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THE INFLUENCE OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICE ON SCHOOL CLIMATE

A MASTER'S THESIS
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OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY
KAY E. LISTER

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BETHEL UNIVERSITY

THE INFLUENCE OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICE ON SCHOOL CLIMATE

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APPROVED

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Abstract

The impact of restorative practices on school climate is affirmed as the fostering of teacher-student relationship impacts connection, empathy, and social skills. Bullying decreased, self-advocacy increased, and school communities became both more present and calmer comparatively. Communication increased with an acquisition of restorative language, learning outcomes increased when students were in the classroom, and authenticity was formed. The mode of restorative intervention was interchangeable to best meet the needs of the proactive or reactive approach. The impact of school climate and the longevity of restorative practice was dependent upon the process of implementation, the culture of the school, and investment to create real, sustainable change.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The primary goal of an educational entity is to create a safe and conducive learning environment. The call for legislation changes in response to mass school shootings led to exclusionary school discipline with zero tolerance. However, the ensuing data was counterproductive to its goal with increased disciplinary referrals, suspensions, expulsions, as well as decreased graduation rates and formation of the school to prison pipeline.

The punitive approach to discipline referrals, whether it is minor or major, is incongruent with a desired positive outcome. In both the field of education and social work the core components are relationships, communication skills, and social skill sets. Restorative practice offers an alternative approach to discipline in which a student is challenged to repair harm and restore the relationship. Therefore, I query further to analyze the data on the correlation between restorative practice and school climate.

History of Restorative Practice

The implementation of a whole school approach to restorative practice and its potential influence on school climate is the query. Restorative justice in the criminal justice system was first implemented in the 1970s with victim-offender mediations. In the 1990s, restorative practices were first introduced to the application of schools by defining restorative with the International Institute for Restorative Practice (Wachtel, 2016). Prevention focused on building relationships and community. Intervention focused on repairing the harm and restoring community (Gregory et al., 2016). Another founding

father emphasized the core components of respect, responsibility, and relationship (Zehr, 2002).

However, the impact of mass school shootings across the country that did not discriminate against victims demanded a response by the public to take action. Parents wanted their children to be safe at school. Pleas for legislation changes resulted in punitive discipline and zero-tolerance (Armour, 2016; Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Morrison et al., 2005; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). The data on the overall impact of exclusionary school discipline resulted in increased school discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions (Acosta et al., 2019; Augustine et al., 2018; Duggins et al., 2016; Gonzalez, 2012). Disengagement followed (Huang & Anyon, 2020), as well as a decreased likelihood of graduation (Gregory et al., 2016).

Restorative practices were one mode of intervention used to intercede. A composite of circling, class meetings, restorative conferences, and restorative language were intertwined with given Tier 1-Tier 3 systems of support (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015; Evanovich et al., 2020; Maynard & Weinstein, 2019; Nance, 2016). Alternatives to discipline included Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) and social-emotional learning (SEL) (Darling-Hammond, 2019; Mergler et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2017). A new perspective included an examination of socioeconomic disparities and ways to bridge that gap (Payne, 2015).

Efforts to provide support may reduce bullying/aggression and increase resilience in victimized youth (Duggins et al., 2016; High, 2008; Latimer et al., 2015; O'Brennan & Furlong, 2010; Ttofi & Farrington, 2008). The far-reaching depths of depression and

suicidal ideation reports further confirm that students were left feeling unsafe at school (Arango et al., 2018).

The whole school approach to restorative practice impacted teacher-student relationships (Bouchard et al., 2016; Kaveney & Drewery, 2011; Skrzpek et al., 2020; Short et al., 2018; Silverman & Mee, 2018). Implementation of whole school change took time to develop a comprehensive plan of sustainability (Gonzalez, 2012; McCluskey et al., 2008). Readiness to implement a productive restorative program included fostering staff readiness to engage with the initiative (Garnett et al., 2020; McCluskey et al., 2008; Short et al., 2018).

The evidence found in scholarly research of restorative practice implemented in a whole school approach to impact school climate is compelling. There was a decrease in discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions (Gonzalez, 2012; Thapa et al., 2013). A proactive plan to address academics and accommodations may be beneficial (Brand et al., 2003; Gonzalez, 2012). The positive outcomes of restorative practice are evident (Wong et al., 2011). Yet, there is still room for improvement if restorative practices are to be sustained (Augustine et al., 2018; Losen, 2015; Song & Swearer, 2016).

Definition of Terms

Circling is an intentional dialogue space which is structured to foster interaction for increased understanding, empowerment, and connection among its participants (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015). Class meetings are a circle with format to address issues within the classroom, effects of the issue, share examples, and resolve to address the problem (Kaveney & Drewery, 2011).

Restorative Justice is the criminal justice perspective of offender-victim mediations (Wachtel, 2016). Restorative Practice is a continuum of informal and formal processes to communicate feelings, reflect upon actions, and to focus on the educational application of repairing harm and restoring relationships (Wachtel, 2016).

Social-emotional learning (SEL) are learning environments that foster healthy relationships, teach specific SEL strategies to meet the needs of the student, and prepare students to increase awareness in their interactions by use of social skills (Darling-Hammond, 2019). School climate is the overall temperature of school in relation to both teacher and student perspectives of positive or negative factors, outcomes, and extenuating circumstances (Augustine et al., 2018).

Research Focus

As I began to research the correlation between restorative practice and school climate, I learned to define the definitions more clearly with keywords and themes. The three main themes that prevailed were exclusionary school discipline, restorative practice interventions, and whole school change. Exclusionary school discipline would incorporate teacher-student relationships, zero tolerance, bullying-victimization, and whole school change.

I progressively understood the transition from restorative justice which was the criminal justice perspective to restorative practice was an emphasis on repairing harm and restoring relationship in schools. I delineated the need to understand punitive discipline referrals, suspensions, and bullying to assess negative outcomes of behavior and how this was impacted by restorative practice. The data from the school to prison pipeline consisted of an increase in frustration for being out of the classroom, decline in academic

grades, decrease in attendance, repeated discipline referrals, and students dropping out of school.

I chose to focus on determining if there was a difference in the different types of restorative practices – with an emphasis on circling and class meetings. At that time, I concurrently examined alternatives to punitive discipline and behavior intervention approaches such as PBIS and SEL. I chose to further examine connectedness and positive education as another way to foster community.

I also wanted to examine the efficacy of restorative practices as a whole school approach and its impacts on school climate. I wanted data on not only discipline referrals and suspensions, but also on teacher-student perspectives, student engagements, and academic success. I wanted to examine the implementation process, comprehensive training of staff, consistency of administration, and sustainability of restorative practice.

The literature review continued to return to its focus of the core guiding question of assessing how restorative practices influence school climate.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search Procedures

The empirical studies were in a few select professional locations. The primary source was the Bethel University Library search engines comprised of EBSCO, Education Database, Psychology Database, Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts (ASSIA), ProQuest, Scopus, and ERIC. I also utilized Google Scholar to obtain resources. The keywords that were used in these searches included: "restorative practice," "restorative justice," "school climate," "exclusionary school discipline," and "school to prison pipeline." The format of this chapter is to review the literature in four sections, in this order: History of Restorative Practice, Exclusionary School Discipline, Restorative Practices, and Whole School Change.

Exclusionary School Discipline

Researchers Gregory, Clawson, Davis, and Gerewitz (2016) researched the teacher-student relationship and school discipline. There was an initial two-day restorative practice workshop in which 29 teachers chose to participate in the surveys in the first year of implementing restorative practice in their given high schools. The 29 classrooms contained 412 students (53% male, 47% female; 38% reported parent having a high school diploma or less, 62% reported parent having completed some level of higher education; and 44% White, 21% Latino, 3% American Indian, 2% Asian, 5% African American, and 25% Mixed Race) from the diversified student group. The students responded to how the teacher utilized the restorative intervention and the teachers responded similarly their implementation of it in the classroom.

Researchers Gregory et al. (2016) further examined discipline referral records. There were more than 120 discipline referrals, of which the researchers focused on referrals related to misconduct/defiance with behaviors such as disrespect, insubordination, profanity/obscenity, misconduct, and disorderly conduct. Research studies have utilized discipline referrals as a barometer of classroom and school climate. A teacher-reported cooperation scale was further analyzed to measure student engagement and classroom disruptions by students.

The findings from the study assess the teacher-student relationship in correlation to restorative practice and discipline. One finding concluded that when a teacher shared that a student was cooperative, then the student seemed to see the teacher as respectful. In regression analysis, it was found that higher implementation of restorative practice, per student perspective, correlated to decreased misconduct/defiance referrals.

The results indicate that increased use of restorative practice implementation correlates to more positive teacher-student relationships. The student survey and school records support the data found by Gregory et al. (2016). Furthermore, restorative practice implementation may be connected to more equitable disciplinary practices and teacher respect.

Another approach to restorative practice is an examination of discipline referrals by researchers Stinhcomb et al. (2006), who studied the impact of zero-tolerance policies. South St. Paul was the site of the study with initiatives for restorative justice. Three schools, over the course of three years, were analyzed regarding their use of the circling approach in the classroom to repair harm, comprehension of restorative practice, and use of state initiative to promote alternatives to violence. Teachers were given basic training

and then further offered extensive training on restorative practice. Training also included positive behavior supports. The focus was to impact the overall school culture.

Referrals for restorative practice were varied but included rule violations of severe offenses including vandalism, harassment, theft, and arson. The two greatest incident categories were classroom incidents and physical violence. It is estimated that half of the staff used daily circle time in the classroom. Consistent with other schools, there were challenges in the implementation of a new initiative of restorative practice in the classroom.

The findings indicated pre-post changes in each of the three schools in South St. Paul. Lincoln Elementary had the most favorable outcome, with a marked decline in in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and behavior referrals. Stinchcomb et al. (2006) find that physical aggression declined from 773 acts in 1997-1998 to 153 acts in 2000-2001. In-school suspensions declined from 126 in 1999-2000 to 42 in 2000-2001. Out-of-school suspensions declined from 30 in 2000-2001 to 11 in 2000-2001. One additional note is that attendance improved by 10% over the three years, from 85% to 95%.

However, the findings by Stinchcomb et al. (2006) for Kaposia Elementary indicated different results. The in-school suspensions increased and the out-of-school suspensions decreased. A policy change that required the removal of a student with significant behaviors may be a factor. Another contributing factor to this outcome may be the difference that Lincoln staff had six months of prior experience with restorative practice and additional support.

South St. Paul Junior High indicated positive results. There was a marked decline from 110 out of school suspensions in 1998-1999 to 55 in 2000-2001. In-school suspension was not an option at the junior high. One additional factor to consider is that junior high students had experience with restorative practice in elementary school and would initiate circles in the classroom.

The feedback from staff was mixed. The time needed to implement restorative practice was not always well received. On the contrary, others perceived the positive impact of cultural change in the school where students once enemies resolved differences, a sense of fairness was felt, and issues were resolved.

The quest for probing discipline records and the impact of restorative practices continued as researchers Anyon, Stone, Farrar, Jenson, McQueen, Downing, Greer, and Simmons (2016) studied the impact of restorative practice on school disciplinary incidents. The school district was a large, urban district composed of 90,546 students and 180 schools. The findings revealed from 9,921 discipline records that there was an overrepresentation of minority youth and students in special education. Findings further noted that the students who did participate in restorative intervention had decreased the likelihood of receiving an office disciplinary referral the following semester.

Among many professionals, there is a belief that exclusionary school discipline incidentally improves school safety and intensifies racial inequality in both education and incarceration. The Department of Education and Justice, the Council of State Governments, and Discipline Disparities Research to Practice Collaborative (2014) reports recommend that suspension be reduced by alternative practices that may more

effectively influence a change in student behavior, keeping students actively engaged in school, and maintaining a positive school climate.

There is a perception that schools with a high rate of suspensions, expulsions, and law enforcement involvement are less safe per Osher et al. (2014). Moreover, the students who have been suspended or expelled, when compared to students that did not receive disciplinary action, are more likely to be moved from school to the criminal justice system, also known as the school to prison pipeline (Fabelo et al., 2011; Rausch, Skiba, & Simmons, 2004; Skiba et al., 2014). In a Florida study by Belfanz et al. (2015), the team found that, with the given ninth graders, each suspension decreased the student's likelihood of graduating by 20% and decreased the odds of furthering their post-secondary education by 12%. In a Texas study, students that were suspended were three times more likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system in the following year (Fabelo et al., 2011).

The lack of equity and the pernicious effects of suspension have raised concern and driven change among educators to seek an alternative to suspension procedures and policies. The US Departments of Education (DOE, 2014) and Justice endorse that youth need not only be accountable for their actions but also learn from the problem and gain new skills. They suggest that schools may use restorative interventions to improve and foster a diversity of individual skills. Restorative follow-up may include, but is not limited to, further discussing the disciplinary incident, providing opportunities to accept responsibility for their actions, and finding resolution in the repair of harm.

In Anyon et al. (2016) study, the researchers analyzed data from restorative intervention implementation, its outcomes, and predictors for any future outcomes. The

Denver school district was the site of the study, following a school discipline policy reform in 2008. The district policy recommends that a student be offered a restorative intervention for a behavior that leads to disciplinary action, from an administrator or trained staff.

According to the research findings of Anyon et al. (2016), the second-semester school disciplinary referrals were impacted by factors that suggests that restorative intervention participants had decreased probability of receiving a second-semester office disciplinary referral in schools that had higher rates of restorative interventions. The models further find that students of color, eligible for free/reduced lunch, determined to have an emotional disorder, or receiving special education services had a higher likelihood than peers to receive a second semester out of school suspension.

Furthermore, the results of Anyon et al. (2016) indicate that the only student group of English Language Learners had lower odds of participating in a restorative intervention compared to non-English Language Learner students. Additional findings indicate that students who were referred for a greater number of offenses involving interpersonal conflict (bullying, detrimental behavior, and 3rd-degree assault) were most likely to participate in an RI. On the contrary, students referred for drug possession or distribution were less than likely to participate in an RI.

The study suggests that restorative interventions (RI) may be beneficial as an alternative to traditional school discipline. Anyon et al. (2016) suggest that schools may make advances in discipline reductions by an increase in preventative methods.

In a more recent study, researchers Huang and Anyon (2020) studied the impact of the relationships of school discipline with student perceptions of school climate and

attitudes towards school. Set in the Southwestern United States, the study consists of 30,799 sixth through twelfth grade students of 116 secondary schools in one large urban school district. The students completed a Student Satisfaction Survey in the spring of 2016. Students consisted of gender equally divided of which 68% of students receiving free or reduced lunch. The students were 58% Latinx 20.7% White, 13.4% Black, 4.4% other racial groups, and 3.5% Asian. There was a convergence of the student survey with district disciplinary records. The goal of the study was to compare students with a diversity of school discipline resolutions (i.e., OSS, ISS, RP) to non-disciplined peers.

The screening measure created five school climate scales in the areas of disciplinary structure, student support, school bonding, school disengagement, and overall safety. The discipline records were further merged to isolate outcomes. Incidents were separated by level of offense and student perspectives.

Huang and Anyon (2020) findings indicated that students who had received an out of school suspension (OSS) reported decreased perceptions of disciplinary structure, school bonding, and higher levels of student disengagement than peers with no disciplinary referrals. Students with an in-school suspension (ISS) reported similar perceptions as students with an OSS. They further analyzed the correlations of disciplinary referrals and a restorative practice intervention alternative - with no significant data being presented.

The evidence finds that students who received at least one or more out of school or in school suspensions overall had a lower perception of school climates along with a greater ambiguity towards school than peers that were not disciplined. Students with a record of restorative practice interventions overall had greater perceptions of school

climate and school than peers who may have received an out of school suspension (OSS). A concern of exclusion and alienation is expressed for students when they are out of the classroom as punishment. Furthermore, findings suggest that in school suspensions (ISS), like OSS, may diminish relationships with the school and decrease trust in school staff. A student that is separated from the classroom is also separated from support services such as in-person instruction, mental health support, and social-emotional learning opportunities. Although there were no significant restorative practice outcomes with this data, the findings evidenced the danger of removing a student from the classroom or the building. The evidence suggests that student perception of one or more in school suspension or out of school suspension changes for the worse.

From discipline referrals to bullying, researchers Acosta, Ebener, Malone, Philips, and Wilks (2019) studied the impact of restorative practice in fostering positive youth growth and decreasing the overall impact of bullying in middle school. A whole-school intervention implemented restorative practices in hopes of creating a climate change. From the initial baseline data and follow-up, two-year post survey data was collected from 2771 students at 13 middle schools evenly split between grades 6 (48 percent) and 7 (52 percent), and primarily ages 11 (38 percent) or 12 (41 percent). Gender was evenly split (51 percent male), and 92 percent of students were white. Interestingly, there was not a significant change in treatment at schools. However, student self-reports indicated an improved school climate. The ripple effect also impacted feelings of improved connectedness, peer attachment, and social skills, and decreased cyberbullying. The study suggests the restorative model may promote positive behaviors and address the concern of bullying. School climate is not clearly defined among scholars, but there is a consensus

that it does include teacher/peer support, positive engagement of students, and safety through clearly defined consistency and rules.

Every Student Succeeds Act 2015 (Act, ESS 2015) stresses the value of school climate as preparing students to transition to life following graduation in a career and/or pursuit of higher education. It delineates school quality from student success. Bullying reduction programs are impacted by the increase in a positive school climate. The implication is that a positive school climate may minimize bullying and be associated with the development of social skills.

Acosta et al. (2019) selected four assessment scales to measure school climate. The focus was on clear and concise expectations, teacher support when working with students, positive student interaction in class, and students having a voice in decisions. In this study, the hypothesis focuses on predicting student outcomes (school climate, peer attachment, and social skills) as well as assessing the experiences of students in the restorative practices intervention.

The results did not find evidence that Restorative Practices Intervention has an effective comprehensive youth development program or impact on whole school change. However, students who did experience restorative practices reported increased positive results (increased school connectedness, healthier school climate, greater positive peer relationships, and developmental growth) as well as decreased victimization from bullying overall. This finding suggests that even though whole school change was not created, restorative practices, when consistently used, may reduce bullying by building a stronger community bond between administration, staff, and students.

Restorative Practices Interventions

Researchers McCluskey, Lloyd, Kane, Riddell, Stead, and Weedon (2008) studied how the impact of restorative practice can make a difference in schools. Set in Scotland, an initial two-year study assessed the fostering of social relationships within a school community by use of restorative practice. The study consisted of 18 schools, of which ten were secondary, seven were primary, and one was a specific school for students with learning disabilities. Participants included 627 staff and 1163 students.

The screening measure for the study was a combination of interviews, teacher and student surveys, observations, focus groups, meetings, and analysis. Of the 1163 students, interviews were held with 138 primary students and 93 secondary students. Of the 627 staff, more than 400 staff participated in interviews. Core staff members in each school were interviewed multiple times over the two-year pilot.

Scotland was in the infancy stages of implementation of restorative practice at the time of the study in 2004. Thus, schools may have been at different levels of development and understanding of restorative practice at the time. The restorative range of practices included: restorative ethos building, restorative curriculum, restorative language, restorative conversations, restorative mediations, restorative circles, and restorative meetings/conferences (both informal and formal).

The findings indicated an understanding of restorative practice by the use of previous initiatives that fostered social skills, peer mediation, and cognitive therapies. At the primary level, there was a merging of old and new initiatives. The evidence of cultural change was in that schools reportedly became calmer and, overall, more positive about the whole school experience. There was an increase in conflict resolution skills in

students. One key factor, as reported by staff, was the modeling of restorative practices as well as the commitment to the training of staff.

Furthermore, findings indicated that at the secondary level, progress was present but at a decreased pace. Staff reported significant changes in the classroom climate. There was an increase in interest in training in restorative practice and readiness for change. However, the restorative practice was more of an additional tool to utilize for classroom behavior management, thus leaving approaches more diversified at the secondary level.

Despite the evidence of positive outcomes, there was also reluctance of some staff to fully support restorative practice. There was support for everyday implementations of restorative practices but a concern for serious infractions which may benefit from punishment.

The theory of restorative practice is explored as researchers Ttofi and Farrington (2008) studied bullying with respect to the short- and long-term effects in correlation to the use of the defiance theory. Defiance theory relates to the fairness and validity of the punishment which is core to acknowledge shame to deter behaviors. The study focused to explain how bullying may be associated with family factors and bullying at home. The study was composed of 182 students aged 11-12 years, both male and female, attending sixth grade in Nicosia Primary School. Those who participated in the study self-reported sibling bullying, peer bullying, as well as physical and psychological bullying. Bullying was defined as committing the act three or more times in the last seven months.

The findings indicate the prevalence of sibling and peer bullying. Ttofi & Farrington (2008) find the correlation of sibling and peer bullying for both physical and

psychological acts was highly correlated. Overall, boys scored higher than girls with significant score differences.

Researchers Ttofi and Farrington (2008) further analyzed the impact of the defiance theory. Data finds the representation of the interrelationship of constructs that demonstrate perceptions of fairness and concepts of shame. In this analysis, the females scored statistically higher than the males. Findings also indicated that males (62%) and females (54%) responded with defiance when they perceived the acts of bullying were unfair. When reviewing the parental bonding and the data findings, research suggests that bonding was negatively correlated with sibling and peer bullying.

Research suggests that in better understanding defiance theory, parents and teachers may recognize the underlying factors of children engaging in bullying - whether it is at home or school. It may be beneficial to increase sensitivity and respect in addressing behaviors to increase compliance.

Another international study that examined restorative practice was by researchers Kehoe, Bourke-Taylor, and Broderick (2018), who studied the impact of restorative practice and its impact on student behavior. The study criteria were such that a school had implemented restorative practices for a minimum of four years prior to the study with a whole-school approach. The study was based in Melbourne, Australia consisting of six schools in the present study, of which there were three elementary (ages 5-12 years) and three secondary (ages 12-18) schools. The number of students ranged from 300 to 1350 in each of the schools. The goal of the study was to measure the direct impact of restorative interventions on student behavior with perspectives from both the teacher and student.

Kehoe et al. (2018) had both teachers and students participate in the study. The criteria for teachers to participate in the study was an understanding of restorative practice. Fourteen teachers from the six schools participated in a 1:1 interview, of which 79% were female, and 21% were male. The students in grades 6 & 9 were recruited, with 40 students participating in 1 of 6 focus groups, of which 52% were female and 48% were male, with a range from 10-12 years of age. The secondary students totaled 19 pupils of which most students were 15 years old. The screening measure was gathered by means of both interviews and focus groups over a period of three months. They further delved into social skills, benefits of personal relationships, and school climate.

The findings indicated the use of restorative practice to be beneficial in building social skills. The acronym HEART illustrated the themes that were observed: Harmony, Empathy, Awareness & Accountability, Respectful, and Thinking. The perspective of elementary students was an increased awareness of their behavior. The perspective of the secondary students was focused on the function of why social skills were significant.

Researchers Kehoe et al. (2018) further analyzed each theme. Teachers reported an increase in harmony with more effective communication and fewer raised voices in the hall. Students reported being able to identify feelings, feeling calm, and community building through peer mediation. The greatest impact of restorative practice was empathy, per teacher report, as the language had changed how students interacted with each other. Students report specific accounts of thinking of others and how they wanted to help. Circle time allowed for conversations to foster awareness of behavior and its impact on others. Respectful relationships, as demonstrated by staff, fostered an awareness of acceptable behaviors and how to treat others. The value of the teacher-

student relationship fostered reciprocal respect. Reflection was reported as either personal awareness or accountability.

In Australia, the findings suggest the use of restorative practices may foster social skills, build empathetic relationships, and student's ownership of their behavior. The benefit is getting along with others and having conflict resolution skills to problem solve. To remember this success - think HEART.

From empathy to dignity, researcher High (2017) studied the impact of restorative practice on fostering dignity in schools. The Evanston /Skokie School District (K-8) in Illinois developed a cost-effective restorative practice program. With initiatives led by social workers from the local police department, District 65 educators, and community volunteers, they proceeded with an informal and gradual approach to the implementation of restorative practice - focused on sharing circles. Although the number of students was not specifically clarified for the K-8 school, it was a ten-week initiative for sharing circles in the classrooms. The goal of District 65 was to foster the basic premises of sharing circles for both staff and students.

Although no specific quantitative data was shared, it was reported that there were improvements in both the classroom climate as well as teacher efficacy in addressing disruptive behaviors. Students also reported feeling safe to speak openly in sharing circles. Students reported feeling validated. Students reported being encouraged to listen as well as find their voice. Self-advocacy skills were fostered. The district began with a 10-week initiative on sharing circles in the classroom to hire a full-time restorative practices coordinator. Restorative practice was beneficial enough for this Illinois school district to make the financial investment in restorative practice.

Another theory is shame theory. Researcher Morrison (2006) studied the correlation of school bullying and restorative justice. The study intertwined three theories of shame with responses to bullying: Scheff's theory of unacknowledged shame, Braithwaite's reintegrative shaming theory, and Tyler's procedural justice theory. The Morrison (2006) study was based in Australia, consisting of 307 students being placed in one of four bullying groups. Students were subdivided into four groups: nonbully/non-victim (61 students), victim (96 students), bully (91 students), and bully/victim (59 students). Bullying was defined as 'someone who repeatedly hurts or frightens someone weaker than themselves on purpose. The goal was to measure bullying behavior, engagement, and frequency and apply the shame theories for further analysis.

The screening measure was gathered by student surveys that were completed, and further follow-up questions were asked to follow up with the manner of being provoked. Shame management was further analyzed as students were asked to respond to four given scenarios regarding a bullying incident. Students were then asked to further respond to five separate questions to measure shame acknowledgment and five separate questions for shame displacement. Further analysis measured both respect and pride of the students. Scores were categorized into five areas: shame acknowledgment, shame displacement, price, respect, and emotional group value.

Morrison (2006) indicated significantly different responses across the four subgroups. The victim and nonbully/non-victim group had the greatest use of shame strategies. However, the bully and bully/victim group reported lower use of shame displacement strategies. Also, when assessed the nonbully/non-victim and bully group

reported the greatest level of respect at their school. In contrast, the bully/victim group had the least amount of pride reported at their school.

The studies suggest a correlation between shame management, respect, pride, and emotional value of being a member of the school community was dependent upon which subgroup one was placed in. The determining factor was how a student processes anger and shame. Findings indicated that students who had the lowest levels of pride, respect, and emotional group value also lacked connection. Findings further indicated that when a student had strong social ties, there was an ability to process emotions, such as healthy shame management. When a student did not have this social skill or connection, it may lead to a disconnection from the school community and negative behavior.

Restorative Circling and Classroom Meetings

Researchers Skrzek, Bascug, Ball, Kim, and Elze (2020) studied the impact of student perspectives on restorative circles. Set in a mid-sized northeastern city, the study consisted of students from a K-8 public school in which restorative practice had been implemented with a focus on circling in the classroom. The sample of students included 49 students from 5th grade and 41 students from 8th grade ranging from 10-13 years of age, with a nominal majority of females to males.

The screening measure assessed student perception of restorative practice circles and their impact on student behavior. Findings indicated that 5th graders reported greater success with circling than 8th-grade peers. Eighth-grade females had the lowest perception of circles. Students were assessed further with open-ended questions of reflections on the positives of circles. A significant number of students responded that being able to express themselves in difficult situations was positive. Fifth graders

responded that they were more receptive to reflecting on others' perceptions and learning how to make different choices for themselves. The findings suggest that younger students were more engaged and had greater positive outcomes than older students with restorative circles.

Restorative circling by future teachers in training brought a unique perspective. Researchers Bouchard, Hollweck, and Smith (2016) studied the impact of fostering communities within the classroom by teacher candidates. The study consisted of 9 students in focus groups with one author and 40 students in a 10-week course with another author. They identified descriptions of circling, obstacles to circling, and the effects of circling.

The focus groups further clarified three themes. First, circling created safe and interactive spaces for learning. Students responded that they were able to better understand the content via circling as they were more engaged, distractions decreased, and they were more comfortable to learn. It allowed an opportunity for trust. Experiential learning was available for the kinesthetic learner to implement an ideology. Second, the discomfort of circling did create opportunities for connection. Listening was key. Thirdly, to be most effective in circling, authenticity was required. The outcomes of the study were professional learning for the teacher candidates, social-emotional learning for the teachers, and a rippling effect of authenticity from the teacher to the learner.

Teacher candidates are the target audience in the next study as well. Researchers Silverman and Mee (2018) studied the impact of using restorative practice to prepare teachers to engage with students in the classroom. The focus was to teach restorative practice and community circles to interns as part of a pedagogy course in a four-semester

sequence during the 2017-2018 school year. Teacher interns learned how to define and demonstrate restorative practice, participate in a group research project, present findings, observe community circles, and then participate in internships within the classroom. The interns had the opportunity to participate in community circles as part of the internship seminar with their peers. Although the number of interns is not specifically clarified, the study is in partnership with Towson University in Baltimore, Maryland and its teacher candidate students. The goal was to allow interns the time to express their successes and struggles in the internship as well as experience community circles firsthand.

Initially, a set of specific questions were created to be utilized in the community circles. The internship seminar instructor also joined the circle to lead, model, and invite discussion amongst the group. The instructor had a talking piece which was shared as participants engaged in the dialogue. As time progressed, the group learned both about the concept of community circles and each other.

The active engagement in community circles with fellow interns and the internship instructor was positive. Interns responded favorably to active participation in community circle Wednesdays and having a place to express successes and struggles. There was camaraderie built amongst the interns when they realized that they were not isolated in their feelings. The community was formed.

In a few of the final circles that were held, the interns had profound responses to their community circle. The interns shared the reasons why they wanted to teach, in which the responses indicated a theme of building relationships. The interns wanted to continue the active use of community circles in their future classrooms to strengthen relationships and impact the classroom climate.

Classroom meetings are another method to implement restorative practice.

Researchers Kaveney and Drewerey (2011) studied the impact of classroom meetings as a restorative practice. Midway High School, in New Zealand, consisted of 970 students. The school began a 3-year restorative practice initiative to focus on building relationships and community. Although the number of staff that participated in the study of the professional development innovation was only four of seventy staff, the findings suggest the data has merit to review. The goal of Midway High School was to foster competency for both staff and students in speaking by the use of classroom meetings for restorative practice intervention.

Professional development was initially met with eager participation. In 2009 (year 1), 75 class meetings were held by 41 staff and ten supporting staff. In 2010 (year 2), 98 class meetings were held by students or teachers. A review of the teacher's perception of both the class meetings and the process was conducted at the end of year 2.

The screening measure for the study was for a teacher to have participated in more than four class meetings with the same class. Of the 41 teachers who held class meetings, only nine staff met the baseline criteria. Three teachers were excluded due to not having the meeting with the same class, and two staff were unable to proceed further due to outside circumstances. Thus, leaving four teachers that made the commitment to proceed forward with the study. Interviews with the teachers were centered on the impact of class meetings on the climate of the classroom and learning climate, the impact of the class meeting on teacher-student relationships, and any additional effects observed by individuals.

The findings indicated a positive outcome of the initiative. Findings indicated that teachers reported improved classroom management and student-teacher relationships. Listening, as well as honesty, was essential for an authentic experience. Teachers reported that the meeting process became more clearly refined in its structure, role, and methodology to be most effective. The outcomes for students, as reported by teachers, suggest an increase in both empathy and healthy boundaries. Teachers reported that the quality of work produced by students increased as well as students' ability to self-advocate. Teachers reported an improved learning environment from increased kindness and problem-solving. Teachers indicated specific improvements in student outcomes with changes in behavior and teacher-student relationships. There were some reports of ambivalence from students that were hesitant to engage in the restorative process for concerns about being vulnerable to others. Despite the study's small size, the evidence suggests restorative practice was achieved with classroom meetings.

One of the longer studies with an emphasis on the teacher perspective with restorative practice implementation included researchers Short, Case, and McKenzie (2018), who studied the impact of restorative practice on secondary teachers. Set in England, a five-year study assessed the perspective of teachers in a whole school approach school. The secondary school was in a low-socioeconomic urban area which had approximately 2000 students, aged 11-18. There were five staff (two female, three male), aged 30-56, that participated in the study. The staff also consistently used restorative practice as part of dealing with conflict and bullying at the school.

The screening measure for the study was an initial interview and later a subsequent interview with targeted themes. The areas of questioning focused on staff

perception, the role of restorative practice in managing behaviors, and the impact of restorative practice.

The findings revealed four themes which included the core of restorative practice, restorative communication, learning opportunity, and the impact in practice. The components that were identified as necessary when de-escalating a situation were a fair process, explanation, and clear expectations. Restorative language was reported to be most effective when there was no confrontation or blame during the meeting. Both verbal and non-verbal communication created an environment that was conducive to dialogue. Teachers modeling restorative practice helped students better understand with empathetic reflection. Findings indicated a calmer community. Teachers reported having positive teacher-student relationships with the restorative approach.

On the contrary, there were also challenges that were found in the study. A lack of consistency throughout the entire school was problematic. From staffing concerns to external demands, the challenge was present. Despite the small number of staff that participated in the survey, the findings are consistent with findings from other researchers of restorative practice.

Connectedness

Connectedness was the focus of additional studies. Researchers Arango, Cole-Lewis, Yeguez, Clark, and King (2018) studied the impact of connectedness on depression and suicidal ideation among youth that have bullied and victimized. There was an initial collection of baseline data from youth that were in the pediatric general emergency department that screened positive for bully victimization with a 6-month follow-up assessment. The study was comprised of 142 youth (74.6% female, 47.18%

African American, 36.62% Caucasian), ranging from 12 to 15 years of age ($M = 13.6$ years of age, $SD = 1.12$). Those who participated in the study self-reported connectedness, bully perpetration, and/or bully victimization.

The screening measure was composed of a peer experience questionnaire assessing verbal, relational, and overt forms of aggression over the previous four months. The study further delved into interpersonal connectedness of the youth in three areas of family, school, and community. Further data collected was analyzed and included information on depression, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behaviors.

The findings from the study assess connectedness, depression, and suicidal ideation. From the 29 youth at baseline that initially reported engaging in suicidal behavior nearly half of them six months later reported having engaged in some type of suicidal behavior of which six youth reported having made a suicide attempt. It is important to note that youth with a suicide attempt at baseline were excluded from this study.

Arango et al. (2018) further defined the information found in connectedness subtypes and time correlations. First, the data reviewed changes across six months in connectedness, bully victimization, depression, and suicidal ideation. Second, the findings reviewed correlations between levels of connectedness, bully victimization, depression, and suicidal ideation.

The study suggests that connectedness is a predictor of depression and suicidal ideation. It emphasizes the significance of fostering relationships with youth - in family, in school, and in the community. The study spotlights youth suicide risk and its relationship to connectedness. These findings give merit to future risk prevention. In

summary, increasing school connectedness for youth may have provided support for a student to feel more confident and comfortable reaching out when they may be struggling or feel unsafe.

Another look at connectedness occurred when researchers Duggins, Kumerminc, Smalls-Glover, and Perilla (2016) studied the impact of aggression on young victims of school bullying. The school district in Georgia partnered with the research team from 2009 - 2013 with students in grades 7-10, that were followed for two years in three cohorts. Duggins et al. (2016) references a total of 373 students who participated in the study throughout the years. The participants, reportedly, were 53% White, 26% Hispanic, 4% Black, and 17% of other race; 55% were female and ranged in age from 10-17 years during their first year of participation, with a median age of 13.59 years.

The research team examined victimization concurrently with family and school connectedness. Aggression was studied as students completed an 11-item aggression scale of frequency of aggression throughout the last seven days. Students responded to four items of frequency of victimization in the last year. Feedback was gathered on family and school connectedness with responses from how they may feel close to their family to how they may feel like they belong at school.

Initial data gathered indicated a significant amount of victimization and aggressive behavior. 98 (26%) students reported victimization in the last 12-months, which included 47 (13%) that reported 1-2 incidences of victimization and 41 (11%) that reported 3+ incidences in the last year. The correlation was consistent with family and school connectedness.

The summation of the 2-year analysis revealed findings that were like previous research. There was an increased prevalence of victimization and low-income status that correlated with elevated levels of aggression. In the cross-sectional findings, there was also a pattern of an overall reduction in aggression behavior in the sample. The longitudinal findings indicated that family connectedness created an opportunity for youth to manage aggressive behavior despite having experienced incidences of victimization. However, the findings from school connectedness did not seem to reveal data supporting the indirect and critical role of fostering a safe school environment.

A different perspective on connectedness occurred when researchers O'Brennan and Furlong (2010) studied the impact of students' perceptions of school connectedness and peer victimization. The baseline was established by participants' completion of the California Healthy Kids Survey. The study was based in Central California, which included six middle schools and four high schools. With exclusionary factors, the sample consisted of 4,426 students in 8th, 10th, and 12th grades. Students who responded to school connectedness and victimization questions were the sample population. The revised total sample totaled 1,213 students in the 8th, 10th, and 12th grades, which were evenly split between genders, and ranged in age from 12-18 years.

The screening measure was gathered by a student self-report questionnaire which measured the connection that students have with their school community. They further delved into physical victimization, relational aggression, and verbal victimization from the last 12 months.

The findings indicated that a majority of students had a high connection to school. These same students reported low rates of bullying and victimization. Tenth graders were

the student group with the low connection when compared to the two grades. Eighth graders were the ones with the greatest physical and verbal victimization. The perceived reason for bullying and victimization is consistent across the grades.

The findings suggest a correlation between students' school connectedness and their encounters with physical, relational, and verbal forms of victimization from peers. The reported frequency of victimization was 2-3 times a week for students with low connections. Students who reported verbal victimization were more likely to be excluded from the peer group and possible future targets of cyberbullying.

Researchers Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, and Linkins (2009) studied the impact of positive education in the use of positive psychology and classroom interventions. The focus was to foster the overall well-being and happiness of students. Set outside of Melbourne, Australia, the study consisted of 1500 students on four campuses with 200 staff beginning the training. Positive psychology was taught to foster resilience, character strengths, gratitude, positive communication, and optimism to half of the staff members. Trained staff were encouraged to utilize both personal and professional examples to teach the children. The principles of well-being were fostered at all-inclusive meetings and additional training.

Currently, there is not sufficient data to report to demonstrate the initial sense that the program was successful for Seligman et al. (2009). However, the fostering of positive education has been replicated in courses offered in multiple grades. One such class of 10th graders with 200 students had attended sessions twice each week with lectures, narrative responses, and reflections. Almost every student was able to identify 2-3 strengths in their narratives written.

Seligman et al. (2009) found that students were directed to engage with family members to find core strengths, how challenges were overcome, and discover new strengths. The collaboration of teacher and student together defining strengths gave way to a common language to create dialogue. Built upon this foundation was the emphasis on positive emotion. Students penned letters of gratitude to family, shared positive memories, overcame negative bias, and reflected how kindness impacts the giver. A gratitude journal was initiated for reflection.

Seligman et al. (2009) findings demonstrated that resilience may be fostered. Students learned how beliefs influence feelings when faced with adversity, such as a running a marathon. Following resilience, students were taught active constructive responding to share positive outcomes with a friend with a 3:1 positive to negative ratio.

Although there may not be comprehensive data to support positive education, there are elements of its everyday implementation in classrooms across settings to change the mindset of not only students and staff but of the greater community in which they live.

Whole School Change

Researchers Garnett, Moore, Ballysingh, Kervick, Bedinger, Smith, and Sparks (2020) studied the restorative practice implementation readiness assessments for schools to initially implement restorative practice. The Burlington School District (BSD) had planned for years how to best implement restorative practice in their district. The readiness assessment tool was the baseline distribution of 40 questions, of which 25 professionals (43% principals, 39% department directors, and 17% classroom teachers) responded. The follow-up needs assessment contained six open-ended questions, which

were shared with thirteen BSD employees following a 4-day restorative practice training.

The findings indicated that the majority (87%) of staff were in support of the continued use of restorative practice. Time to implement restorative practice professional development for all staff was a concern for 20% of staff. Less than half of respondents (40%) expressed the concern that the school was able to move forward while confidently sustaining restorative practice. Another concern, reported by 26% of participants, was the presence of conflict with given stakeholders.

The readiness assessment demonstrated that there was a difference in the staff perspective on punitive discipline to school reform. Staff burn-out from initiatives may be a factor. The follow-up assessment indicated that participants had positive experiences with the initial implementation of restorative practice and the use of circles in the classroom. Despite growth in buy-in for restorative practice, readiness assessments are essential to determine the current culture of the school and its ability to effectively implement and sustain restorative practice.

A comprehensive examination of school climate with various approaches was done by researchers Brand, Flener, Shim, Seitsinger, and Dumas (2003) who completed three separate studies related to the impact of efforts to change school climate, culture, and safety. The multi-year study targeted its audience of middle school students with a baseline of 105,000 students from 188 schools in 16 states with an ever-increasing sample size through the years.

In study one, Brand et al. (2003) focused on the emphasis of assessing student perception of the whole school climate. A 125-item questionnaire was compiled to gather

data on student adjustment related to teacher support, peer interactions, discipline, student input in decision making, support for cultural pluralism, and safety concerns. However, the students had difficulty responding to the given response format, and this was modified to a continuum scale which included sometimes, always, and never in a 4–5-point response. They further assessed the data from two samples of schools in a Midwestern state for two consecutive years as the subsample. It was determined to modify the measuring assessment to be a 50-item questionnaire which led to study two for the team. Year one of the study was considered the baseline data.

In taking another angle on the effect of changes on climate, culture, and safety, Brand et al. (2003) sought to increase the sample size of schools compared to study one. In study two, from the baseline sample size, the research sample grew to 145,000 students from 278 schools for year two of the study. The third-year cohort increased even further in sample size to 161,000 students from 300 schools. The sample size was a compilation of students from urban, suburban, small town, and rural communities. Despite the high number of participants, scores were highly consistent when randomly subdivided into subsamples. The measures included items regarding teacher support, consistency, clarity of rules and expectations, student commitment, negative/positive peer interactions, disciplinary harshness, student input in decision making, instructional innovation and relevance, support for cultural pluralism, and safety problems.

Lastly, Brand et al. (2003) addressed their research question with a third study that further analyzed social climate, student academic achievement, behavior problems, and socioemotional adjustment. Data was collected from students, teachers, and archival sources from year one to year three cohorts. For the cohorts - year one had 188 of 188

schools participate, year two had 204 of 278 schools participate, and year three had 246 of 300 schools participate in the additional study. The measures assessed included academic achievement, GPA, academic potential, academic expectations per student report, academic aspirations, classroom behavior, delinquency, drug attitudes, substance abuse, self-esteem, anxiety, and depression.

The Brand et al. (2003) research findings indicate multiple correlations throughout the studies. In the area of academic achievement, there is a correlation for students with higher reading and math scores to have not only higher GPAs but also self- and teacher expectations, academic aspirations and efficacy, and teacher's ratings of academic potential. In the area of student commitment, across all three samples, found that overall student efficacy and teacher expectations improved with increased teacher support structure, positive peer interactions, and instructional innovation. Safety problems were lower when students reported higher self- and teacher expectations, academic aspirations, and efficacy.

Furthermore, studies indicated an elevated concern with school climate with behavior problems and substance use. When students perceived to have lower teacher support, the student commitment to achievement decreased. The negative impacts of student behavior were higher smoking, drinking, and drug use. In the area of negative peer interactions, the greatest predictor was the student's behavioral adjustment in such areas as delinquency, drug attitudes, and substance use. In regard to socioemotional health, higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression were present in schools in which students reported higher levels of teacher support, structure, student

commitment to achievement, positive peer interactions, and instructional innovation, as well as decreased safety concerns.

The studies suggest a significant relationship between school climate and student adjustment which is impacted by relationships between students and teachers.

Achievement and overall adjustment outcomes improved with extensive change in multiple areas of the social climate. A preventative plan to address both academic and adjustment difficulties may minimize the offset of transition and outcome.

Examining the whole school approach from an international perspective, researchers Wong, Cheng, Ngan, and Ma (2011) studied the impact of a whole-school restorative approach to addressing bullying in Hong Kong. With an increase in bullying and gang affiliations, the study focused on addressing perceptions of staff and students of bullying. The study consisted of 1,480 students in grades equivalent to 7th grade to 9th grade from four different Hong Kong schools in a two-year study. Identified protective factors were children who were overall happy and accepted by peers. Risk factors included students with contact with gangs, violent peers, and engagement in bullying. The focus was to better support school counseling and social work within the school to better impact the restorative whole school approach.

The screening measure was a questionnaire focused on self-reflection and perception, actual incidents of aggression, and demographics. The study measured self-esteem, hurting others, empathy, a sense of belonging, school harmony, bullying behavior, and caring behavior.

Findings indicated that participating schools did not have a significant difference in bullying prior to the restorative whole school approach. It was reported that 36% of

students experienced bullying prior to the program, and 3.5% of students experienced bullying at least three times within a month. Verbal bullying was the most common kind of bullying reported by 56% of students. Findings also suggest that bullying and negative attitudes were elevated at schools not participating in the restorative whole school approach initiative. Exclusion (9%), physical bullying (28%), and extortion (22%) were also reported behaviors.

Researchers Wong et al. (2011) shared that findings suggest that bullying and negative attitudes were elevated at schools not participating in the restorative whole-school approach initiative. In fact, bullying at non-restorative whole school approach schools became worse as 51% of the students increased their bullying behavior.

The positive impact of the restorative whole school approach suggests that the school culture was impacted positively as well as student self-esteem. Additional factors that may have been beneficial were the attitude of the school staff regarding the implementation of the restorative approach to address bullying. Harmony among staff, involvement of students, and parent involvement were also factors to be considered.

Whole school approach was examined next with its relationship to discipline referrals. Researchers Augustine, Engberg, Grimm, Lee, Wang, Christianson, and Joseph (date) researched the impact of restorative practices on school climate and suspensions. The school district was the Pittsburgh Public School District (PPS) in the years 2015-2016 and 2016-2017. The researchers examined a specific restorative practice program - The International Institute for Restorative SaferSanerSchools Whole school change program - within a select group of schools in Pittsburgh in a program called Pursuing Equitable and Restorative Communities or PERC. The Pittsburgh school district

services approximately 25,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade in 54 schools. The context of the study was the belief that PPS needed to be safer. A 2013-2014 student survey indicated 18% of students believed that they need to be prepared to fight, 35% were angry about how adults treated them, and 22% felt student misbehavior decreased learning. In that same year, 28% of African American students were suspended.

When funding was granted, Pittsburgh Public School partnered with the International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP) to carry out its trademark WholeSchool Change program. The SaferSanerSchools Whole School Change program included the following areas: affective statements, restorative questions, small impromptu conferences, proactive circles, responsive circles, restorative conferences, fair process, reintegrative management of shame, restorative staff community, restorative approach with families, and fundamental hypothesis understandings. All staff were asked to participate in two of the four professional development days to be trained. IIRP coaches were available to both staff and administration. Pittsburgh named its initiative "Pursuing Equitable and Restorative Communities," also known as PERC.

The implementation of restorative practice across a district-wide school program was essential to measure progress or lack thereof. In Pittsburgh, they completed a two-year randomized control study to measure restorative practice with respect to its specific mode of implementation, impact, and likelihood of its sustainability (Augustine et al., 2018).

Augustine et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study from three vantage points the student, teacher, and school. They measured outcomes according to student (suspensions, arrests, attendance, ability, and achievement), teacher (composite teaching

performance, value-added, and ratings of their teachers), and school (teacher ratings of teaching and learning conditions). Based on the implications of their findings from the study, there was an overall positive impact, but sustainability was uncertain. There was a decline in suspensions (elementary students, race disparities and lower-income families, and non-violent behavior) and an overall improved school climate in PERC schools. There was an increased understanding and knowledge of restorative practice for both staff and students.

Findings indicated that staff that were trained in PERC schools not only increased their knowledge of restorative practice but also increased confidence and buy-in as time progressed to year two of the initiative. Findings indicated an improved school climate - per both teacher perception and learning environment. There was an increase in conduct management, teacher leadership, school leadership, and overall learning conditions. PERC staff reported having stronger relationships with students due to restorative practices. Findings further indicated a reduction in suspension rates as well as rates associated with race and income. PERC students were less likely to be suspended. However, in middle school, academic outcomes became worse, and there was no change in suspension rates. Also, male students with individual education plans did not have a marked decline in suspensions, violence, or weapons violations.

There is still room for improvement if restorative practices are to be sustained. The implications for research of Augustine et al. (2018) lead to a need for clear, concise expectations and effective tools to implement restorative practice:

- To address time constraints, restorative practices need to be intertwined within the everyday routine of the school day

- Set expectations at the district level for how school staff is to implement restorative practices
- Provide mandatory professional development
- Ensure that leaders at the district level can manage the workload
- Implement data collection systems to collect accurate information on all types of behavioral incidents and remedies (Augustine et al., 2018)

The final comprehensive examination of restorative practice and school climate took place in Denver, Colorado. Researcher Gonzalez (2012) studied a comprehensive analysis of restorative justice, punitive discipline, and the school to prison pipeline. The progressive execution and influence of the school-based restorative justice program in North High School in Denver, Colorado, focused on creating a safer school climate, decreasing suspensions and referrals to law enforcement, and affecting educational outcomes. Denver Public Schools embarked upon restorative practice interventions in 2003. The response to change was the result of increased student dropout, supersessions, and expulsions. In a 4-year span from 2000-2001 to 2004-2005, the Denver Public Schools reported in-school suspensions increased from 1,864 to 4,859, and out of school suspensions increased from 9,846 to 13,487. At the same time, there was a 71% increase in police-issued tickets with only a 2% population change. The additional concern was a reported disproportionate number of minority students that were part of this increase in disruptive behavior.

Denver divided up the transition to restorative practice into three stages: investigative, grant-funded pilot phase, and implementation of the district-wide initiative. Cole Middle School was the site of the restorative practice initial pilot for the 2003-2004

academic year. Cole Middle School had the greatest number of suspensions, tickets, and arrests. Overall data was limited, but results demonstrated potential to the point of receiving a grant.

The Colorado Department of Education Expelled, and At-Risk Student Services (EARSS) grant provided initial funding for four additional schools in Denver. North High School, Skinner Middle School, Horace Mann Middle School, and Lake Middle School were identified as a priority with a significant number of suspensions, tickets, and arrests as Cole Middle School had. In the 2004-2005 academic year, there were a total of 858 out-of-school suspensions (350, 220, 288), 12 expulsions (4,3,5), and 152 tickets (72, 22, 58).

Upon the completion of the 2006-2007 academic year, the pilot restorative justice program had 213 referrals for the four schools. Compared to the baseline year of 2004-2005, there was a 29% decrease in out-of-school suspensions. Expulsions also decreased at Skinner Middle School by 100% and by 43% at Horace Middle School.

In the following academic year, 2007-2008, the pilot program expanded to add one additional high school and two additional middle schools in the Denver area. Eight hundred twelve referrals were made to the restorative justice program in the year. Positive outcomes of restorative practice continued as suspensions continued to decrease markedly in all four schools.

Findings also indicated that students who were referred to the restorative justice program had a significant reduction in both office referrals and out-of-school suspensions. In all of the four schools, students that were referred also had an increase in attendance and a decrease in tardiness. Furthermore, in the 2008-2009 academic year, the

restorative justice program led the change in the Denver Schools which reduced overall suspensions by 5,400 suspensions from the baseline year of 2005-2006.

In the 2009-2010 academic year, 293 students were sampled that had participated in at least three restorative interventions over the academic year. Students were asked to reflect on the impact of involvement with multiple instances of restorative interventions in such areas as school discipline, attendance, and social skills. Five key areas of failing grades, absences, timeliness, office referrals and out-of-school suspensions were all impacted with positive change. With attendance an indicator of school engagement, attendance improved for 31% of students with at least two restorative interventions. Tardiness decreased by 35% of targeted students. Out-of-school suspensions dropped for 13% of targeted students by 89%.

North High School had a primary target to develop a procedural alternative to exclusionary discipline. The baseline data for the 2004-2005 academic year included 288 out-of-school suspensions, five expulsions, and 68 tickets/arrests at North High School. Compared to the other pilot restorative programs, North High School's initiative was led by Denver Public School staff from a whole school perspective. Formal and informal restorative practices included mediations, conferences, and circles of the key restorative elements.

The whole school approach to restorative practice at North High School included 120 formal restorative mediations, conferences, and circles for the initial two years of implementation. In 2007-2008, North High School had 170 referrals for 254 infractions. In 2008-2009, North High school had 199 formal referrals. In 2009-2010, North High School had 190 referrals for 241 students with 184 incidents. Findings indicated that 41%

of students that participated in the restorative justice program improved attendance by a 44% decrease in absences from semester one to semester two.

Gonzalez (2012) finds the correlation of positive outcomes with restorative practice utilized in a whole school approach in the Denver Public School. Out-of-school suspensions decreased, expulsions decreased, referrals to law enforcement decreased, attendance increased, and restorative interventions were utilized by students.

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Summary of Literature

This literature review set out to answer the question, *How does restorative practice influence school climate?* The literature led to three core themes: exclusionary school discipline, restorative practice interventions, and whole school change.

Safety of children at school took precedent when students were no longer safe in the classroom and playground (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). In the mass school shootings—no age group or area of the country was exempt. The public demanded safer schools and policy changes to deter this from happening in their hometown. In 1995, the Gun-Free School Zone Act was passed in legislation that mandated a 1-year minimum expulsion for students who bring weapons to school (specifically firearms and bombs) and a referral to local authorities (Stinchcomb et al., 2006).

Zero tolerance became the response not only for acts of crime but also for minor misbehavior (Stinchcomb et al., 2016). However, the negative outcome of exclusionary school discipline and zero-tolerance has resulted in a loss of opportunity for students to learn in the classroom, and schools are not safer (Gonzalez, 2012). Staggering numbers of punitive discipline's negative outcomes speak volumes (Acosta et al., 2019; Augustine et al., 2018; Duggins et al., 2016; Gonzalez, 2012).

The disparity of both over-representation of minorities, males, low-income students, and students with special education services, along with data of countless discipline referrals, stirred a change in restorative interventions (Anyon et al., 2016). Findings indicated that students who had received an out of school suspension (OSS) or an in school suspension (ISS) disciplinary referral reported decreased perceptions of

disciplinary structure, school bonding, and higher levels of student disengagement than peers with no disciplinary referrals (Huang & Anyon, 2020). Furthermore, when a student is suspended, it decreases the likelihood of graduation from high school (Gregory et al., 2016). A student separated from the classroom is also separated from support services such as in-person instruction, mental health support, and social-emotional learning opportunities (Huang & Anyon, 2020).

The divergence from exclusionary school discipline has led to a subtle transition of victim-offender mediations and restorative practices. Prevention focuses on building relationships and community. The intervention focuses on repairing the harm and restoring the community (Gregory et al., 2016). Internationally and within the United States, various restorative practices, positive behavior interventions, and social-emotional learning programs have been implemented to achieve better outcomes (Kehoe et al, 2018; Morrison, 2006; Seligman et al, 2009; Wong et al, 2011).

Internationally, studies have originated primarily from Australia. Kehoe et al. (2018) implemented HEART to foster social skills, build empathetic relationships, and to encourage students to take ownership of their behavior. Morrison (2006) found that when a student has strong social ties, they have an ability to process emotions, such as healthy shame management. Seligman et al. (2009) found that resilience may be fostered as students learn how beliefs influence feelings. On the contrary, when a student does not have this social skill or connection, it may lead to a disconnection from the school community and an increase in negative behavior (Huang & Anyon, 2020).

This disconnect may lead to bullying (Acosta et al., 2019; Arango et al., 2018). Research suggests that in better understanding defiance theory, parents and teachers may

recognize the underlying factors of children engaging in bullying - whether it is at home or school. It may be beneficial to increase sensitivity and respect in addressing behaviors to increase compliance (Ttofi & Farrington, 2008).

In a different perspective, there was an increased prevalence of victimization and low-income status that correlated with elevated levels of aggression (Duggins et al., 2016). An emphasis on dignity proved to have improvements on both the classroom climate and teacher efficacy in addressing disruptive behaviors. Students report feeling validated as they find their voice (High, 2008).

In studying the correlation of bullying and victimization in relationship to restorative practice, connection matters. The evidence of the reported frequency of victimization was 2-3 times a week for students with low connections. Students who reported verbal victimization were more likely to be excluded from their peer group and were possible future targets of cyberbullying (O'Brennan & Furlong, 2010). In another study, connectedness was a predictor of depression and suicidal ideation. These findings merit future risk prevention when students may be struggling or feel unsafe (Arango et al., 2018).

When engaged with restorative circling and class meetings, the teacher and student perspective demonstrated the impact of fostering relationships. The age of the students may be significant as one study suggests that younger students were more engaged and had greater positive outcomes than older students with restorative circles (Skrzpek et al., 2020). Teacher candidates discover the rippling effect of authenticity from the teacher with the learner and the value of strengthening relationships with future students (Bouchard et al., 2016; Silverman & Mee, 2018).

In another study, teachers reported that the meeting process became more clearly refined in its structure, role, and methodology to be most effective. Teachers reported that the quality of work produced by students increased and students' ability to self-advocate. Teachers reported an improved learning environment to increased kindness and problem solving (Kaveney & Drewery, 2011). Another study revealed that restorative language was most effective when there was no confrontation or blame in each meeting. Both verbal and non-verbal communication may create an environment conducive to dialogue and a calmer community (Short et al., 2018).

Research suggests a three-to-five-year implementation of restorative practices is necessary to achieve sustained success (Gonzalez, 2012). Even if there may be reported significant changes in the classroom climate, schools may sometimes not be fully prepared to implement or ready for a change. In one study, there was an increase in interest in training in restorative practice and a readiness for change. However, restorative practice was an additional tool for classroom behavior management, thus leaving approaches more diversified at the secondary level (McCluskey et al., 2008). Another study assessed readiness for restorative practice to demonstrate a difference in the staff perspective on punitive discipline to school reform. Staff burn-out from initiatives may be a factor. The follow-up assessment indicated that participants had positive experiences with the initial implementation of restorative practice in the classroom (Garnett et al., 2020; McCluskey et al., 2008; Short et al., 2018).

Whole school change is impacted by relationships between students and teachers (Acosta et al, 2019; Augustine et al., 2018; Gonzalez, 2012; Wong et al., 2011). Achievement and overall adjustment outcomes improved with extensive change

in multiple areas of the social climate (Augustine et al, 2018). In one school, out of school suspensions decreased, expulsions decreased, referrals to law enforcement decreased, attendance increased, and restorative interventions were utilized by students (Gonzalez, 2012).

A preventative plan to address academic and adjustment difficulties may minimize the offset of transition and outcome (Brand et al., 2003; Gonzalez, 2012). The positive impact of the restorative whole school approach suggests that the school culture was impacted positively as student self-esteem increased and there was a reduction in bullying. Harmony among staff, involvement of students, and parent involvement are also factors to be considered (Wong et al., 2011). There is still room for improvement if restorative practices are sustained with a need for clear, concise expectations and practical tools to implement restorative practice (Augustine et al., 2018).

Limitations of the Research

As I began to research the correlation between restorative practice and school climate, I learned to define the definitions more clearly with keywords and themes. The three main themes that prevailed were exclusionary school discipline, restorative practice interventions, and whole school change. Exclusionary school discipline would incorporate teacher-student relationships, zero tolerance, bullying-victimization, and whole school change.

Evidence-based research was found both globally and within the United States with similar outcomes for restorative practice. Specific emphasis on exclusionary school discipline, zero-tolerance, discipline referrals, bullying/victimization, theories of restorative practice, teacher-student relationships, restorative practice elements,

connection, readiness assessments, and whole school change produced more questions than answers until themes and outcomes were clearly defined.

However, the research was limited in a few areas when seeking clarification. The research was limited to the victim's perspective with respect to post conferences and the long-term impact of the outcome of depression, and suicidal ideations, concerning mental health. The research was limited on the impact of exclusion with respect to students who have received repeated discipline referrals and may have dropped out of school.

Research was limited to specific numbers of general education students, students with 504s, and students with IEPs to assess specific disparity in discipline referrals.

Implications for Future Research

The implications for future research may benefit from assessing our students that are no longer in the classroom. When repeated punitive discipline created a disconnect attendance is impacted and students may drop out of school. It may be beneficial to examine how discipline referrals without proper mental health supports, financial means of socioeconomic status, and basic social skills to problem-solve impact not only the school to prison pipeline, but also the generational legacy of families.

The implications for research may also benefit from an examination of the front-line workers with students that are facing the discipline referrals as administrators, school resource officers, guidance counselors, mental health counselors, and special education teachers. An assessment on the differences in collaborative approaches to teaming with a student versus specific role only approach to interact with the student may be beneficial.

One additional research perspective may be the impact of remote learning versus in-person learning as related to the impacts of school shutdowns with Covid-19

Pandemic. In my experience, some students with anxiety thrived in remote learning as they may have struggled with attending class in person. On the contrary, as one student shared with me, “Remote didn’t go so well Ms. Lister”. He only earned 1.0 credits towards his graduation in his freshman year of high school as his peers comparatively earned 7.0 credits. The overwhelming range of student perspective on the continuum is vast. The overwhelming range of teachers’ perspective with additional expectations both virtual and in-person, additional expectations of general teacher duties, along with the great resignation of teachers amidst its demands merits examination.

Implications for Professional Application

The implications for professional application on restorative practice and school climate impact the teacher-student relationship by fostering authenticity, empathy, and problem-solving (Gregory et al, 2016). With restorative practice there was a decrease in discipline referrals and suspensions (Anyon et al., 2016; Augustine et al, 2018; Huang & Anyon, 2020). There was an increase in student engagement with a whole school approach which further led to increase in self-advocacy and academic understanding (Seligman et al., 2009). Furthermore, there continues to be room for improvement as we learn more about the data of restorative practice and school climate.

First, research-based evidence clearly demonstrates that the punitive policies of zero tolerance are ineffective in creating the desired result of school safety and a positive school climate. Instead, repeated discipline referrals, in school suspensions, out of school suspensions, and expulsions created a disconnect in relationships. The outcome for exclusionary school discipline is a loss of academic instruction created academic deficits, exclusion created frustration, lack of student engagement, and a rippling negative impact

for the community (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Losen, 2015; Mergler et al., 2014; Nance, 2016; Thapa et al., 2013).

Second, evidence substantiates restorative practice readiness assessment and comprehensive implementation procedures are a critical component of restorative practice. An audit from an outside provider may be beneficial to assess if the school is ready to undertake the task at hand and assess competencies of implementation along with plans of correction. When the school is deemed ready and the entire staff (leadership, teachers, and support staff) are committed to active engagement with the process – a comprehensive professional development is key. With respect to staff turnover and ongoing training, restorative practices training will benefit with best practice to be ongoing such that implementation of its practices are consistent for all. Clear concise communication, expectations, and consistency is paramount (Armour, 2016; Morrison et al., 2005; Song & Swearer, 2016).

Thirdly, evidence indicates support services engagement with at-risk students is critical for Tier 1-Tier 3 interventions. Funding to special services at present does not reflect the need to best meet the needs of the student with a comprehensive wraparound approach as a school. The increased need for special services is ever present due to complexity of trauma and diagnoses, lack of basic restorative language, lack of social skills, hope to recover academic deficits, disparity in socio-economic status, and overall need to prepare students to transition to become successful adults beyond high school. Guidance counselors, social workers, special educators, and other specialists are needed to meet the needs of the student where they are at (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015; Evanovich et al, 2020; Latimer et al., 2005; Payne, 2015; Smith et al., 2017).

Lastly, evidence resonates the positive impact of teacher-student relationships in restorative practices. Authenticity increased, a sense of community and belonging increased, and empathy increased with the implementation of restorative practices. Academically there was an increase in active student engagement with learning and bridging the gap of academic deficits. In transition preparedness there was an increase in self-advocacy in both checking for understanding and setting of healthy boundaries with others with increased base restorative language skillset and social skills. The school climate improved with effectual implementation of restorative practices as evidenced by a decrease in decrease in subsequent discipline referrals (Darling-Hammond, 2019; Maynard & Weinstein, 2019; Wachtel, 2016; Zehr, 2002).

Conclusion

Restorative practices influence school climate by fostering student engagement and actualization. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the premise of base needs must be met before one can progress to the next level. The scene applies to students and teachers as well. We must first address the core problem rather than react disproportionately. Restorative practice paradigm shift offers evidence-based research to change in how we "do school" and connect with each other to make effective generational changes in our society.

As an eclectic blend of both a social worker and special educator by training, I can identify school climate with a unique perspective. I see the struggle of the students that have multiple out of school suspensions and then are absent from the classroom. The ripple effect is exclusion from the classroom, a frustration with the process of punitive discipline, a lapse in what is essential information to be taught in the classroom, a

drowning in missing assignments and academic failures, an incomprehensible deficit to successfully transition to adulthood, and a generational impact on our students' future families and children.

A sage teacher once said, "You cannot save all the puppies." I respond in this heart's cry with, "We can do better. We know better." The impact of one single interaction may make all the difference to one student.

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