beginning the official circle process. This practice ensures that no one feels blindsided. A tenet of restorative practices is that it is not "a blaming session" (Rundell, 2007, p. 54). When the circle begins, there is the introduction of the talking piece (Zehr, 2002). The talking piece is an item that indicates whose turn it is to talk. This object goes around the circle, allowing everyone to speak uninterrupted. The key questions in restorative practices begin to be answered as the talking piece is passed around the circle. These questions are as follows: "Who has been hurt? What are their needs? Who must address the need and fix the harm? What are their needs?" (Calhoun, 2013, p. 3). These questions begin the conversation in a restorative conference. A script must be used during a formal restorative circle. Following the script enables the facilitator to ensure that the conference stays on track and that no one hijacks the proceedings.

Criticisms

A major criticism of restorative practices is the belief that circles require too much time from teachers, who already have so much to do to meet content standards and improve testing results. However, inappropriate student behavior has an adverse effect on the learning environment for all students. Emphasizing the safety and confidence of the student creates a space for meaningful learning to take place. A student who feels welcomed and valued in a community is less likely to express negative emotions through aggressive or disruptive behavior (Berkley, 2016).

The proper implementation of RJ relies on having access to trained facilitators. These professionals may be district employees, funded through a grant or a local nonprofit organization. However, simply having access to training does not guarantee that RJ will be implemented with fidelity. Unfortunately, there have been schools in the United States and Canada that claim to use restorative methods; however, the process is implemented in a way that is "highly punitive and destructive" (Vaandering, 2010, p. 149). The shortcomings of these schools in implementing RJ help to explain why the circle must be democratic and the facilitator should not be a person in power (e.g., a principal). In an ideal situation, each school would have a full-time RJ coordinator. Paul Cama's research (2019) stands among a scant group that has documented a failed RJ initiative implementation. His study found that the implementation of RJ was "procedural and technical rather than rooted in the theory and philosophical tenets of restorative justice" (p. ii). Cama experienced RJ's failure as a result of scattered teacher training, lack of administrative support, and emphasis on teacher evaluation over school climate.

Karanxha et al. also documented a failed RJ implementation attempt in two elementary schools. Within a year, they witnessed the introduction, implementation, and decline of RJ. When it comes to RJ in schools, they described their biggest challenge was for leaders to create space for teachers, students, families, and the community to establish a culture of trust, inclusion, collaboration, and respect (2020).

RJ, as promising as it may appear, is not a panacea for all of a school's challenges. Unfortunately, attempts to implement RJ might be troublesome in schools with a long history of punishments and retributive discipline methods. Despite efforts to implement alternatives, there is still a punitive trend in school discipline (Crowe, 2017; Gardner, 2016; Payne & Welch, 2015).

Adults who are used to a more punitive approach may be concerned about the perceived "loss of control" (Ryan & Ruddy, 2015, p. 257). Punitive methods may reflect an "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" mindset that has become comfortable for many (Davis, 2019, p. 28; Greer, 2018). It is possible that establishing accountability and trust in a school that has a history of racism and police control may necessitate a more profound shift than restorative practices could provide (Lustick, 2017). Cama's (2019) study found that the failure of the RJ program was primarily due to a "misconception among administration and staff that RJ is about discipline" (p. 95). This misconception was echoed by some of the responses of those interviewed in the current study.

Race Issues

We would be remiss to discuss RJ without mentioning race. "We cannot be true to ourselves as healers of harm if we practice RJ in ways that ignore race" (Davis, 2019, p. 93). According to Cama, "Restorative practices should look at the content of a person's character and acknowledge that one's race and culture is a source of empowerment" (2019, p. 98). Only by including race in the discussion can we truly comprehend why it has become crucial to use RJ in our schools. Skiba et al. determined that White students are suspended for observable behavior such as smoking, weapons, or fighting, whereas Black students are suspended for more subjective violations such as disrespect, excessive noise, threats, or loitering (Presberry, 2020; Skiba et al., 2002). They surmised that disparity in suspension and expulsion rates were at once subjective and racist.

Gregory et al. (2014) found that higher RJ implementers (schools) narrowed but did not eradicate the racial disciplinary gap in their referral patterns. Therefore, schools, where RJ was

highly implemented, showed that RJ may be one method for addressing the racial disparities in schools. However, the problem was not completely resolved, and more would need to be done to address it. According to their findings, greater RJ implementation levels were associated with better teacher–student relationships as measured by student-perceived teacher respect and teacher use of exclusionary discipline. Scholars have postulated that poor relationships between students of color and educators can result in "differential processing" (Gregory et al., 2016). This term refers to the phenomenon in which an adult unevenly distributes penalties and punishments often based on factors such as race, gender, or disability.

More recent research into the impact of RJ on racial disciplinary gaps has mostly endorsed RJ. A randomized controlled trial (RCT) comparing outcome measures in 22 RJ schools to those in 22 control schools indicated that RJ implementation reduced the racial discipline gap between Black and White students (Augustine et al., 2018). According to a report focusing on RJ in one high school indicates that Black–White racial disparities in suspension rates abated after RJ implementation (Fowler, Rainbolt, & Mansfield, 2016).

When the Government Accountability Office studied discipline data, across each disciplinary action, Black students, boys, and students with impairments faced excessive amounts of discipline. Black students were particularly disproportionately overrepresented among students who were suspended from school, received corporal punishment, or had a school-related arrest (Mowicki, 2018). Although the disciplinary rate for Black girls is lower than for Black boys, it is still significant. Nationally, Black girls represent 31% of all girls referred to law enforcement by school officials and 43% of those arrested on school campuses while comprising only 17% of the overall student population (Smith-Evans et al., 2014). The

disparity between White and Black students is true for Black girls too and goes to show how the system is biased and racist.

According to Vincent et al., (2015), the implementation of strategies such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) does not appear to reduce racial discipline disparities, and at times may exacerbate them unless coupled with other race-conscious approaches (Vincent and Tobin 2011; Vincent et al., 2015). Furthermore, relationship-building strategies may have limited impact unless paired with reforms that alter the larger social and institutional contexts that maintain racial hierarchies in schools (Anyon et al., 2017). It appears that any approach to address this issue needs to be two-fold, a school-wide relationship-based program that also targets racism and bias.

Anyon et al. (2017) conducted a study that identified the locations in schools in which students of color were most likely to be disciplined. The location where students of color were at the highest risk for an office disciplinary referral was the classroom, from teachers with whom they likely have the most contact regularly. They discovered no empirical support for arguments that implicit biases are stronger when school adults and youth are unfamiliar with one another. These findings suggest that it is not the relationship between teachers and students of color that holds the potential for implicit bias. Instead, systemic biases in discipline policies and practices are greater than the sum of prejudicial decisions made by individual teachers, administrators, and support service providers who have weak relationships with students of color. According to Anyon (2017), successful reforms will likely need to address large-scale dynamics related to power, privilege, and oppression. These facets are often acknowledged in the school discipline literature but are left unaddressed in recommendations for policy change.

Restorative practices strive to include all members of a community and make them feel welcome and valued. The restorative model "forces all participants to bridge the distance… and allow for healing to begin" (Ryan & Ruddy, 2015, p. 255). This model will aid us in our efforts to foster peace in our classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

This study looked at the study conducted in the Denver Public Schools that relied on two tenets of CRT: Whiteness as property and colorblindness (Yang et al., 2019). "Whiteness as property" is the process of protecting the rights of the dominant racial group at the expense of the marginalized (Harris, 1993). As Harris notes, "Whiteness and property share a common premise—a conceptual nucleus of a right to exclude" (p. 17). Colorblindness in this context refers to the assumption that good behavior is objectively defined and that all students should be held to the same standard, regardless of cultural background (Yang et al., 2019). When implementing RJ, we must consider these two tenets as they apply to the value of education.

Inspiration can be found in Frederick Douglass, who has been quoted as saying, "Education is the pathway from slavery to freedom" (as cited in Davis, 2019, p. 44). Davis describes the importance of education to the Black population, "From slavery times to the present, black people have treasured education as liberatory" (2019, p. 44). Race, as seen through the CRT lens, is a socially constructed culturally invented) category that is used to oppress and exploit people of color. Using CRT to examine the concept of education as a means to freedom from slavery, we can see why race must always be considered a factor when discussing the disparities in school discipline. Instead of creating pathways to liberation and opportunity, too many schools today are forcing children into pipelines of incarceration and violence. These

"school-to-prison pipelines" disproportionately affect Black students and other students of color. The impact of this phenomenon is tragic because "youth incarceration is the strongest predictor of adult incarceration" (Davis, 2019, p. 66). This is consistent with another core tenet of CRT: social institutions, not just individuals, reproduce inequality (Anyon et al., 2017). The disproportionate imprisonment of Black people is detrimental to all Americans. Recognizing inequality at the adult criminal justice level demonstrates the significance of implementing interventions at the school level if the "school-to-prison" pipeline is to be broken down (Morgan, 2021; Yang et al., 2017).

In their study, Blaisdell (2016) used the CRT work on "racial spaces" from legal studies to explore structural racism and relate it to schools in the United States. People of color face serious consequences when they are segregated into neighborhoods that restrict their access to equal social rights. Economic, housing, and transportation policies implemented by federal, state, and local governments, as well as other social institutions, cause and enforce segregation (Blaisdell, 2016). This segregation creates extreme inequalities in how non-White students experience school.

This literature review is being filtered through CT and CRT frameworks that have been, "employed minimally in the field of restorative justice" (Vaandering, 2010, p. 145). With this as our starting point, we may proceed to the discovery of RJ using our CRT lens. According to Creswell, the researcher applying CRT must ground, "race and racism in all aspects of the research process" (2013 p. 32). Examining RJ through a CRT lens will allow us to determine if the practices used consider the racial and cultural background of the students involved (Cama,

2019). This candid examination of RJ and racial injustice is important for anybody who seeks to eradicate racial disparities in the discipline.

CRT was applied in this study design because the chosen school has a diverse population of 54% Black, 16% White, 15% Hispanic, and 10% two or more races (MISchooldata.com). This demographic profile was similar to those of previous studies (Yang et al., 2019). Multiple survey questions required respondents to reflect on the issues of race and equitable discipline (see Appendix A). The interview questions (Appendix B) were also designed to encourage the interviewee to reflect on the matter of race as it applies to discipline. CRT was also used to analyze the survey results. All responses with a racial component were grouped together and then analyzed for themes. The final analysis and recommendations were viewed through CRT and CT lenses as the action steps forward integrated race as well as socioeconomic status, disability, and gender.

The RJ philosophy is at the forefront of addressing behavioral and social problems in schools (Pranis, 2005). CT can be applied when people are empowered to transcend the constraints imposed by their race, color, socioeconomic status, or gender (Creswell, 2013). The use of CT and CRT will aid in examining the essence of RJ and how it can be nurtured in school staff while recognizing the truth of discipline in schools. This truth can begin with an acknowledgment that there is an inherent structure in our schools that benefits straight, White, middle-class males (Crowe, 2017). CRT also challenges us to expose the truth of the experiences of people of color in our school system and our society. Due to the disparity in school discipline between Black and White children, Black children find themselves trapped in a self-perpetuating

transgenerational dynamic of cascading negative health, economic, and education outcomes (Davis, 2019).

At its core, RJ is primarily viewed as a "social movement" (Davis, 2019, p. 35). There is a call to action that emphasizes the individual within the context of broader social structures and systems. The transition from a rule-based to a relationship-based paradigm strengthens our way of being in the world and our view of one another (Vaandering, 2010). The movement from punitive measures to restorative methods in schools will undoubtedly alter our society. Restorative practices allow violators of school rules to learn from their mistakes and reduce recidivism (Cama, 2019). The restorative approach to mending broken relationships strengthens our bonds as a society.

Response to zero-tolerance and Punitive Discipline

Children inevitably make mistakes. The interpretation of these natural milestones as crimes has the potential to "criminalize children," particularly in schools (Davis, 2019, p. 45). Some professionals believe that mistakes are a natural part of a child's development and should not be criminalized. Actions that were once considered normal adolescent behaviors and dealt with by school administrators have now become criminal offenses codified in U.S. law (Armour, 2013; Fasching-Varner et al., 2016; Goldys, 2016).

Restorative practices are being offered as an alternative to the punitive measures that many educators still believe are necessary when responding to a childhood mistake. The zero-tolerance philosophy demanded that there be mandatory sanctions for each crime without negotiation. This movement was solidified with the passage of the Gun-Free Schools Act in 1994, which mandated that federal school funds be tied to compliance. Initially, the law only

applied to guns, but subsequent amendments expanded it to include any weapon. State legislatures and local school boards exercised their authority and extended zero-tolerance to include offenses as diverse as drugs, fights, threats, swearing, defiance, and disrespect (Karanxha et al., 2020). According to this philosophy, exclusionary methods and harsh punishments are often viewed as the only cure for students who exhibit poor behavior. Many parents believe responses to misdeeds must be prescribed consequences that are uniform schoolwide. These disciplinary practices have been used as a reactionary response to an incident, rather than to generate positive outcomes (Cama, 2019).

Many parents, teachers, and students have fixed mindsets regarding traditional behavior management. Exclusionary disciplines, such as suspension or expulsion, were used to punish numerous sorts of misbehavior such as insubordination or arguing. However, this approach serves to alienate the offender. This alienation makes a student feel like an outcast and no longer a member of the school community. This student may feel victimized by society and lose trust in the adults in their life. The offender tends to identify themselves as the victim and exhibit a "non-remorseful response" (Cama, 2019, p. 30). This results in more delinquent behavior that erodes the school community and contributes to poor student outcomes (Goldys, 2016). Removing children from the classroom results in "missed instructional time, decreased school engagement, and diminished trust between student and adult" (Davis, 2019, p. 46). It is important to note that a student's history of disciplinary problems was the strongest predictor of school dropout (Berlowitz et al., 2017). This melting pot of circumstances leads to an alarming picture of our at-risk youth.

According to a report by Adams (2010), over 93,000 children were locked up in juvenile correctional facilities in the United States at that time. Research shows that while up to 34% of all children in the United States have experienced at least one traumatic event, between 75% and 93% of youth entering the juvenile justice system annually are estimated to have experienced some degree of trauma. All this trauma is brought into the classroom daily. Punitive discipline may further traumatize these students, but restorative methods may heal them (Adams, 2010; Gardner, 2016).

Restorative practices can be understood as a response to the failure of zero-tolerance policies in the historical context. Payne and Welch attribute the punitive trend in school discipline to our "post-Columbine society" (2015 p. 52), which enacted zero-tolerance policies in the late 1990s. The implementation of zero-tolerance policies in response to shootings, most notably at Columbine, has gained much public attention (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016; Davis, 2019). According to Davis, because of Columbine and other mass school shootings, our schools began to mimic prison architecture. The environment became even more "prison-ized," particularly in low-income communities of color (Davis, 2019, p. 45). Regardless of other considerations such as intent, age, race, and so on, zero-tolerance survived the use of suspensions, expulsions, and other punitive measures. Skiba writes, "No data exists to show that out-of-school suspensions and expulsions reduce disruption or improve school climate" (2014, p. 30). Therefore, there must be a better way to eliminate negative behaviors in school and foster a positive school climate.

Initially, zero-tolerance was intended to protect people and prevent violence. Unfortunately, it "was actually supporting an undercurrent of institutionalized racism"

(Berlowitz et al., 2017, p. 18). Zero-tolerance policies are causing more harm than good in our school communities. Martinez wrote emphatically, “Zero-tolerance has no place in our schools” (2009, p. 156). This statement illustrates a cultural shift away from punitive measures of discipline and zero tolerance.

One dangerous aspect of zero-tolerance was that it was used in situations where it was not intended. Initially, zero-tolerance was intended to be a response to the most serious offenses, for the most severe behaviors on campus that threaten the safety of the school staff and students. Unfortunately, behavioral incidents, such as insubordination and arguing, were added to schools’ zero-tolerance policies. This permitted school administrators to use suspensions more frequently and freely, resulting in the use of automatic suspensions and expulsions for discipline infractions that would previously have received a lesser consequence (Martinez, 2009; Rainbolt et al., 2019).

When an infraction occurs in this punitive system, the student is faced with standard consequences specific to the offense. Zero-tolerance hoped that punitive intervention combined with standardized consequences would reduce recidivism and improve the school climate (Davis, 2019). Unfortunately, this approach has not worked in our schools or our justice system.

Not everyone is strict in their rebuking of zero tolerance. A key purpose of zero-tolerance was to essentially “send a message” through severe consequences (APA, 2006, p. 21). When an offender is appropriately punished, those with a fixed punitive mindset may feel vindicated. However, even with the zero-tolerance “get tough” approaches in place, schools are not necessarily any safer (Payne & Welch, 2015, p. 542). Furthermore, as previously discussed, it

has been demonstrated that zero-tolerance discriminates disproportionately against minorities (Berkley, 2016).

When compared to zero tolerance, RJ values misbehavior as an opportunity for the student to repair the damage to the victim and community (Crowe, 2017). Martinez (2009) wrote, "Zero-tolerance has not had the positive effect on schools that it was intended to have and does not help citizens to address school violence and safety, school administrators must find other methods" (p. 155). This difficulty has resulted in the necessity for something to replace the gaps in our broken system. With the failure of zero-tolerance policies, it has become evident that a new approach such as RJ is needed.

According to Jain et al.'s mixed-methods study of RJ use in OUSD, more than 47% of teachers reported that RJ helped reduce office referrals. Furthermore, 53% reported it helped reduce disciplinary referrals for Black students (Jain et al., 2014). These findings provide hope that the adoption of the RJ paradigm can help bridge the disciplinary gap.

Racial Disparities, Institutionalized Racism, and "Racial Gap"

When considering RJ as a response to zero tolerance, it is important to recall the issue of race and its impact on the disciplinary process. Davis explains that studying RJ without taking into consideration race can result in a harmful system. A restorative approach that disregards race can be perceived as "uninformed, uncaring, if not irrelevant, and racist" (Davis, 2019, p. 38). This highlights the necessity of keeping race at the forefront of our minds as we discuss RJ and discipline in our schools.

Several studies have found a disparity in rates of exclusionary discipline between Black and White males in the name of zero-tolerance (Acosta et al. 2019; Karanxha et al., 2020; Losen,

2016). Even by taking out the factor of zero tolerance, Black students are suspended and expelled at a higher rate than their White peers (Heilbron, 2015). According to Berlowitz et al., racist disparities in zero-tolerance implementation lead to a "pushout mechanism" (2017 p. 8). This mechanism allows schools to suspend or expel a student for any infraction, including those who are not making academic progress or who are behaviorally disruptive.

The skewing of the zero-tolerance policy allows for more leeway in suspending students. Not surprisingly, more young men of color (primarily Black, Native American, and Latino) were being suspended (Davis, 2019). Black male youth are two to three times more likely to be suspended than White male youth (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). One study found that "Black students are punished more severely for less serious infractions" (Skiba, 2014, p. 30). This increased rate of suspension places Black students academically behind other students (Mosby, 2019).

According to Gregory and Fergus, students who are disproportionately suspended are less likely to succeed in life (2017). These students "lack positive models, and thus fail to develop healthy coping skills" (Berlowitz et al., 2017, p.19). Gregory and Fergus continue to explain that exclusionary discipline practices do not improve the quality of children's educational experience (2017). Even if a student is suspended only once, they would be more likely to participate in future disciplinary infractions including truancy, disrespect for school authority, and continued noncompliance (Crowe, 2017). Thus, Black males are at a high risk of dropping out of school and potentially becoming involved with the criminal justice system.

Even many so-called "integrated" schools practice implicitly tracking students of color. Such tracking "maintains a set of conditions in which academic success is linked with whiteness"

(Tyson, 2011, p. 6) and thus maintains White supremacy. Standardized testing similarly maintains White supremacy and is used to justify segregationist practices such as tracking (Blaisdell, 2016; Leonardo, 2007). All of these practices perpetuate and support the disparity in future success between Black and White students in the United States.

Davis reports that 75% of the nation's inmates are high school dropouts (2014 p. 40). The perceived need for using metal detectors, drug-sniffing dogs, and heavy police presence in urban schools promotes the message that students of color are most likely to be criminalized for their behavior. Desai and Abeita summarize the results of the failure of our urban schools, "Failing urban schools lead to a healthy and constant influx of new inmates" (2017, p. 46). We can conclude from this that improvements in the way discipline is handled in urban schools are required to keep the youth of color out of the juvenile justice system and, ultimately, out of the adult correctional system.

When racial disparities are discussed alongside restorative practices, it is easier to comprehend why change in our failing system is so important. Delpit emphatically writes that Black children do not come into the world at a deficit, "There is no achievement gap at birth" (2013, p. 5). There is no evidence people of color adopt any specific "deviant" culture simply by living in impoverished, urban neighborhoods. We must look further to explain why we are failing our young Black children, especially males. According to Davis (2014), young males of color are more likely to go to prison than to college (Blaisdell, 2016). Young men who go to prison instead of college suffer a "lifetime of closed doors, discrimination, and ostracism" (Alexander, 2012, p. 190). When discussing school discipline and the discipline disparity between young Black and White male students, we must include race.

Many urban schools have become part of the "school-to-prison pipeline." Pushout strategies are prevalent in schools whose policies impose "isolation consequences, such as suspensions for minor offenses" (Cama, 2019, p. 17). According to Alexander (2012), the current state of incarceration of Black males resembles past oppression methods such as slavery, Jim Crow laws, and South African Apartheid. She explains that, if current trends continue, one in every three Black males will serve time in prison. In some cities, more than half of all Black men are under "correctional control" such as being in jail, on probation, or on parole (Alexander, 2012, p. 9). Although laws prohibiting these remnants of slavery have been passed, they can still be found in the systems of current "mass incarceration and police terror" (Davis, 2014, p. 40). The solution lies in a quest for justice that seeks reconciliation rather than deepening conflict. This system of justice can be found by implementing restorative methods in our schools.

Roadblocks to RJ

The complex nature of a school's power structure may have unintended effects on the RJ process. For example, when students participate in the RJ circle process, they may be concerned that they will be punished for admitting the wrongdoing that prompted the circle. They may also feel compelled to participate in the RJ process. Even student facilitators who have previously experienced harsh disciplinary processes may adopt a "shaming tone" (Lustick, 2017, p. 306). All participants in the circle process need to feel valued and not harshly criticized or shamed.

Another issue with implementing RJ is that an administrator may not value restorative methods, which can lead to inconsistent support. A school administrator's "commitment, modeling, and enthusiastic support" are needed for the initiative to succeed (Rainbolt et al., 2019, p. 165). Cama (2019) identified a lack of participation and support from the administration

as a significant cause of RJ implementation failure. For a school's outlook to be changed, the staff must be able to look up to their leadership for guidance. If the administrator is not involved, the staff will understand that the RJ program is not valued. For this approach to be successful, a school's administration must lead by example and demonstrate by modeling.

RJ critics believe that it lacks practicality and reject the appearance of RJ as "pain-free" (Mullet, 2014, p. 161). Others consider RJ to be "too touchy-feely" (Shah, 2012, p. 2), has a "soft response" (Mirsky, 2011, p. 3), or is not "tough enough" (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016, p. 131). There is no simple solution to this problem. The RJ paradigm does not rely on a change in student behavior; for RJ to be successful, there must be a change in adult behavior (Davis, 2014). Although some adults are anxious about change, they may feel a "perceived loss of power and control" (Ryan & Ruddy, p. 257). This perceived loss of power may lead people to question RJ's integrity. This happens when it is perceived as a weak response or nonresponse. However, Mirsky insists, "This is not permissiveness, wrongdoing is not tolerated" (2011, p. 6). RJ at its core relies on personal accountability.

Teacher turnover was a big concern in the schools Rainbolt et al. investigated, as they had to retrain people as the new staff were hired. Restorative practices must be an ongoing process to be successful (Acosta, 2019; Rainbolt et al., 2019). Obtaining the resources required to train personnel may prove impossible. Participants in Cama's (2019) study described that the school's focus was on teacher effectiveness and student achievement, rather than restorative practices. Another critical piece in the initial implementation of restorative practices within the schools was the hiring of a "Full-Time Restorative Practices Coordinator" (Cama, 2019, p. 5). School districts with already stretched budgets may not see the value of RJ and may be unwilling

to spend the money required to properly install RJ practices (Cama, 2019, p. 5). This shortage of funds is often attributed to urban districts that serve more students of color.

The respondents in Cama's (2019) study perceived the restorative process and practices as separate events from the school's core instructional work. This disconnect could seriously inhibit the proper implementation of RJ. The RJ process was found to be used as a "reactive measure than a strategy used for teaching students about actions, consequences, and accountability" (Cama, 2019, p. 8). For RJ to be implemented effectively, it must be evident in the entire fabric of the school.

A study of the data from San Francisco Unified District (SFUSD) indicated that RJ practices did help to minimize the number of expulsions for Black males. However, they found that the rate of suspension remained the same. They also found that RJ was more successful in middle schools than in high schools or elementary schools. This would be an interesting topic for future research. To summarize, the use of RJ practices in the SFUSD did not reduce exclusionary practices for Black students, resulting in a significant reduction in discipline disparity (Fallo, 2019). More research is needed to determine why SFUSD found a discrepancy in their data about expulsions but not suspensions.

Acosta (2019) found that it was unclear whether the Restorative Practices Intervention (formerly Safer, Saner Schools from IIRP) could impact the entire school as they had hypothesized. Their 2-year whole-school intervention did not produce significant changes in the schools participating in the RJ program. A subsequent analysis of the study found that middle-school students who received the Restorative Practices Intervention did not report higher levels of school connectedness, better school climate, more positive peer relationships, and

developmental outcomes, or lower levels of victimization than students in control schools (Acosta, 2019). This raises the question of whether RJ is more effective at the elementary school, middle school, or high school level.

The need for buy-in from the entire school (Gardner, 2016; Greer, 2018; Hansen, 2005) is a recurring theme in Rainbolt et al.'s (2019) study. According to that study, communication is an area that needs to be improved. Teachers in the schools they studied were not always made aware that one of their students was involved in a restorative process. They also emphasized that a significant area needing improvement was a follow-up from the administration following a restorative session (Rainbolt et al., 2019). The teachers wanted the students to be held accountable to the school community.

Community Building

RJ emphasizes community building and relationships (Crowe, 2017; Vaandering, 2010). According to Ryan and Ruddy, the common definitions of restorative practices reveal it as a method of "bringing people together" (2015, p. 256). A positive relationship between students and staff is essential for restoring and rebuilding the community. Goldys defines the phenomenon of the "school family" (2016, p. 77). Students at his school explain that they have two families: one at school and one at home. This use of common language builds community and shows caring (Kaveney & Drewery, 2011). Another facet of RJ is the ability to strengthen the communal bonds within a school.

Methods such as PBIS and MTSS are a few approaches that support the RJ paradigm as it relates to the whole school. RJ, PBIS, and MTSS are school-wide, data-driven approaches that hold people accountable for their actions, but they are not punitive and hence do not rely on

consequences and punishments as a rule. RJ, PBIS, and MTSS are grounded in the theory that all students need to feel that they are valuable members of the school community.

According to Crowe (2017), the entire school community must be committed to enhancing a school's climate. Building relationships among teachers, administrators, and parents can lay the groundwork for change. These community-building programs can be easily paired with the RJ methods within the schools. RJ can help to build school community, "by promoting dialogue, accountability, a deeper sense of community and healing" (Davis, 2014, p. 41). Furthermore, building community, creating positive social bonds, and fostering investment in school rules before conflict arises may be the keys to creating a positive school community (Anyon et al., 2016).

According to a study conducted by Ryan and Ruddy, restorative practices resulted in a paradigm shift from "solely punitive to corrective and supportive" (2015, p. 254). The use of RJ contributes to the transformation of the space in which students are silenced and punished into one that encourages emotional endurance and self-determination. It also helps the students realize that they are not alone. Students learn new methods to build community, manage conflict, and repair harm through restorative processes (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Kaveney & Drewery, 2011; Lustick, 2017). Restorative processes also provide effective straightforward ways to teach students they are part of a community, both in the classroom and the entire school. Their actions have an impact on others in the community, and they share responsibility for making their community a desirable place to live (Mirsky, 2011).

The ideal RJ implementation would succeed in creating authentic spaces for students and staff to work through conflict and build trust. Restorative practices include the development of

empathy as well as reinforcing community building, responsibility, and accountability (Lustick, 2017). RJ strengthens the school community and the community at large through developing empathy and the strength in forming relationships.

Summary

The first theme that emerged from the literature was the concept that RJ is best implemented as a school-wide approach (Harrison, 2007; Payne & Welch, 2015). Restorative practices are most effective when used in conjunction with a school-wide program such as PBIS or MTSS. PBIS has been demonstrated to significantly reduce problematic behavior (Heilbron, 2015). According to Payne and Welch (2015), for changes to work, a school requires large-scale policy initiatives. Sheras and Bradshaw (2016) take it further to insist that it is not the implementation of one policy that will make a difference, but the implementation of numerous policies.

The second emerging theme is that restorative practices are a response to the failure of zero-tolerance approaches. As previously noted, the failure of zero-tolerance policies has created a need for an alternative solution to the crisis in our schools. By implementing RJ into our schools with fidelity, we can teach proactive behavior skills, improve student and staff relationships, improve school climate, and ultimately increase student achievement (Berkley, 2016). RJ proponents claim that it will solve problems and save time in the long run by improving student responsibility (Mullet, 2014). Crowe (2017) further explored this idea and explained that a student can be taught that he is responsible for his behavior by rebuilding relationships damaged by conflict. This is a far cry from the past few decades when zero-tolerance was the golden rule.

The third theme is the emphasis on community building and relationships. This perspective acknowledges that everyone needs help and that helping others helps everyone. In the realm of restorative practices, “Everyone is both a giver and receiver” (Pranis, 2005, p. 6). Students who attend schools that have implemented RJ learn to confront their unacceptable behavior, repair the harm they’ve caused, and rebuild their community (Mirsky, 2011). The development of empathy is a by-product of RJ, “Developing empathy is the essential element that helps people treat each other with care” (Crowe, 2017, p. 39). RJ implementation has been promoted as a process through which our students can learn to care about one another and build a better world.

The fourth theme is the presence of racial disparities and institutionalized racism in disciplinary processes. Historically, Black boys were more likely than their White counterparts to be suspended or expelled from school (Alexander, 2012; Davis, 2014; Karanxha et al., 2020). Some behaviors that result in exclusionary discipline can be attributed to cultural differences or implicit bias of the disciplinarian (Davis, 2014; Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Often a teacher’s personal bias can creep into the classroom and influence how a student perceives school (Cama, 2019). When comparing Black and White males, disparities in school discipline are most obvious. Black boys are academically behind other students due to the higher suspension or expulsion rates (Mosby, 2019). This inequity is alarming and demands immediate solutions, one of which is the implementation of RJ.

According to Crowe, there is a gap in the literature that describes RJ from the perspective of principals and teachers in the field (2017). The current study aims to obtain feedback from these professionals. To remain true to its core values, RJ’s effects need to be present in all

aspects of the school culture, including teacher mentoring, observations, and the curriculum (Cama, 2019). It is becoming evident that exclusionary discipline practices do not improve the quality of children's educational experience (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). The best way to meet the needs of the school community is using RJ and its philosophy, which can serve to strengthen the relationship bonds within schools.

In contrast to zero tolerance, restorative methods allow schools to create individual solutions to repair the harm (Crowe, 2017). The needs of all stakeholders can be considered by using these methods. Suspending students from school prevents them from developing social skills and learning proactive strategies to conflict (Berkley, 2016; Crowe, 2017). The RJ paradigm has been implemented to repair harm rather than punish individuals (Costello et al., 2010).

By bringing race into the discussion, we can understand how egregious the school-to-prison pipeline and racial discipline gaps are to the school community. The CRT perspective emphasizes that race and culture must be considered when discussing restorative justice. The RJ tools can help us start to repair the damage that zero-tolerance and institutionalized racism have done to all students and schools. We can only become future-focused and build the world we truly want to live in by owning up to our wrongdoings and attempting to make amends with those we have hurt.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

The method of case study can be used to better understand contexts, communities, and individuals (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). This study used two data collection tools: surveys and semi-structured interviews. The primary purpose of this research was to examine how one urban, midsized, Midwestern, high school is implementing RJ in practice. Schools with various populations have used RJ and received positive results (Mirsky, 2011; Payne & Welch, 2015). This section's primary components are research design, including research questions, philosophical lenses, theoretical basis, setting, sample populations, data sources, data analysis, limitations, and ethical considerations.

Philosophical Lenses

The use of Critical Theory (CT) in this study allowed for an examination of RJ so that individuals involved in the field are explicitly aware of how RJ came to be. CT has been minimally used in the fields of RJ and education (Vaandering, 2010). Paolo Friere, an expert in the area of CT, supposes that "humans will be enlightened the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it" (2005, p. 151). CT can be used to map out the field's constraints, thereby enhancing the existing philosophical understanding of RJ practice in schools (Vaandering, 2010).

bell hooks advanced CT and interjects the concepts of racism and sexism into the dominant culture. She emphasized that the focus cannot be solely on the individual, the conflict, or the healing process without considering broader sociopolitical and cultural forces at play and

the broader institutional context of an individual's life or circumstances. hooks wondered if the "action taken to undo the oppression is any different from the dominant power it is replacing" (1994, p. 4). To undo oppression, we need to look inward, we need to change who we are and how we educate.

In addition to CT, when CRT informs and strengthens the RJ framework, implementation and development go much beyond a focus on student behavior (Vaandering, 2010). Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an analytical lens developed in the United States by public intellectuals following the social justice movements of the 1960s and 1970s to investigate power structures (Cama, 2019). When viewing a situation through a CRT lens, "Race matters whether we work in schools, criminal justice, the workplace, or community. Failing to acknowledge and take action to address social injustice allows living legacies of slavery, genocide, and segregation to persist" (Cama, 2019, p. 68). The only way we can improve the lives of students of all races is by acknowledging race as a factor in our social justice work.

Methodological Approaches to Studying RJ

When beginning this study on restorative practices, I reviewed the work of others to determine which methods would be most appropriate. Payne and Welch (2015) used a quantitative design to assess the impact of a school's predominant racial mixture as a function of RJ. They found that schools with a higher proportion of Black students are less likely to adopt restorative approaches to address student behavior. Anyon et al. (2016) also used a quantitative approach to identify patterns in school office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. Anyon and colleagues examined data sets related to restorative practices using a statistical approach. Greer

(2018) also used a quantitative study, using surveys and interviews. She found that disciplinary structure and student support were predictors of RJ readiness.

Although these studies provided solid data on the efficiency of restorative practices, they do not provide adequate information on the quality of the experience. Qualitative research is used to understand human perception, worldview, and the way we describe our experiences. It's about exploring and comprehending a broad question, often with very few preconceived notions about what may be found. Qualitative methods were used for these reasons.

Hantzopoulos (2013) used a humanist framework to complete a 2-year ethnographic study of RJ. Her research focused on how to best restore the community in the "wake of actions inconsistent" with the community's values (p. 8). Reimer (2011) conducted an additional qualitative study on the role of restorative practices in Ontario, Canada. Using the qualitative case study method, she was able to provide perspective by interviewing five people who were familiar with RJ practices. Desai and Abeita (2017) completed a case study that highlighted the school-to-prison pipeline. This case study centered on a multiracial youth who spent 5 years in the juvenile justice system. By conducting a case study, these researchers were able to shed light on the impact of restorative practices on the educational and life experiences of young Black males.

Both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies have been effective in the analysis of RJ (Anyon et al., 2016; Desai & Abeita, 2017; Greer, 2018; Hantzopoulos, 2013; Payne & Welch, 2015; Reimer, 2011). The quantitative studies met the need for data-driven inquiry and are therefore valuable (Greer, 2018). However, the use of qualitative methodology appears to be an area that requires further research. The current study used qualitative

methodology to explore how RJ processes are being implemented in a midsized, Midwestern, urban high school in Michigan. The use of qualitative methods resulted in an in-depth understanding of the quality and experience of RJ.

According to Creswell (2003), a qualitative case study is appropriate when researching a real-life, bounded system that examines numerous pieces of information. This study is cross-sectional because the survey, interviews, and data for this study were all collected in the same period (Spring, 2020). The data were collected from a group of professionals at a specific midsized, Midwestern, high school with a large population of Black students (54%).

A qualitative approach was appropriate here because the purpose of this study was to reveal the essence of restorative practices and clarify their implementation in schools. A key factor of this case study was that it allowed me to gain in-depth knowledge of a topic or problem (Creswell, 2013). The instrumental case study develops an understanding of a specific issue, such as this case of RJ in a Midwestern, midsized (946 students) urban, high school (100% urban, 0% rural) with a high population of Black students, (54%) (Mischooldata, 2023). This high school was chosen because it closely resembles a high school in a study by Yang et al. (2017). Yang's study also involved a high school with a similar population and racial makeup. They also used CRT to analyze their findings. The selection of this school is relevant because the demographics of the district closely resemble a recent RCT (randomized controlled trial) that studied the implementation of an RJ program (Augustine, 2018). From a representative population of an urban school's adult professionals, the study's participants were selected using probability sampling. This method of selecting the school and participants allows for a high level of generalizability (Crossley, 2021).

Research Questions

This study was guided by two essential questions designed to explore the elements and problems of the restorative process.

Research question 1: What are these urban school professionals' perceptions of the use of RJ?

Research question 2: How are RJ processes being implemented in an urban high school in Michigan?

Setting

The school used for this study is in Michigan's fourth most diverse city (Niche.com, n.d.). In 2022, the city had a population of 124,134 (100% urban, 0% rural). In 2022, the median household income was $44,765 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2022b). The 2019 crime rate in the city was 469 (City-Data.com crime index), which is 1.7 times higher than the U.S. average. The city's race composition is White 55%, Black 21%, Hispanic 13%, Asian 6%, two or more races 6%, and Indigenous American 1% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2022a).

The school district has a graduation rate of 64.27%, and 71.6% of students are from low-income families (MIschooldata.com, n.d.). For the 2020–2021 academic year, the percentage of students achieving proficiency in math is ≤10% (which is lower than the Michigan state average of 36%). Whereas the percentage of students achieving proficiency in reading/language arts is 30%–39% (which is lower than the Michigan state average of 48%; Public School Review, 2022).

According to the Department of Education Office of Civil Rights data for 2017, Black males comprised 65.7% of suspensions, while only comprising 55.7% of the population. White students comprised 12.7% of suspensions and 14.8% of students.

I chose one of the city's three high schools based on anticipated access (convenience sampling). This school has one principal and three assistant principals. The city in this study also has a nonprofit Conflict Resolution Center 501(c)3. This center is a nonprofit organization that schools in the area contact to facilitate formal RJ circles. This organization's ability to facilitate formal restorative circles may have an impact on the use of RJ in area schools.

In this district, when a student is suspended for more than 10 days or expelled, they are referred to the Office of School Culture (Central Office). The Office of School Culture is an umbrella term for the office in charge of district initiatives and grants such as Title IX, Homebound Services, Public Safety, CR-PBIS, and various other initiatives. The Office of School Culture oversees the students' educational needs and strives to ensure that they are still receiving an appropriate education when they are on suspension or expulsion.

Study Participants

Two administrators were interviewed for this project. The lead principal (D. Statler), all names are pseudonyms, is a Black male who has worked for the district for over 12 years. The assistant principal (O. Waldorf) was also Black and has been a principal for 5 years, but this is only her second year at the school in this study. A social worker (Z. Rose) was interviewed. She is White and has been in the district for more than two decades. This is her ninth year at the school. She has been at the school the longest of those interviewed.

For this study, five White teachers were interviewed. This demographic was a significant limitation of this study. All interviewees were volunteers and self-identified based on their responses to the survey. The identities of all other survey participants were kept confidential. F. Pepper has been at the school for 2 years and in the district since 2012 (10 years). He has also been a bus driver and a behavior specialist. J. Fiama began working in the school on a part-time basis in January 2007 and has held a full-time position teaching computers and math for the last five years. B. Honeydew has been at the school for five years. Currently, his job requires him to instruct students from all three high schools in the district. L. Zeland has been in the district for more than 30 years. S. Monellea has been in the district "since the 90s" and has been at the chosen school for two years. She is a special education teacher.

Table 1: Pseudonym Assignment to Interview Participants

Position	Pseudonym	Race	Years in Education	Years in Current Position	Subject Taught
Principal	D. Statler	Black	12+	4	n/a
Assistant principal	O. Waldorf	Black	12	2	n/a
School social worker	Z. Rose	White	20+	9	n/a
Teacher 1	F. Pepper	White	10	2	Special

					education
Teacher 2	J. Fiama	White	16	5	Computers and math
Teacher 3	B. Honeydew	White	15	5	Math
Teacher 4	L. Zeland	White	30+	5	ELA
Teacher 5	S. Monellea	White	30+	2	Special education

Data Sources

Surveys

Prior to conducting this study, I received permission from the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). I was able to distribute a survey after initially submitting a formal request to conduct research to the school district (Appendix B). The survey was created using U of M Qualtrics (Appendix C) and was delivered electronically (email and web link) to all the building's staff, approximately 50 people. At the start of the survey, respondents were shown a statement informing them that their responses would not be linked to their identity (Appendix D). Their identity was only required when answering whether they would be willing to participate in an interview.

This qualitative process allowed me to survey fewer people than in a quantitative survey and still get rich data (Farrell, 2016). According to Farrell, questions should be open-ended and

use how and why questions. She states that the time required should be short and that the survey should ask for "questions, comments, and feedback" (2016, p. 2). According to Irwin and Stafford (2016), survey preparation should include up to four times the final number of questions. I was able to choose questions that truly addressed my research questions during the actual survey because I had prepared an abundance of questions ahead of time.

Semi-structured Interviews

I chose a semi-structured interview as opposed to one that is completely unstructured or completely structured (for interview questions, see Appendix E). "A completely unstructured interview has the risk of not eliciting from the interviewees the topics or themes more closely related to the research questions under consideration" (Rabionet, 2011, p. 564). Rabionet (2011) considers semi-structured interviews as a "flexible and powerful tool to capture the voices and the ways people make meaning of their experience" (p. 564). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were the best option for this study.

The participants in the semi-structured interviews were required to sign a consent form indicating their willingness to participate. This agreement detailed what would be expected of them during their participation in this project. Most importantly, this letter emphasized that participation is voluntary and that they may quit at any time. This consent form can be found in Appendix F. The participants were sent an email to schedule an interview (Appendix G).

To begin, I engaged the interviewee by giving an opening statement and a few general questions meant to elicit conversation. I had some additional scripted questions at the end of the interview to probe for information that did not come up in the structured portion of the interview. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using UofM Zoom.

Member checking is a key validation approach in this process. I used the method of summarizing the participant's interview. Throughout the interview, I summarized key points and requested confirmation from participants. This enabled the respondents to clarify their thoughts on the matter immediately during the interview process.

Data Analysis

Responses to a survey and semi-structured interviews served as the study's primary sources of data. The interviews were transcribed, and each speaker was identified as the interviewer and interviewee. Pseudonyms were used in place of the respondents' real names at this point (see Table 1). I read through the transcripts and made notes in the margins before starting to use a descriptive technique, as well as underlining, circling, bolding, or coloring rich or significant quotes or concepts. This process is known "precoding" (Saldana, 2021, p. 30). In the initial round of descriptive coding of the interviews, I reviewed each interview line by line and used in vivo coding to color-code responses that showed the school's demographics and culture. I also used a color-coded system to highlight responses that relate to race. I created an analysis of the responses by organizing the responses in this way, and several themes emerged.

After mining the interview transcripts and survey data for the above responses, I re-coded the responses according to the essential research questions. First, I color-coded the responses for each research question 1: What are these school professionals' perceptions of the use of RJ? Then I subdivided those responses into ones indicating that their perception of RJ is for repairing relationships and statements indicating that their perception is that it is for controlling student behavior. Next, I color-coded the responses for research question 2: How are RJ processes being implemented in an urban high school in Michigan? Again, I subdivided these responses based on

whether RJ was used to establish relationships or regulate behavior. These were themes that emerged from the literature review and the "precoding" of the interview transcripts.

Reliability refers to the extent to which the information is credible and accurate. By acknowledging that Black and White students have different lived experiences even within the same school, I attempted to reduce my own bias. By recognizing that race is an influencing factor in school discipline I am better able to view the data presented here. During this research, I sought out anti-bias training, read socially conscious books, and became my school building's diversity, equity, and inclusion coach. These opportunities enabled me to discuss other issues related to our own bias, thereby minimizing my bias as a researcher.

Another strategy that heightens the reliability of this study is that I was the lone researcher. I did not elicit help in conducting the research or coding the generated data. Throughout this research, I gained the perspectives of a variety of school personnel. This research yielded interview data from administrators, teachers, and social workers.

Another technique used was to obtain information from more than one source of information (the interview and the survey). This results in data analysis from the two instruments. I used both sources of information to answer the study's questions. To do this, I compared the interview responses to the survey responses to see if they agreed or disagreed. Comparing the data resulted in an iterative process in which my research questions were thoroughly investigated.

Limitations

Although I intended to give a thorough examination of the topic of RJ's perceived experiences and the actual lived experience, there inevitably were limitations. The primary

limitation was that I worked in the district being studied. Although I was not a teacher at the chosen high school, I was familiar with some of the staff members. One of the teachers I interviewed was a friend. I was also familiar with some of the district's disciplinary regulations and how it implemented its RJ practices. I was able to limit my familiarity with people interviewed and reduce my potential bias by coding under pseudonyms.

The COVID-19 epidemic also hampered this qualitative case study. When the educational professionals were interviewed, they had been teaching virtually for a year and a half. Multiple interviewees mentioned that they believe their responses and experiences may be complicated by this factor. Discipline difficulties were substantially less frequent during the COVID-19 era. According to one administrator, the frequency of office referrals and disciplinary issues was significantly less during this time.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the research design that I used for this study. First, I decided that this would be an instrumental, qualitative case study. This is because the instrumental case study develops an understanding of a specific issue, such as RJ in a Midwestern, midsized, urban, high school with a high population of Black students. I used questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to complete my study. Using the process described earlier, I was able to solicit 32 survey responses and seven participants agreed to be interviewed. For data analysis, I used descriptive coding to harvest responses based on the topic. Then, using in vivo coding, I generated categories based on the participants' literal responses. This chapter then described the study's limitations and the methods described here. The primary limitations of this study were my employment at the school district being studied and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Future researchers should be able to nearly replicate this study by following the methods outlined earlier.

CHAPTER IV. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

To analyze the use of RJ in an urban high school, approximately 50 professionals from the chosen high school were given the survey to complete, with 32 responses returned. Of the survey participants, two administrators, one social worker, and five teachers were interviewed about their perceptive of RJ and how they implement it in their schools and classrooms. By providing their contact information in the final survey question, these professionals volunteered for further participation in this study (the interview). The interview and survey were designed to elicit responses that provided context and answers to the research questions: (1) What are these school professionals' perceptions of the use of RJ? and (2) How are RJ processes being implemented in an urban high school in Michigan?

RJ is viewed in two different ways in this study. First, this paper examined the perceived use of RJ in relationship repair and disruptive behavior management. Second, the actual

implementation of RJ at the school was divided into two categories: RJ as a means to repair relationships and RJ as a tool for behavior management. These findings attempted to provide answers to the research questions. These were the themes that developed through the literature review and "precoding" of the interview data.

Perception: Restoring Relationships

RJ is used to restore relationships, which is a core tenet (Mullet, 2014, p. 158). This theme was found in the educators' responses to the survey. D. Statler (administrator) explained that RJ was a way for individual parties or groups to work out differences in a safe, controlled environment. He had taken a class at the local law school on the "Art of Negotiation" that informed their understanding of the benefits of RJ. This 6-week class outlined the legal and practical methods behind negotiating between two parties. This class taught Statler, "The whole art of negotiating, making sure everyone can live with the outcome." Both administrators (Statler and Waldorf) agreed that the process requires a skilled facilitator and that it is often the delivery of this RJ professional that determines the success of the program. "If the facilitator is not adequate the students may be very reluctant to be vulnerable in front of a stranger (Statler)." To ensure that all parties are at ease, it is hoped that this strong facilitator can help in resolving any conflicts that may arise between two parties or two individuals.

When they can share their perspectives, Honeydew stated, "It becomes such a wonderful moment of understanding and just two people that are working together to build a relationship is just absolutely wonderful." She described a situation where two girls had gotten into a verbal altercation because one of them refused to give the other a ride home, forcing the other to take the bus. They were able to establish an understanding of the situation from all perspectives by

sitting down with both girls. The RJ process let the girls speak honestly and openly, allowing them to mend their relationship.

One of the biggest concerns the teachers had was the prevention of fights. They appeared to be hoping that RJ would serve as an effective tool in the prevention process. RJ was viewed to gain the students' trust. The students need to trust that the third-party negotiator would eliminate prejudice and as Fred mentioned, "They would be able to see things down the middle."

Some teachers viewed RJ as a program designed to rekindle people, and students, in the idea that things can be reconciled and the faith that their side of the story can be voiced. Many of the teachers explained that they could explain their actions and feelings to a neutral arbitrator if the punishment was not the intended outcome. F. Pepper remarked, "If we can talk about things, I think that can help a lot, I think it builds trust to give because the students will trust that we will handle a situation fairly."

The teachers and administrators have related their perception that RJ can be used as a tool to repair broken relationships. They also emphasize the importance of having a neutral, skilled facilitator. One benefit of RJ was seen as the prevention of further conflict leading to physical altercations or violence. Together, these educators have expressed their belief that RJ can help students develop social–emotional growth. This growth can be seen to repair relationships and the belief that conflicts can be resolved peacefully.

Perception: Behavior Intervention

Although not considered a central focus of RJ, 17 of 32 respondents viewed RJ as a behavioral response. Teachers considered insubordination (mentioned by four teachers) or classroom disruptions (mentioned by five teachers) as situations requiring referral to an RJ

professional. Multiple people mentioned RJ as a response to "behavioral issues." J. Fiama (teacher) revealed that their perceived purpose of RJ is for disruptions in the class that cannot be stopped or are repeated. This use of RJ for behavioral issues demonstrates a leaning toward a climate that is more punitive than restorative. However, 70% of the surveyed respondents answered that their school is both punitive and restorative when asked whether they would classify it as more of a punitive or restorative environment. L. Zeland (teacher) stated that they have referred students to RJ in order for them to avoid attending class. F. Pepper, a veteran teacher, described RJ as "a process dealing with behavioral issues and finding effective ways to handle behavior." Survey respondents said that they referred students to RJ for issues such as disruptive behavior, insubordination, and being kicked out of class multiple times. These data imply that RJ has been used in response to a behavioral issue.

According to Lisa M. Bonney, executive director of the Resolution Services Center of Central Michigan, the center conducted approximately 115 cases with 207 students at the high school in this study during the 2021–2022 school year. She stated that approximately 512 suspension days were averted that year (Bonney, personal communication, March 30th, 2023).

Mr. Statler emphasized that he believes RJ was used as an alternative to suspension when interviewed to gauge their perception of RJ as a tool for reducing negative behavior. He remarked, "Instead of having this young person suspended, they can go through restorative justice." He believes that it helps in this way and has been able to resolve many situations that could have resulted in suspension. He added that he likes to make sure that his teaching staff and administrators are aware of his desire for them to use that practice. He wants to make sure it's actively used and that it is a resource for keeping students from being suspended from school.

When dealing with problematic behavior, RJ is seen to present consequences in a way that "doesn't have to look so punishable."

According to O. Waldorf (administrator), RJ is a process that teachers and administrators use to deal with behavior issues and find effective ways to handle the behavior. "What we're trying to do is have our students change their behavior and complete documentation on top of it, are things changing or not." When focusing on changing behavior, Waldorf emphasized the importance of monitoring and documenting the behavior to see if it had changed.

Both teachers and administrators agreed that RJ can be an effective tool in reducing the number of suspensions and expulsions. They have referred students to RJ for a variety of reasons including fighting, disruptive behavior, bullying, and insubordination. These situations traditionally would result in a suspension or expulsion. Additional examples of behavior that resulted in a referral to the RJ office were chronic tardiness and refusal to participate in class. In the past, these students also would have been suspended for these behaviors. One teacher claimed that RJ can be used to prevent students from dropping out. Waldorf said that RJ is seen to "Keep kids in school." She wanted all educators to be trained in RJ methods and recognize their benefit in changing student behavior. Although many educators favor more punitive measures, they are aware that the system of suspensions and expulsions is ineffective. They believe that RJ can be used to alter student behavior and reduce the rate of punitive consequences for behavior. They are basing this perception on their personal experiences with RJ.

Implementation: Restoring Relationships

As they completed the survey, the respondents were asked for their reasons for referring students to RJ. Their responses reflected the use of RJ to restore relationships. These reasons

included incidents of students talking about each other, which may end up leading to rumors and threats of a fight. They also referred to friend groups taking sides after the breakup of a relationship as an attempt to preempt rumors of a fight brewing. Other reasons were conflicts with other students, arguments with peers or teachers, disagreements, fighting during class, refusal to get along with a classmate, physical altercations, threatening staff, staff conflict occasionally, fights, and disagreements. These reasons for referral reflect the assertion that RJ can be used by administration and teaching staff to repair relationships.

The consensus among those interviewed is that RJ happens typically between two individuals or two groups. F. Pepper added that it is an opportunity to resolve issues in a "respectful, controlled environment." He also emphasized the importance of community building from "day one." L. Zeland (teacher) reiterated this sentiment when he stated that using RJ gives the "victims a voice to air grievances," which helps in reconciling the relationship without suspension. Multiple respondents relayed their personal experiences or witnessed experiences with RJ. J. Fiama (teacher) described how they intervened in a situation involving two students who were having an interpersonal conflict and used RJ principles and "get them to understand why the other one thinks the way they do." The two girls were able to speak their side of the story in private when this teacher took them away. He reportedly used a painted rock as a talking stick to prevent interruptions when it was not their turn. Another teacher described a situation where they "share what I have with the students with them and they share what they have with me from there, what we do is we just tried to build a relationship." These examples help develop the theme that RJ is often used to build and maintain relationships.

As educational professionals, those interviewed recognized the value that RJ brought to the district. Many people claimed that it changed the outcome of situations that would have escalated to violence and suspension. One person said RJ was “an attempt to reach a sense of justice.” Another person said RJ was instrumental “in addressing bullying issues and finding effective ways to handle the behavior.” These comments help to support the idea that RJ can play a significant role in reducing suspensions and expulsions.

These teachers expect that in time, the RJ process will be a student-led initiative, “Kids would also self-refer,” they would say, “I’m having, you know, an issue with this other kid…” (Pepper). Students have been reported to have requested RJ to help mend a broken relationship. Finding common ground is the whole art of negotiating, making sure everyone can live with the outcome. Honeydew said, “RJ gives you a better way to resolve issues and to hear everyone’s voice.” She emphasized that mending the relationship is what matters most.

The school social worker (Z. Rose) suggested that the downside of suspending kids who were having issues is that they leave, and they don’t tackle the problem. She has seen this conflict exacerbated over social media and when they come back to school, “All hell breaks loose.” She added that the administration is trying to help the staff move away from suspensions.

In the past, the school has had an outside agency for RJ, claims Waldorf. Most of the interviewees described a room in the office area where RJ professionals would hold restorative circles as well as individual circles. Pepper said, “I think it’s valued, it’s something that our district is using, and it helps change the outcome of our suspension rate and the outcome of situations that would have resulted in fights or violence.” He reported that they have had some fantastic “RJ people.”

The value of RJ according to Honeydew is that, “There are some intimate details that you can get to with restorative practices that you might not have.” She saw this as especially true when RJ allowed her to do some “deep diving into the student’s background.” In certain situations, the teacher may also pull in parents and significant others who can provide further details. The introduction of a third party into a situation can help reduce bias and provide for a solution that is “down the middle of the road.”

According to Statler, there have been more conflicts in certain years because of heightened tensions and relationship stress among the students. He believes that these situations could have been worse. The school has also had years where the benefit of using RJ has coincided with the suspension rate at an all-time low. This was very exciting for this administrator, who attributes RJ as playing a big part. Again, he emphasized the need for a competent facilitator, “I think a lot of times, you can avoid serious punishment, you can diffuse situations, so they don’t get worse. People can hold grudges for a long time unless it’s nipped in the bud. And I think that’s one of the major positive outcomes of RJ.” According to Lisa Bonney, the Resolution Services Center began their implementation of RJ in this school in 2017. There was a drop of 299 suspension days averted from 2017 to 2020. This data trend was interrupted by the COVID-19 outbreak because schools were closed or open virtually, therefore there was no behavioral data available for the 2020–2021 school year. Zeland revealed that 4 years ago, she had a series of romantic situations and fights where other students from other schools were coming into their building. She said, “I think that there’s a benefit in addressing those problems early on instead of not acknowledging them because it grows bigger.” Reportedly, the presence of RJ meant fewer tensions, and fewer of those larger fights because

there is an outlet. Pepper cautioned, “Once somebody’s problem gets into social media, it’s no longer just our building.”

The school is working to train everyone on how to facilitate an RJ circle as part of their effort to develop RJ as more than just a place where students can go. Fiama relayed that he has done informal conferences between two students. He reported that at their most recent staff meeting, they talked in depth about having everybody trained in RJ to make it more than just a pull-out but a school-wide initiative.

Honeydew reported that their school holds conferences, uses peer mediation, and emphasizes community building when asked about RJ practices. She describes the administration, the teacher, and the student working together to resolve the issue. A back-and-forth dialogue between the adults that shares information required to mend a relationship between that student and the teacher facilitates this relationship.

Zeland described their experience with RJ this way; “I would see the outcome; I have had students that went to restorative and came back with a changed perspective and a change of attitude. They were able to communicate to me the things that were going on in their life which made a huge difference in the way I interacted with them.” Fiama complimented this reflection and said that after the RJ circle, he became more aware that some issues served as triggers for the student. He gave an example of a scenario in which they would use RJ methods to discuss a “heated” situation with students. First, they would try to get each student to explain their side. The RJ professional would then intervene to try and calm them down and help them understand each other. Maybe through this process, the students would realize, “The way they both think is

wrong, and just because you and I don't agree with something, doesn't mean it needs to get nasty."

Pepper explained that RJ is used not only with individuals but also with friend groups. "RJ has been a really good way to get a handle on the core of the problem and squelch it before it gets really big." RJ has also been used at this school as part of a reentry plan for two students who were suspended or expelled for fighting.

RJ sessions don't always lead to a perfect reconciliation between the parties involved. Fiama relayed his experiences with unsuccessful meetings. Students who previously attended unsuccessful meetings may now be aware of a place where they can be heard. Now that they can pinpoint where the problem is, these students can begin to work both from the outside and the inside. Honeydew recalls that in the RJ process, she acted as a referee to help the students overcome their differences, "because no matter where you go, no matter what you do, there's always going to be somebody that you're going to end up having to interact with that you don't see eye to eye. That's just the way the ball bounces, that's life."

A common theme that RJ can be used to mend damaged relationships emerged within the interview and survey responses. RJ was also used to prevent situations that could have resulted in physical altercations or further conflicts. RJ was also described to allow students to understand their feelings and emotional triggers. Overall, a majority of those interviewed considered RJ to help students develop self-determination so that they could use the skills they learned in future situations.

Implementation: Behavior Intervention

Beyond the building of relationships, RJ is often seen as a response to behavior. This is not part of the original RJ philosophy as laid out by Mullett (2014). In the studied school, RJ is "A room in the office where they would hold circles and individual circles." According to Statler, "We have a core group of our staff trained right now." He intended to have six core staff trained (student support specialists, counselors, behavior specialists, and administrators) by late fall 2021.

When asked why they referred students for RJ services, 17 of the 32 respondents replied that they were referred for fights, disagreements, and other relationship issues. In this open-ended question, fighting was specifically mentioned 13 times, conflicts within friend groups 11 times, bullying five times, and staff conflict two times. This demonstrates an emphasis on relationships and their perception that RJ is intended to mend those relationships within the school community.

The biggest benefit of RJ was that 17 out of 32 survey respondents agreed that it was an alternative to suspension. Waldorf said, "We know suspension does not change behavior" and "RJ is a resource to keep students in school." Numerous students were being suspended from Student Services (central office) and depending on the situation, RJ would be part of the solution. There would be fewer pupils being suspended in Michigan if the state did not have zero-tolerance standards. In addition to being used to patch up broken relationships, RJ is used as a prerequisite for students returning to school after a suspension due to misbehavior.

Pepper described his use of punitive measures in managing behavior. When asked whether teachers in their school were more punitive, he laughed and said, "Yeah, me! I see myself and some teachers who will stick to it until the day we die!" Although he claims to be

punitive in approach, he responded that he uses RJ to avoid serious punishments and to diffuse situations so they don't get worse. He described that he would have RJ professionals come and talk to a student if there was a problem. The teaching staff as a whole still did not always automatically think that certain situations should be brought to RJ. According to Statler, there is a core group of teachers who refer students based on their interactions with students and their level of understanding of the RJ process.

According to Waldorf, they (administrators) handled at least 60% of the referrals to the RJ individuals. "If a student gets pulled down to the principal's office, you know kids aren't necessarily freaked out about that like it might not be a bad thing." She emphasized community building from the start to change students' behavior. She also believed that RJ could decrease the disparity in suspension rates between White and Black males. She stated that RJ can provide this benefit, "If it's done with fidelity, and if it's done with sincerity and if it's done without bias."

Rose explained that at one point in time, RJ was being used to replace punitive responses. She said that this approach had a flaw in that the administration frequently treated the students as "friends." She continued to elaborate that "favoritism or disregard has been something we've all dealt with." She argued that regardless of the disciplinary measure used, behaviors don't change when this occurs. Not all administrators were said to "befriend" the students, other administrators were said to be very punitive, and this resulted in very mixed messages. When asked about what was happening in the RJ room, none of the others interviewed voiced this same concern.

When asked which issues prompted a referral to RJ, the educators gave the following answers: racism (racist remarks), assault and battery, bullying, chronic tardiness, anxiety, and

refusal to participate. Verbal outbursts during class, disruptive behavior, and threatening staff were all observed in the classroom and can all be termed insubordination. Students had also been referred for mental health concerns including very suicidal behavior; however, it is unclear what the role of the restorative professional would be in this situation.

Before a crisis worsens, RJ methods are seen to diffuse situations. Rose explained, “It’s doing a crisis intervention with the kid, helping them understand what their role was in any situation. What can they do to help repair the harm.” This incident shifts from the realm of strict punishment to one of personal responsibility and relationships. Zeland described RJ as a process dealing with “Behavioral issues and bullying and finding effective ways to handle the behavior.” This made him a big proponent of using RJ and ensuring that each situation is reviewed to see if they can use restorative. He intended to use it in those situations. Pepper explained that attempts to replace punitive measures had previously been made, but “The biggest thing yet, that has not yet happened is follow-through from it.”

Multiple teachers stated that often kids are referred to RJ for avoiding coming to class. Some students are avoiding a teacher’s class that they don’t want to go to. Students were said to be avoiding class because the teacher told them they are disrespectful; although the students do not feel that they were being disrespectful, they were just trying to “make a point.” Fiama explained that it has been beneficial to know that RJ exists and that he can refer students. Fiama used the example of a student who struggles greatly with socializing with her peer group. He referred this student to RJ because she uses social struggles as an excuse for procrastination and absence from school.

This school has included the CR-PBIS framework into its curriculum to address and "to respond and be proactive about student behavior that is understanding of different cultures and backgrounds. It's a way to positively build students up and give them the skills to handle issues" as described by a teacher interviewed. This support system, which may relate to RJ, helps to promote good conduct throughout the entire school. Zeland said that this is ideal if it doesn't seem like "one more new thing" or one thing that they are going to discontinue when something else comes along. She was concerned that RJ and CR-PBIS were viewed as separate entities although there was an obvious connection "right in the classroom."

Pepper responded that he made a plea to the parents if the CR-PBIS doesn't work. If it did not work, the RJ professional was asked to intervene and assist them in making changes. RJ has been suggested as a method for assisting students to have more introspection into their behaviors and identify which events trigger them. They have seen absenteeism and truancy become less by using RJ this way.

Honeydew reported that she believed some students seemed anxious about going to RJ. She responded, "You don't have to go through this, but you should give it a try, check it out, nobody is going to let anything happen in that meeting. If things get out of hand people stop the meeting and change instruction." She believed RJ could be improved by helping students understand it more as a normal process instead of punishment, in terms of students who are new to the district or who are newer to experiencing challenges in school.

Students can better grasp their role in any situation when RJ is used as a crisis intervention to help mend relationships. Rose observes the presence of students who have experienced trauma:

> When these traumatized students come to school they come in and they're already reactive to anybody because they are on edge so they're anxious. These students come from a very traumatic life outside of school that becomes evident in their relationships within the school environment. When more than one student with the same kind of outlook is together, it makes it very difficult for them to be positive and empathetic with each other. This causes breakdowns in communication and that can be a big hurdle to the success of an RJ approach. RJ is becoming used more with students who are at risk for multiple conflicts.

This demonstrates that this social worker is using a trauma-informed approach with her students who may have very turbulent lives outside of school. This is related to the RJ philosophy because in RJ the student is viewed as a complex persona within a complex school environment.

The benefit of the implementation of RJ in Honeydew's perspective is that she has seen "Absenteeism stop, truancy stop or becomes less due to students' change in attitude." I was unable to confirm this assertion with the student's overall attendance data. Waldorf explained that the biggest obstacle is proving to the staff that it works and not folding under pressure, "People you know, they want someone's head for this." She was implying that when a disparaging event occurs, someone must be held accountable. She sees that the community can come to a common ground and address the situation; there may be consequences to face, but "it doesn't have to look so punishable." The Office of School Culture (Central Office), which dictates the school-wide initiative, benefits from RJ in this scenario.

Finally, Rose hoped that the students would believe they had a legitimate chance to defend their actions and their feelings to a neutral arbitrator. This ideal situation can arise when

punishment is not the goal, but rather the idea of people voicing their side of the story. If both the students and educational staff are willing to make the effort to incorporate the idea of "talk therapy" into the curriculum, this idea of talking things out will ultimately be beneficial. Zeland corroborated, "I think that would have a positive effect on suspensions."

According to those surveyed, RJ is used as an alternative to suspension was its greatest advantage. Following a behavioral incident, the student is referred to the RJ office according to the school's RJ procedure. RJ circles and peer mediation will be held in this office by an RJ professional. Teachers mentioned that although they believed they were punitive in their responses to behavior, they also believed that RJ could be used for behavioral consequences. In this study, the school used CR-PBIS strategies to address behavioral issues such as absenteeism and truancy. Many educators stated that they believe RJ can be used in conjunction with this framework. The administration primarily used RJ as a tool to reduce the rates of suspensions. According to Lisa Bonney, there were fewer cases of RJ in 2021–2022 than there were in 2017–2018 (Bonney, personal communication, March 30th, 2023).

Summary of Findings

Following this qualitative case study, two themes emerged. The first theme is the use of RJ to mend and heal relationships. The second theme is the use of RJ as a response to behavior. One teacher in this study described RJ as "A way for people to air their grievances and come to a mutual understanding." They see this as a positive way to mediate and resolve conflict. RJ was also regarded as an opportunity for people to get together, restore their relationships, and prevent situations that would have otherwise resulted in fights or violence. Their perception of the nature of RJ is that it allows the individual an opportunity to fix the harm while simultaneously giving

the victim, or another individual, an opportunity to express how they were harmed, giving them a voice. B. Honeydew (teacher) explained RJ as a way for students and staff to communicate with each other openly and honestly.

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

Restorative practices have been endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice for improving overall school discipline and for improving culture and climate (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The philosophical foundation of RJ, which emphasizes the inherent worth and well-being of all individuals, sets it apart from other safe-school and anti-bullying initiatives (Vaandering, 2009).

The previous chapter presented the findings of this study based on interviews with eight educators and 32 survey respondents. The research questions to which the findings were most relevant were as follows: (1) What are these urban school professionals' perceptions of the use of RJ? and (2) How are RJ processes being implemented in an urban high school in Michigan?

Background

The school community must acknowledge the need for change as viewed from existing school data and state data. RJ needs a paradigm shift from the traditional authoritarian, punitive approach to a caring, involved community with a language of mutual respect to be successful (Berkley, 2016). A teacher participant in this study relayed that he has had incidents where a student was sent out of the room because they were "disrespectful," but the student explained that they didn't comprehend why the teacher thought they were disrespectful. The teacher

continued by stating that the "cultural differences" between the Black student and their White teacher were the cause of this disagreement. The source of this conflict was said to occur because "The student who is more animated is going to be the one suspended." Another participant disagreed, saying, "I don't think race plays a part in it, just from what I've seen."

As Cama described, "The basic philosophical tenets of RJ lie within its purpose of restoring the harm to a victim or community through social justice values that foster healing, equity, and the rebuilding of relationships" (2019, p. 91). RJ practitioners seek to transform a person's mistake into a positive learning experience. RJ supports the growth of the neighborhood and recognizes how we all need help and that helping others benefits everyone involved at the same time. Everyone is both a giver and a receiver in this context (Pranis, 2005).

Perceptions of the Use of RJ

Some administrators and staff in this study believed that RJ was only about discipline. This was exemplified by a teacher who commented that the students were initially sent to the principal's office for discipline and that it was the principal who referred them to the RJ office. A principal supported this claim by saying that he estimates that 60% of referrals to RJ are made by the administration. This contradicts the sentiments expressed by Cama that "There is no punitive thinking in RJ, every incident is considered a learning experience, and consequences are part of that experience" (2019, p. 95).

Many of the educators' remarks implied that RJ is more frequently used for behavioral interventions than for community building. They perceived RJ as a reactionary approach that was a response to a misdeed or wrongdoing. According to Cama (2019), the failure of RJ in his study

appeared to be caused by "Largely a misconception among administration and staff that RJ is about discipline" (p. 95). This same misconception appears to be the case in this study.

Conversely, a few educators also mentioned RJ as a preemptive measure. Some saw circle conferences as a method to mitigate the behaviors before a major incident. Circle conferences were thought to be crucial for lowering the incidence of at-risk behaviors and ensuring effective student outcomes when held frequently. An important detail that was mentioned by most of the educators was the concept that RJ should be about relationships between victim and perpetrator. These interventions were said to have happened in the classroom rather than in the RJ office. This serves as the conceptual foundation for RJ work in the school.

Implementation of RJ Processes

One teacher explained that the school's use of CR-PBIS attempts to mitigate the racial component of the school's discipline. They remarked, "As far as RJ and CR-BIS are concerned, they've kind of been two different entities but I mean there's an obvious connection right in the classroom." Another teacher remarked, "RJ and CR-PBIS have never been linked in the past. I'm very interested in how this is all going to play together now that we're all getting trained." Yet another teacher described CR-PBIS as a "reward system" and believes "We've done a good job of combining RJ with CR-PBIS." There is an expectation from the staff that RJ training is forthcoming soon.

In traditional schools, punitive and standardized discipline is used, and offenders are viewed as the root cause of the problem (Vaandering, 2010). The task ahead is to get the school community to accept the philosophy and implement the strategies of RJ practices with fidelity. It

is believed that RJ can diminish racial bias if the program is implemented; as one administrator put it, “Ethically, with fidelity and without bias.”

The respondents reported that their RJ program consisted of an RJ professional, who may have been recruited by the district or an outside agency. When a problem occurred, students were referred to the RJ office. As this RJ person visited their classroom and exchanged emails with the teachers following up on the incident’s participants, one teacher was happy with their interactions with them. Other teachers did not experience this depth of communication and felt that they did not know what was discussed in the RJ office. The caveat of assigning someone sole responsibility is that it opens the door to making RJ role specific. Because the rest of the staff will rely on a single person to conduct interventions, this prevents ownership of the process. The purpose of RJ is to develop a cohesive community where all stakeholders are regarded as valuable participants. The process cannot be effective when only one side of a conflict is engaged.

As seen through the CRT lens, the CR-PBIS program implemented in this district attempts to address behavioral concerns in a culturally sensitive way. When asked what RJ practices looked like in the building, responses showed a pattern that indicated the process was more of a reactive measure than a strategy used for teaching students about actions, consequences, and accountability. This incorrect terminology and the intervention’s purpose revealed a lack of process knowledge and training. This was because of the absence of formal RJ training. Respondents in Cama’s (2019) failed study also cited cases of staff members receiving only minimal training in RJ practices.

School-wide Restorative Practices

Restorative practices work best if they are paired with a school-wide program such as CR-PBIS. The respondents in this study reported that affective and restorative languages are used throughout the building. The CR-PBIS framework is embedded into the curriculum in the school to address and "to respond and be proactive about student behavior that is understanding of different cultures and backgrounds. It's a way to positively build students up and give them the skills to handle issues" as described by a teacher interviewed.

School leaders must create, establish and maintain a safe environment for staff and students to learn and succeed. The restorative approach as a school-wide policy emphasizes effective communication skills for students and staff, making amends for harm and providing students with skills and strategies that help them respond more appropriately in the future (Berkley, 2016). Crowe explains the benefits of the restorative approach as follows:

> When students faced their peers, parents, and school staff within a structured. conversation like youth court or a restorative circle conference, students were held accountable for their actions and required to make amends, making things right in order to rebuild the damaged relationship with the person harmed. (2017, p. 110)

According to principals and teachers who participated in this study, school structures, such as restorative circle conferences, and CR-PBIS initiatives, offer a time and space for everyone affected by any kind of harm to practice empathy (Riestenberg, 2012). CR-PBIS seeks to increase student engagement in the school's culture. This is consistent with Cama's (2019) explanation of engagement, one of the central tenets of RJ. The positive response regarding RJ from those interviewed for this study could be a result of the merger between CR-PBIS and RJ as

both initiatives provide for a "three-tiered, data-driven approach for serving all students school-wide" (Berkley, 2016).

Failure of Zero-tolerance Policies

A different approach is needed to address the situation in our schools because of the failure of zero-tolerance policies. One teacher in this study explained, "Without the zero-tolerance policies in Michigan, there aren't as many students who are being suspended to that office (referring to the Office of School Culture, Central Office)." When a student in this district is about to be expelled or suspended for an extended period, the Office of School Culture is contacted.

Preserving Community

The restorative approach enables offenders to hold themselves accountable for their misdeeds and to remain a part of the community (Costello et al., 2019). It is considered an insult to the community's relationship when a student breaks a regulation. Implementing RJ practices requires a whole school approach as well as the time and effort required to take the adoption process forward successfully. It extends beyond a reaction to bad behavior or offense. Students who are expelled from school for rule-breaking are unable to remain a member of the school community. Students are taught proactive social skills through restorative practices so they can succeed in school and as adults (Berkley, 2016). All people who were interviewed and survey respondents acknowledged the value of these practices. One teacher remarked, "Occasionally we would have them (the RJ professionals) come in to talk to students in the classroom." These findings lead to the conclusion that CR-PBIS and RJ are effective tools for minimizing disruptions to the learning environment.

There may be resistance to the implementation of RJ because teachers and others in the school might not want to drastically alter their attitude to accept the philosophy of nonpunitive responses. This fear of change may be related to the perceived challenge to their authority (Anyon et al., 2016). One interviewee described how they can recall occasions where their fellow staff members simply wanted "*something* to happen," a desire to hold the perpetrator accountable using punitive measures.

Cultural Differences

According to the literature reviewed (Davis, 2019; Delpit, 2013), some of the behaviors that result in exclusionary discipline can be attributed to cultural differences or bias implicit in the disciplinarian. This is further supported by the fact that 80% of the nation's public-school teachers are White, and consequently, implicit bias is more likely to occur in public schools with a majority of students of color (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Statler reported that this was a fact and not necessarily a problem, although he claimed this ratio was concurrent with his experience. Although this administrator did not elaborate on this point, Waldorf reported that the district actively recruits educators of color. This recruitment strategy could potentially minimize the cultural component that contributes to the discipline disparity between Black and White children. One of the teachers interviewed said that they believe that bias toward students of color has a significant impact on school discipline.

When considering the racial implications of RJ, most respondents agreed that there is hope that RJ implementation could reduce the disparities between Black and White males in their suspension and expulsion rates. A growing body of evidence demonstrates how school-based RJ strategies are successfully transforming zero-tolerance discipline and improving educational

conditions and outcomes for youths of color (Alexander, 2012; Anyon et al., 2017; Davis, 2019; Delpit, 2013).

Recommendations

All stakeholders involved in RJ implementation at a school must know what is needed to support and accomplish the planned outcome. The likelihood of a program being successful rises when principals commit to promoting restorative practices (Berkley, 2016). Leaders must be directly involved by modeling the practice and providing opportunities for staff to use restorative dialogue including staff circles at meetings (Berkley, 2016). One teacher interviewed for this project said, “I didn’t get a sense of how it was integrated and if it was integrated well or not.” This teacher had not been formally trained in the RJ model, yet she was expected to use RJ as part of the school-wide behavioral system. Further research could be conducted where principal engagement is controlled, and the outcome of student discipline is measured.

Finally, I gained an interesting knowledge of the perceptions and experiences of the staff and administrators of one urban high school in Michigan. This research revealed that RJ is incompletely implemented in the school. In the eyes of one teacher interviewed, “It didn’t seem to be integrated into the school fabric, I would have liked it, I was hoping that it was more involved.” According to the opinions of the people who were interviewed, RJ is being implemented at their school, but they require additional support and training.

Based on these findings, I recommend that further research be implemented. This research could take the form of an RCT study in which RJ is implemented in a few schools. The school’s discipline data could be compared with those of several other schools where RJ was not implemented. This study will assist in demonstrating the effectiveness of RJ in regard to

discipline data. Although RJ seeks to be different and usually is, some jurisdictions in Canada and the United States have borrowed the term RJ for programs that are "highly punitive and destructive" (Moore, 2003, pp. 34–35). Future studies should look at this subject. Research could be conducted to determine the true nature of RJ and what can truly be described as a restorative process.

Chapter Summary

The principals and teachers who participated in this study believed that relationships were the most beneficial element of RJ. According to Amstutz and Mullet, "Schools that viewed the conflict as a teachable moment and an opportunity for growth intentionally design environments and processes that value relationship-building and community" (2015, p. 35). Whether RJ is used to build relationships or to better manage and control students is a crucial question (Vaandering, 2010). Crowe (2017) explains the critical role that education plays in a child's life:

> Actions and reactions from principals and teachers determine the trajectory of a student's school experience. Decisions about student conduct by principals and teachers have life-changing consequences. A student may be directed on a path to benefit and improve his or her school experience or move toward a downward path, which may lead to the school-to-prison pipeline. (p. 130)

RJ requires strong leadership, which involves principals promoting the continuous message of its significance and the school's commitment to its processes, using the RJ terminology, and elaborating on its effectiveness and impact on teachers and students. It is modeled through adult-to-adult interactions and adult-to-student interactions. Teacher leadership, along with principal leadership, is essential in gaining momentum for the program throughout schools. To discipline

children, parents must explain behavioral expectations and the reasons behind them. “Students learn to self-regulate behaviors based on anticipated social consequences and sanctions from parents, schools, or both” (Crowe, 2017, p. 40).

As discussed, if we want to make a significant change in our communities, there must be a racial component to the discussion about RJ. The potential for mitigation of racial disparities in discipline is evident in the research and in the perceptions of the survey participants in this study. Vaandering (2010) wonders if RJ is just another method used by adults to exert control over kids or a means through which to encourage relationships and respect.

The pattern of findings observed here is in line with the current research on RJ practice in schools. It indicates that the integrity of RJ is called into question when it is perceived as a weak response or no response at all. The imperative for a paradigm shift is described by Davis (2019), “If we are to move into the future, we need to do no less than reimagine what it means to be human in relationship to one another and the Earth and its inhabitants” (p. 92) One of the most fascinating aspects of this field is the diversity of perspectives, experiences, and goals of the people working in it. The future of RJ is exciting but unpredictable because of this diversity.

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APPENDIX A: IRB LETTER

Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB-HSBS) • 2800 Plymouth Rd., Building 520, Room 1170, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2800 • phone (734) 936-0933 • fax (734) 998-9171 • irbhsbs@umich.edu

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To: Lisa Gries
From:

Thad Polk

Cc:

Annie Whitlock
Lisa Gries

Subject: Notice of Exemption for [HUM00185338]

SUBMISSION INFORMATION:

Title: Restorative Justice: A Case Study of an Urban Michigan High School

Full Study Title (if applicable): Restorative Justice: A Case Study of an Urban Michigan High School

Study eResearch ID: HUM00185338

Date of this Notification from IRB: 2/11/2021

Date of IRB Exempt Determination: 2/11/2021

UM Federalwide Assurance: FWA00004969 (For the current FWA expiration date, please visit the UM HRPP Webpage)

OHRP IRB Registration Number(s): IRB00000246

IRB EXEMPTION STATUS:

The IRB HSBS has reviewed the study referenced above and determined that, as currently described, it is exempt from ongoing IRB review, per the following federal exemption category:

EXEMPTION 2(i) and/or 2(ii) at 45 CFR 46.104(d):

Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) **if at least one of the following criteria is met**:

(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that **the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained**, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

(ii) Any disclosure of the **human subjects' responses** outside the research **would not**

reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Note that the study is considered exempt as long as any changes to the use of human subjects (including their data) remain within the scope of the exemption category above. Any proposed changes that may exceed the scope of this category or the approval conditions of any other non-IRB reviewing committees, must be submitted as an amendment through eResearch.

Although an exemption determination eliminates the need for ongoing IRB review and approval, you still have an obligation to understand and abide by generally accepted principles of responsible and ethical conduct of research. Examples of these principles can be found in the Belmont Report as well as in guidance from professional societies and scientific organizations.

SUBMITTING AMENDMENTS VIA eRESEARCH:

You can access the online forms for amendments in the eResearch workspace for this exempt study, referenced above.

ACCESSING EXEMPT STUDIES IN eRESEARCH:

Click the "Exempt and Not Regulated" tab in your eResearch home workspace to access this exempt study.

Thad Polk

Chair, IRB HSBS

APPENDIX B: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE LANSING SCHOOL DISTRICT

Michelle Laing
michelle.laing@lansingschools.net
Phone: 517.755.2027
Fax: 517.755.1049

February 19, 2021
Lisa Gries
257 Shoesmith
Haslett, MI 48840

Re: Project #2102-03

Dear Lisa Gries,

Your Research Request Application entitled Restorative Justice: Case Study in An Urban Michigan High School is Approved. This approval is granted based upon your agreement not to identify the Lansing School District within any publication without obtaining specific written permission from the district and all data will be reported anonymously or as a group data with no

specific identifying information. It is also understood that as the researcher, you will submit to the district a report of the findings within 90 days of the conclusion of the project. The following comments apply specifically to your request

- Consent will be obtained from each participant prior to their participation in the study.

- A list of all persons participating in this study who are not employed by the Lansing School District and who will be entering the building or buildings where the study is to be conducted will be forwarded to the Lansing School District's Department of Accountability and School Improvement to be kept on file before research activities are begun.

- You will not specifically name the Lansing School District, any employees or students of the Lansing School District, or the buildings in which you conducted your research in any papers or publications resulting from this research.

Please be prepared to present a copy of this letter upon request. If you have any questions, need additional information, or encounter other issues during the execution of your study, please do not hesitate to contact me either via telephone at (517) 755-2027 or via email michelle.laing@lansingschools.net.

Thank you for your patience and for your interest in the Lansing School District.

Sincerely,

Michelle Laing

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APPENDIX C: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Thank you for taking the time to answer this questionnaire!

1. What is your position at this school?
2. Does your school use the restorative justice (RJ) process?
3. The Michigan Revised School Code was changed in 2017 to include restorative justice. Are you aware of this change?
4. The academic climate at my school has changed with the addition of RJ to the school code…
5. Have your classroom discipline procedures changed due to the implementation of RJ practices?

6. Who in your school is primarily responsible for implementing RJ practices? Mark all that apply.
7. Punitive climates are based on rules and consequences. Restorative climates rely on relationships to solve problems. Would you consider the climate in your school to be more punitive or restorative?
8. According to Heilbron (2015), “Black students are suspended and expelled at a rate higher than their white peers.” Do you feel that this may be true at your school?
9. From what you know about RJ, do you feel that it can help decrease the discrepancy between Black and white males in suspensions and expulsions?
10. Do you feel that race is a significant factor in the rate of suspensions and expulsions?
11. Does your school use other school-wide behavior/ academic intervention programs? Check all that apply.
12. If you have referred students to RJ intervention, what behaviors led to this referral?
13. Would you be willing to participate in an interview on this topic? The interview will take approximately 30 minutes of your time and will be conducted via UM Zoom—please click on the link below.

Yes, I would be willing to participate in an interview (by clicking “yes” you will be taken to an additional survey that will ask for your contact information)

No, thank you, I do NOT wish to participate

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APPENDIX D: CONSENT FOR SURVEY

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: A CASE STUDY OF AN URBAN MICHIGAN HIGH SCHOOL

HUM# 00185338

Principal Investigator: **Lisa Gries MAT Ed. S. UM-Flint**

Faculty Advisor: Annie Whitlock Ph.D. UM-Flint

You are invited to participate in a research study about the **real-life experience of restorative practices in an urban high school in Michigan.**

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to **complete a 13-question survey about your experience with restorative justice at your school.**

There is no anticipated risk in this study. The participant's identity will be disguised in the final report. Any data collected from surveys or interviews will be considered confidential. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer.

You may not receive any personal benefits from being in this study. However, others may benefit from the knowledge gained from this study.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you can change your mind and stop at any time. You can choose not to **answer any survey questions** for any reason.

If you have questions about this research study, please contact me.

Lisa Gries

lgries@umich.edu

Annie Whitlock

anwhitl@umich.edu

As part of their review, the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences has determined that this study is no more than minimal risk and exempt from on-going IRB oversight.

Your Consent

Consent to Participate in the Research Study

By clicking "I Consent" on this document, you agree to participate in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. If you want a copy of this document, save, and copy the text from this page. If you have any questions about the study after you click on this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

I AGREE

I DO NOT AGREE

APPENDIX E: SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you define restorative justice (RJ) from your perspective?
2. Could you give me a brief history of RJ at your school?
3. Where did the directive for RJ come from? From the superintendent, teachers, school administration, or the state?
4. A new regulation was passed in 2017. If you have been at this school since then, have things changed? Are you aware of this change?

5. What role do you play in the RJ process?
6. In your opinion, how do you think RJ can be better implemented at your school?
7. How do you feel the introduction of RJ has impacted you and your classroom?
8. In your opinion, does RJ create a closer connection between you and your students?
9. How do you feel that RJ has impacted your teaching colleagues?
10. Is there one person who oversees RJ at your school?
11. Have you received training in RJ?
12. What other movements within the school support the RJ model: CR-PBIS, MTSS, or RTI?
13. What aspects of RJ are used most often: circles, conferences, peer mediation, or community building?
14. What are some of the hurdles you face in implementing the RJ program at your school?
15. Do you feel that RJ practice has been effective in decreasing out-of-school suspensions?
16. Do you see a rise in in-school suspensions while using RJ methods?

APPENDIX F: CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW

INFORMATION SHEET

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: A CASE STUDY OF AN URBAN MICHIGAN HIGH SCHOOL

HUM# 00185338

Principal Investigator: **Lisa Gries MAT Ed. S. UM-Flint**

Faculty Advisor: Annie Whitlock Ph.D. UM-Flint

You are invited to participate in a research study about the **real-life experience of restorative practices in an urban high school in Michigan.**

If you agree to participate in the research study, you will be asked to **participate in an interview over UM Zoom that may last 30–40 minutes.**

There is no anticipated risk for this study. The participant's identity will be disguised in the final report. Any data collected from surveys or interviews will be considered confidential. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer.

You may not receive any personal benefits from being in this study. However, others may benefit from the knowledge gained from this study.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you can change your mind and stop at any time. You can choose not to **answer any survey questions** for any reason.

If you have questions about this research study, please contact.

Lisa Gries

lgries@umich.edu

Annie Whitlock

anwhitl@umich.edu

As part of their review, the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences has determined that this study is no more than minimal risk and exempt from on-going IRB oversight.

Your Consent

Consent to Participate in the Research Study

By clicking "I Consent" on this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. If you want a copy of this document, save and copy the text from this page. If you have any questions about the study after you click on this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

I Consent

I DO NOT Consent

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW EMAIL

Dear Colleague:

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the interview portion of the study entitled "Restorative Justice in an Urban High School."

Prior to meeting, it will be necessary for you to consent to be a participant in this study. Please follow the following link to acknowledge your consent.

https://umich.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8ADkrWuXgWgu2vr

Your interview has been scheduled for _____ on _____. You can access the meeting using the following link.

(UM Zoom link)

Your participation is greatly appreciated. By participating in this study, you are engaging in important work that aims to benefit the field of education. You are also helping me further my professional and educational goals. I am looking forward to speaking with you soon.

Thank you very much!

Lisa Gries

APPENDIX H: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear Colleagues:

My name is Lisa Gries, and I am a teacher at Woodcreek Montessori in the classroom for students with emotional impairments. I am also pursuing my Educational Doctorate degree (Ed.D) at the University of Michigan–Flint. It is in this capacity that I am working on my dissertation, and I would like to ask you for your help.

My dissertation topic is restorative justice. You may be aware that the Michigan Revised School Code was implemented in 2017. This amendment included a list of seven considerations that need to be made before a child is expelled or suspended. One item on the list is the consideration of restorative justice. My project is aimed at exploring the impact of this change on how students are suspended or expelled.

My specific research questions are as follows:

1) What are these urban school professionals' perceptions of the use of RJ?

2) How are restorative justice processes being implemented in an urban high school in Michigan?

I am asking you to first participate in an online survey. This survey contains 13 questions that will require less than 5–10 minutes. After the survey, I will conduct interviews of interested participants. It is my hope that many of you are willing to help in this endeavor. This survey is anonymous, and your information will not be identified or shared.

Thank you very much for your willingness to participate in this study. I appreciate your time! Please follow this link to the online survey consent form and subsequent survey: https://umich.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_exHUHVwiZnxWrwF

Sincerely,

Lisa Gries MAT, Ed S.

I have provided a link to download the consent form to print for your record:

https://umich.box.com/s/uxu6mrt5yvzjzrav06mchsad5estaq5m