

Bethel University

Spark

All Electronic Theses and Dissertations

2024

Restorative Justice Practices Within a School

Channing J. Smith
Bethel University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://spark.bethel.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Smith, C. J. (2024). *Restorative Justice Practices Within a School* [Master's thesis, Bethel University]. Spark Repository. <https://spark.bethel.edu/etd/1105>

This Master's thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Spark. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Spark. For more information, please contact k-jagusch@bethel.edu.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PRACTICES WITHIN A SCHOOL

A MASTER'S THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY
CHANNING J. SMITH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION
AUGUST 2024

BETHEL UNIVERSITY

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PRACTICES WITHIN A SCHOOL

Channing J. Smith

August 2024

APPROVED

Thesis Advisor: Meghan Cavalier, Ed. D.

Program Director: Katie Bonawitz, Ed. D.

Abstract

This literature review looks into restorative justice practices within schools, guided by the main research question: How is a restorative justice model best implemented, and what are the associated challenges? Restorative justice is presented as a non-exclusionary approach to school discipline, prioritizing communication, accountability, and community building over traditional punitive measures like suspension and expulsion. Research studies and literature indicate that restorative practices can solve some of the issues surrounding the inequality prevalent in traditional punitive discipline, especially among marginalized and disadvantaged students. Additionally, this literature review explores implementation tools such as professional development and pedagogy. It also discusses the challenges of transitioning from punitive to restorative practices and examines the potential benefits of employing restorative justice in schools.

Table of Contents

Signature Page.....	2
Acknowledgments.....	
Abstract.....	3
Table of Contents.....	4
Chapter I: Introduction.....	6
Rationale.....	7
Definition of Terms.....	9
Statement of the Question.....	11
Chapter II: Literature Review.....	12
Literature Search Procedures.....	12
Current Disciplinary Actions Across the United States	13
Zero-Tolerance Policies Versus Restorative Justice Practices	16
Implementation and Challenges of Restorative Justice in Educational Settings	20
Restorative Circles	27
The Potential of Restorative Justice to Create Inclusive, Equitable, and Supportive School Environments	28
Restorative Justice Practices Impact on Reducing Punitive Discipline Practices	33
Teaching Restorative Justice Through Pedagogy	41
Opposition in Regards to Restorative Justice.....	47
Chapter III: Discussion and Conclusion.....	51
Summary of Literature.....	51
Limitations of the Research.....	54

Implications for Future Research.....	55
Implications for Professional Application.....	57
Conclusion.....	59
References.....	60

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Discipline in schools is essential for creating an environment conducive to learning and personal development. It ensures that students understand the importance of boundaries, respect for authority, and the consequences of their actions. In the United States, the approach to discipline has historically been punitive, characterized by measures such as detention, suspension, and expulsion. These exclusionary discipline practices aim to deter misbehavior through the forceful use of penalties. While intended to maintain order, punitive discipline has often been criticized for disproportionately affecting minority and disadvantaged students, potentially worsening educational inequalities, and failing to address the underlying causes of behavioral issues.

Today's schools have another choice of discipline through the adoption of restorative justice practices, driven by the recognition that punitive disciplinary measures often exacerbate the underlying issues and fail to address the root causes of misbehavior. Research conducted by Skiba et al. (2014) demonstrated that traditional disciplinary approaches, such as suspensions and expulsions, disproportionately affect marginalized students, contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline and continuing inequities among these communities in school. In contrast, restorative justice practices offer a more equitable and holistic approach by engaging students in dialogue, empowering them to take responsibility for their actions, and promoting a sense of belonging within the school community. By emphasizing healing, accountability, and conflict resolution, restorative justice holds the potential to foster a safe and supportive school environment conducive to academic and social-emotional growth (Skiba et al., 2014).

Restorative justice holds importance in today's society due to its transformative potential within the realms of justice, education, and community building. Traditional punitive approaches

tend to focus solely on punishment, disregarding the needs of those harmed and the underlying causes of wrongdoing. In contrast, restorative justice provides a framework that prioritizes healing, accountability, and dialogue. By actively involving all members of the school community, restorative justice aims to repair harm, restore relationships, and create a sense of empathy and understanding. It empowers individuals to take responsibility for their actions, promotes personal growth and reflection, and helps address the root causes of harm. By implementing restorative justice practices in educational settings, schools can create inclusive environments that prioritize the well-being and development of students, enhance social connections, and reduce disciplinary exclusionary measures, resulting in improved academic outcomes and overall school climate.

Rationale

When schools are unable to manage repeated student behavior issues, the typical response is to turn to more punitive measures such as detention, suspension, or expulsion. These actions aim to deter misbehavior but can do harm, such as isolating students from their peers and regular school activities, potentially vilifying them, and reducing their opportunities for positive social interactions and academic engagement. These measures often fail to address the root causes of the behavior and may perpetuate a cycle of infraction, punishment, and exclusion. By examining the literature and practices regarding restorative justice around the United States, schools can gain a solid grasp of what restorative justice is, how effective it can be, and ways to shift their thinking from traditional punitive measures to restorative ones. This shift involves focusing on repairing harm, holding students accountable, and rebuilding relationships, which ultimately creates a more inclusive and supportive educational environment that addresses behavioral issues more constructively.

Research on restorative practices has shown positive results within the schools. Research conducted by Carroll (2017) showed a drop in full-day suspensions by 50% throughout three high schools in Merced, California. However, restorative justice is not that widely implemented within the United States. Not all programs with the words “restorative justice” in them are created equal, and not all such programs can be said to result in “restorativeness” (Carroll, 2017). This paper will aim to examine the literature around restorative practices, the implementation of restorative practices within schools, and the challenges that come along with a shift to restorative justice practices from traditional forms of discipline, suspensions, and detentions.

Implementing restorative justice strategies within schools comes with several challenges. One major hurdle is changing the one’s mindset around discipline from a punitive stance to a more restorative perspective. This requires training teachers, administrators, and staff in restorative practices and conflict resolution skills. Some other challenges include time and the resources that are needed to facilitate the restorative process effectively. Coordinating meetings, ensuring participation, and dealing with resistance from various members involved can be complex. Additionally, not all incidents may be suitable for restorative justice, especially in cases where there is a power imbalance, a history of violence, or where one party is unwilling to participate. Striking the right balance between restorative justice and maintaining a safe and structured learning environment can be challenging.

In the modern age of teaching, a shift away from traditional discipline strategies may be a new fresh way to create an environment focusing on total student development. Traditional punitive measures often lead to students feeling isolated, disconnected, and misunderstood. Feelings of belonging are particularly important for youth of color, who may face racialized structural and interpersonal discrimination in their quest to achieve academically, and may need

additional support to navigate and feel connected to their schools and classrooms (Bottiani et al., 2017; DeNicolo et al., 2017). This is particularly concerning as modern education emphasizes not only academic learning, but also social-emotional growth and critical thinking skills. Restorative justice aligns with these goals by nurturing empathy, communication, and conflict-resolution abilities. Modern society places a premium on collaboration, adaptability, and empathy as qualities that restorative justice seeks to cultivate. With the recognition that student behavior is often influenced by underlying factors such as trauma or personal struggles, a more compassionate approach is essential to address these issues effectively. Embracing restorative justice in schools acknowledges the evolving nature of education and aligns disciplinary strategies with the needs of a rapidly changing world.

Definition of Terms

The next section explains important terms regarding research into restorative justice in educational environments. These terms will be used repeatedly throughout this literature review to define and establish a shared understanding of these concepts. A good grasp of these terms will help better understand the literature and its impact on school discipline and student results.

Exclusionary Discipline Practices

Exclusionary disciplinary practices involve actions that remove students from their classroom or school, such as detentions, suspensions, and expulsions (Cribb Fabersunne et al., 2023).

Marginalized Students

Marginalized students are individuals in the educational system who are systematically excluded, disadvantaged, or subjected to discrimination based on factors such as race, ethnicity,

socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or other characteristics (Atticot & Kamm, 2023; Battjes and Kaplan, 2023).

Restorative Circles

Restorative circles are often described as one-to-one conferencing or large circles with multiple participants run by a facilitator, and can be initiated by one teacher or mandated by an entire district. These circles focus primarily on proactive frameworks or practices responding to student behavior and repairing harm done by student misbehavior (Wadhwa, 2016).

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is an approach to addressing conflicts and misconduct that focuses on repairing harm and restoring relationships rather than solely punishing the offender. Unlike traditional discipline strategies that often involve punitive measures such as detention, suspension, or expulsion, restorative justice emphasizes open communication, relationship building, active listening, and collaborative problem-solving. Restorative practices involve bringing together all parties involved in an incident to engage in a facilitated dialogue, where they can express their feelings, understand each other's perspectives, and collectively determine how to repair the harm caused. This approach fosters empathy, responsibility, and a sense of community, in contrast to the alienation and resentment that punitive measures may cause. This process not only cultivates empathy and accountability but also nurtures a sense of belonging within the community, standing in stark contrast to the isolation and resentment often engendered by punitive approaches (Anfara et al., 2015).

Zero-Tolerance Practices

Zero-tolerance practices refers to a strict disciplinary approach that requires the swift removal, by suspension or expulsion, of students from school for a wide range of infractions, including violent behavior, truancy, and violations of the dress code (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

Statement of the Question

The guiding research question for this thesis is: How is a restorative justice model best implemented, and what are the associated challenges? This paper will look at various aspects related to restorative justice including: What are the current punitive disciplinary practices in the United States? What is the potential of restorative justice in creating a better, more inclusive school environment? What is restorative justice's impact on reducing current punitive measures? How can restorative justice be taught through pedagogy? Lastly, what do critics have to say about restorative justice practices?

This paper also aims to examine the literature surrounding restorative justice within schools, focusing on current studies and current data related to its outcomes. It provides a comprehensive review of existing literature and research on the implementation and impact of restorative justice practices in educational settings. By analyzing various studies, this paper will highlight the effectiveness of these practices in reducing punitive disciplinary measures and addressing racial inequalities in school discipline. Additionally, it explores the broader implications of restorative justice on school culture, student behavior, and community relationships. Through this examination, this paper offers insights into how restorative justice practices can be more effectively integrated into school systems to promote a more inclusive and supportive learning environment while combating racial inequalities within the current system.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter provides an overview of various literature and studies conducted regarding restorative justice. This chapter looks at traditional disciplinary practices like detentions, suspensions, and expulsions, as well as restorative justice practices like community-building, restorative circles, accountability, and open dialogue. This chapter also views the literature surrounding the implementation and challenges of switching to restorative justice practices, as well as taking a look at the opposition to restorative justice.

Literature Search Procedures

To locate the literature for this thesis on restorative justice within schools, searches of Educator's Reference Complete, Google Scholar, Education Journals, ERIC, Academic Search Premier, ResearchGate, Taylor and Francis, Sage Journals, and JSTOR were conducted for publications between the years 1994-2024. This list was narrowed by reviewing published studies from peer-reviewed journals focusing on current discipline in schools, restorative justice practices, their effectiveness, and implementation within school settings. The keywords used in these searches included "restorative justice in schools," "school discipline and restorative practices," "zero-tolerance school discipline," "restorative justice effectiveness," "implementation of restorative justice in education," and "restorative practices in school settings." The structure of this chapter is to review the literature on restorative justice in several sections in this order: Current disciplinary actions across the United States, implementing restorative justice practices and the challenges associated with that, the potential of restorative justice to make schools more equitable, the use of restorative practices to reduce punitive measure, and opposition to restorative justice practices.

Current Disciplinary Actions Across the United States

The current punitive discipline system within United States schools largely relies on penalties such as detention, suspension, and expulsion to manage student behavior. These measures often deter misconduct by enforcing immediate consequences for the students who create the offenses. However, this approach has faced significant criticism for its poor effectiveness in addressing the underlying causes of the student's behavior. According to research conducted by Skiba et al. (2014), research has indicated that punitive discipline can lead to a range of adverse outcomes, including increased dropout rates, academic disengagement, and even early involvement in the juvenile criminal justice system. Many argue that this system often fails to foster personal growth or rehabilitation, instead continuing a cycle of punishment and exclusion that can hinder the creation of a supportive, inclusive educational environment. It is the responsibility of educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to advocate for a more effective and supportive discipline system within the schools.

According to statistics by the US Department of Education in an article written by Dinkes et al. (2009), 48 percent of public schools reported taking at least one serious disciplinary action against a student, including suspensions lasting five days or more, removals with no services (i.e., expulsions), and transfers to specialized schools for specific offenses during the 2005–2006 school year. Of those serious disciplinary actions, 74 percent were suspensions for five days or more, five percent were expulsions, and 20 percent were transferred to specialized schools. (Dinkes et al., 2009)

The National Center for Educational Statistics broke down the offense committed and if serious disciplinary action was taken. Irwin et al. (2022) reported that in the 2019–20 school year, approximately 35 percent of public schools, totaling around 29,500 institutions, took at

least one serious disciplinary action in response to specific student offenses. The data indicated that 24 percent of public schools implemented serious disciplinary actions for physical attacks or fights. For offenses involving the distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs, 19 percent of schools took such actions. When it came to the use or possession of a weapon other than a firearm or explosive device, 10 percent of schools responded with serious disciplinary measures. Additionally, eight percent of schools took serious disciplinary actions for the distribution, possession, or use of alcohol, and two percent did so for the use or possession of a firearm or explosive device. The data showed a reduction in serious disciplinary actions taken in all areas except for the distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs between 2009-2010 and 2019-2020. This is a promising statistic and begs the question of what are educators and administrators doing to reduce the instances of disciplinary actions.

Cribb Fabersunne et al. (2023) conducted a study that explored the link between exclusionary school discipline (ESD) and academic performance among middle and high school students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds in a California school district. Their study was conducted from 2014 to 2017. The data showed that 21.4% of the 16,849 students experienced at least one ESD event, with Black and Latine students disproportionately affected. Exclusionary school discipline events were associated with a significant decline in grade point average (GPA), particularly among minority students. For instance, Black and Latine students experienced GPA decreases of 0.56 and 0.51 points, respectively, compared to their White peers. The findings highlighted the inequities in ESD practices and suggested these practices may contribute to long-term adverse educational and health outcomes, proposing that ESD events be considered adverse childhood experiences (Cribb Fabersunne et al., 2023).

The current data justifies a need for a shift from current disciplinary actions to more restorative practices. Losen and Skiba (2010) examined current disciplinary practices within school systems, with a focus on the rise and impact of out-of-school suspensions. Their study highlighted the increase in suspension rates since the 1970s, mainly due to adopting "zero tolerance" policies. These policies mandate suspensions for breaking various rules, including violent behavior and dress code violations. The authors argued that these harsh disciplinary measures do not do anything to benefit school safety or student behavior. These practices may harm students by reducing their instructional time, leading to poor academic success and an increased risk of dropping out. Losen and Skiba (2010) showed a racial disparity in suspension rates, with students of color seeing an increase from six percent in 1973 to fifteen percent in 2006. The Black/White gap has grown from a three percent difference in the 1970s to over a ten percent difference in the 2000s. Black students are now over three times more likely than White students to be suspended (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

The report's findings suggested that middle schools, in particular, show higher suspension rates, which negatively affect students' academic and social outcomes in the long term. The analysis of suspension data from 18 large urban school districts revealed that Black males face the highest suspension rates, followed by Latino males and Black females. Losen and Skiba argued that this loss of instructional time is detrimental to trying to close the achievement gap. Losen and Skiba (2010) recommended increased data collection, technical assistance for schools with high suspension rates, and federal oversight to ensure non-discriminatory disciplinary practices. Losen and Skiba said the goal is to create safer and more supportive learning environments without resorting to frequent suspensions.

Zero-Tolerance Policies Versus Restorative Justice Practices

In the early 1990s, the U.S. Congress started a tough-on-crime approach in schools due to crime levels in communities across the country reaching record numbers. This period saw the increased criminalization of juveniles, leading to a school discipline system defined by harsh punishments (Kang-Brown et al., 2013). The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 was a historic moment, initiating zero-tolerance policies nationwide. This federal law made schools expel any student caught with a firearm for at least one year to remain eligible for federal funding (Gun-Free Schools Act, 1994). This policy implemented by the federal government led states to adopt and expand their own zero-tolerance rules regardless of the offense.

Zero-tolerance discipline and restorative justice are very different ways to handle student behavior. With zero-tolerance, students get strict punishments like suspension or expulsion, no matter why they broke the rules or how bad the infraction was. There needs to be more give-and-take regarding the context of the infraction. This method tries to scare students into behaving but is often seen as unfair and does not solve the real issues. On the other hand, restorative justice focuses on fixing the harm done and creating a supportive school environment. It includes talking things out, mediation, and activities that build community and empathy. Instead of punishing students, it tries to understand why they misbehave and helps them improve their behavior. Restorative justice practices can lead to more robust, more inclusive school communities. The papers and studies below explain why schools might want to switch from zero-tolerance to restorative justice.

The ethnographic study conducted by Dunning-Lozano (2015) explored the disciplinary practices and outcomes associated with Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEPs) in

Texas, specifically targeting a 6th to 12th-grade cohort. The research revealed significant insights into implementing zero-tolerance policies and their impact on students, teachers, and families within these programs. The study underscored that DAEPs often function as extensions of the criminal justice system, reinforcing punitive measures over rehabilitative ones. This systemic approach tends to disproportionately affect minority and low-income students, contributing to the possibility of disadvantaged students ending up within the criminal justice system. The study found that 80% of referrals to DAEPs were selective based on the one handing out the punishment, often for minor infractions like insubordination, highlighting the gray area nature of these referrals (Dunning-Lozano, 2015).

The findings further indicated that Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs harm students' academic and social performances. Students in DAEPs have a dropout rate five times higher than those in mainstream schools, and these programs often serve as re-entry points for juvenile criminal offenders rather than facilitating their reintegration into regular educational settings. The ethnographic data illustrated how DAEPs not only continue educational inequalities but also stigmatize and criminalize vulnerable student populations. Moreover, the study revealed that these disciplinary practices extend beyond the school environment, impacting the students' families and broader communities, thus calling into question the efficacy and ethical implications of zero-tolerance policies in education (Dunning-Lozano, 2015).

Knight and Wadhwa (2014) explored how restorative justice practices can nurture resilience and provide opportunities for students in urban schools. Through the use of restorative justice practices, specifically peacemaking circles, the authors illustrated how these practices help build supportive relationships, encourage positive youth development, and create a more inclusive and empowering school environment. The narratives provided highlighted the

experiences of students who faced significant challenges and how restorative practices helped them navigate and overcome these obstacles.

Knight and Wadhwa emphasized the detrimental impact of zero-tolerance policies on student resilience. These policies often resulted in suspensions and expulsions, affecting at a higher rate students of color and those with disabilities. Knight and Wadhwa argued that restorative justice offers a more constructive alternative by focusing on repairing relationships that were harmed in the infraction and addressing the root causes of behavior issues. Knight and Wadhwa provided detailed portraits of students who benefited from these practices, demonstrating how circles facilitated honest communication, accountability, and personal growth. By creating a supportive community and providing students with opportunities to express themselves and engage in meaningful dialogue, restorative justice practices helped to counteract the negative and isolating effects of punitive disciplinary measures (Knight & Wadhwa, 2014).

Battjes and Kaplan (2023) explored the shift in school discipline from zero-tolerance policies to restorative justice practices. They argued that zero-tolerance policies, which have been prevalent for the past three decades, often separated students from their peers and school communities, leading to unintended negative consequences such as isolationism, a higher rate of criminal activity, and a feeling of shame amongst their peers. These policies often impacted marginalized students at higher levels, pushing them toward the criminal justice system rather than addressing the root causes of their behavior and helping them achieve academic success. As a response, several states began to pass legislation that moves away from zero-tolerance, focusing instead on restorative practices.

Battjes and Kaplan (2023) highlighted that while the government initially implemented zero-tolerance policies to protect students and create safe school environments, they have often failed in practice. Instead of deterring misbehavior, these policies led to higher rates of suspensions and expulsions, particularly among minority, low-income students and students with a disability. In contrast, restorative justice practices emphasize understanding and addressing the underlying causes of misbehavior, holding students accountable, and promoting healing and community building. Restorative practices are not a new concept, according to the authors. They have existed for centuries, and Native Americans and other indigenous societies have commonly used them. For example, Indigenous communities often settled conflicts and disputes using ‘restitution negotiations’. Conflicts between people were resolved by repairing the harm done through agreed-upon compensation or resolution. The goal of these meetings was to prevent revenge and restore peace in the community (Kohli, 2019). Battjes and Kaplan (2023) provided examples of how states like Michigan and Minnesota have successfully integrated restorative practices into their school discipline codes, demonstrating a significant shift in focus from punitive measures to supportive interventions to keep students engaged in their education and reduce behavioral infraction reoccurrence.

Knight and Wadhwa (2014), Battjes and Kaplan (2023), and Dunning-Lozano’s (2015) research laid out above shows the ineffectiveness of zero-tolerance discipline policies in schools by highlighting their long-term detrimental effects on students, particularly those from disadvantaged communities. Started by the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, zero-tolerance policies were intended to create safe school environments but the research has shown that this has resulted in increased criminalization of juveniles and continuation of educational inequalities amongst students of color, low-income students, and students with a disability (Gun-Free

Schools Act, 1994; Kang-Brown et al., 2013). Dunning-Lozano's (2015) study revealed that DAEPs, which emerged from these policies, function as extensions of the criminal justice system, continuing to affect minority and low-income students disproportionately and contributing to higher dropout rates and ongoing public disapproval. This disciplinary approach fails to address the underlying causes of misbehavior and often worsens the issues it seeks to resolve. In contrast, as discussed by Knight and Wadhwa (2014) and Battjes and Kaplan (2023), restorative justice practices offer a more practical alternative by creating supportive school environments and addressing root causes of behavior through community-building, relationships, and open and honest dialogue. These practices have been shown to reduce the negatives stated above by creating inclusive educational settings that demonstrate a shift from punitive to restorative discipline methods in some states (Battjes & Kaplan, 2023; Knight & Wadhwa, 2014).

Implementation and Challenges of Restorative Justice in Educational Settings

Restorative justice practices were broken down in simple terms by Anyon et al. (2016) saying that restorative justice practices are problem-solving processes held in a small conference or a larger circle format, which may include people affected by the incident directly or indirectly. How this is achieved is in four parts. First, a pre conference meeting is held whereby a facilitator meets with a disputant to orient him or her to restorative practices. Secondly, if the conference is to proceed, a range of parties are invited to voluntarily attend, including the disputant, the disputant's supporters, and all those negatively impacted by the incident. Third, in the conference itself, participants sit in a circle facing one another, and a facilitator uses a structured set of questions to guide the exchange among all the participants. Fourth, the participants jointly develop a plan to repair the harm and prevent future incidents. Agreements to repair the harm

can take many forms, including the disputant making amends through his or her actions (e.g., community service or repair damaged property). Typically, agreements are written down and agreed upon by all conference participants (Anyon et al., 2016).

Implementing restorative justice practices in classrooms, schools, and districts presents numerous challenges. One of the primary difficulties is the necessity of replacing the current disciplinary policies. These challenges can hinder the whole school adoption of restorative justice practices despite their potential benefits. Payne and Welch (2015) noted that leaders who want to work within a restorative approach must grapple with the fact that removing punitive discipline policies can be unsettling and difficult for teachers, who may feel insecure about fostering the relationships that are foundational to restorative work. By pointing to deeply ingrained racial bias, and how it influences teachers' responses to their Black and Hispanic students, two anonymous educators from Skiba et al.'s (2014) study echoed prior scholarship about differential treatment of student behavior based on race. These racial biases, coupled with social pressure to exert control over students of color, contribute to a troubling phenomenon: the more Black students in a school, the less likely that institution is to use restorative justice (Payne & Welch, 2015).

Atticot and Kamm (2023), explored the impact of restorative justice practices on exclusionary discipline, particularly focusing on Black students who are often more affected by such practices, contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline. By interviewing 16 school leaders and teachers, Atticot and Kamm found that restorative justice can effectively reduce suspensions and expulsions of Black students if implemented as a practice rather than a program. Consistent difficulties to implementing restorative practices include time constraints, mindset, lack of resources, and the need for professional development and whole-group involvement. Using

various educational theories, Atticot's and Kamm's (2023) research identified positive and negative themes common to academic success and failures such as community building, school avoidance, negative impacts on learning, restorative circles, communication development, and cultural shifts throughout their study. Atticot and Kamm also made three recommendations for future research: comparing the experiences of Black girls in schools with and without restorative justice practices, engaging in restorative circles as a participant observer, and a mixed methods study on the Restore and Heal Wheel's effectiveness on school culture (Atticot & Kamm, 2023).

Atticot and Kamm (2023) sought to identify answers to three vital questions: What are school leaders' and teachers' lived experiences with exclusionary disciplinary practices? What are teachers' and school leaders' lived experiences with the use of restorative justice practices and how could these practices affect students behaviorally and academically? Finally, what have been some hindrances to restorative justice or restorative practices based on the lived experiences of school leaders and other educators?

Cremin et al. (2012) explored the concept of restorative justice and its application in educational contexts through an interdisciplinary lens. Grounded in criminology, restorative justice was also found to incorporate elements from psychology, education, sociology, peace studies, philosophy, and law. This broad perspective highlighted the diverse ways restorative justice is conceptualized and applied, creating a dynamic interplay of ideas. Cremin et al. drew on a seminar series funded by the Economic and Social Research Council of the United Kingdom, which gathered experts from various disciplines to discuss the theoretical foundation and practical applications of restorative justice in schools. The themes identified included encounter, reparation, and transformation, with each discipline emphasizing different aspects of these concepts based on their specific norms and assumptions.

Cremin et al.'s (2012) research revealed both similarities and differences among the disciplines mentioned above. Psychology, for instance, focuses on the therapeutic potential of restorative justice after harm has occurred, while social psychology and sociology emphasize the importance of reparation and situational factors. Criminology is concerned with the socio-cultural context of crime and ensuring equitable reparation, while peace studies distinguish between reparative restorative justice in Western contexts and transformative restorative justice in indigenous cultures. The discussions also addressed the challenges of integrating restorative justice into educational settings, noting that effective implementation may require a cultural shift within schools. Cremin et al. discussed the potential of restorative justice to transform school environments, but cautions against narrowing restorative justice to a set of techniques, advocating for a broader, more holistic approach. Cremin et al. (2012) wrote:

Restorative justice could be seen as inherently about restoring communities to a place where conflict is non-destructive, or restoring conflict to a non-destructive level. Perhaps in schools and communities, proponents of restorative justice need to combine processes for dealing with harmful behavior with more proactive changes in culture, so that it becomes both remedial and preventative. (p. 434)

This quote continues the pattern that for restorative justice to be effectively implemented there needs to be a culture shift within the school.

Winn (2018) also explored the application of restorative justice within educational settings, advocating for a shift from current punitive measures to practices that promote healing and community. Winn argued that restorative justice can transform how schools handle discipline, suggesting that addressing harm and creating accountability can cause a more equitable and collaborative educational environment. She emphasized the importance of four

pedagogical stances: history, race, justice, and language, which she believes are essential for the successful implementation of restorative practices in schools.

One takeaway was the discussion of the Student Circle Keepers program at Kennedy High School, where students and administrators engage in dialogues about justice and restorative justice. This program highlighted the benefits of restorative practices, such as promoting equality, problem-solving, and positive interactions among students. Winn's research showed the necessity of training and a change of thinking among educators to fully embrace restorative justice, as lack of training and commitment are cited as significant barriers to its success (Winn, 2018).

Winn also addressed the challenges faced by schools in implementing restorative justice, particularly the need for support from all participants, including educators, administrators, students, and the community. She introduced the concept of Transformative Justice Teacher Education, which views teaching as a justice-seeking endeavor and emphasizes the importance of ongoing education and community engagement. Through her exploration of these themes, Winn provided a framework for understanding and applying restorative justice in educational contexts, aiming to create environments where all students can thrive (Winn, 2018).

Restorative justice practices in educational settings have emerged as a transformative approach to address student misconduct, emphasizing reconciliation and community-building over current disciplinary actions. The Family and Youth Restorative Conference Program by McMorris et al. (2013), implemented in Minneapolis Public Schools in collaboration with the Legal Rights Center, represented a significant application of these principles. Since its inception in 2008, the program aimed to provide an alternative to traditional disciplinary actions such as

expulsion, focusing instead on restorative interventions that engage students, families, and school personnel in a collaborative process.

The implementation of restorative justice through the program involved a structured process that included an initial conference to develop an accountability plan and follow-up coordination to ensure compliance and support. This approach emphasized repairing harm, and restoring respect and a positive reputation within the school community rather than disciplinary measures. Utilizing family group conferences, the program sought to address serious behavioral incidents by involving students, their families, and school staff in a collaborative process to restore relationships and support student reintegration into the school community. Data from student and parent surveys, as well as school records from 2010 to 2012, indicated high levels of satisfaction with the program and significant improvements in students' ability to make positive choices and reduce their previous poor behaviors, which often led to detentions or suspensions (McMorris et al., 2013).

Statistics from the evaluation highlighted the program's effectiveness. Both students and parents reported increased awareness of community supports and improved communication with family members. Notably, 83 percent of students felt the program helped them succeed in school, and 91 percent would recommend it to peers. Post-conference surveys showed significant decreases in students' fighting and skipping school, with a 29 percent increase in students' confidence in making good choices when upset. School records corroborated these findings, showing decreased suspensions and improved attendance and academic outcomes in the year following participation (McMorris et al., 2013). The collaborative model between Minneapolis Public Schools and the Legal Rights Center, supported by restorative-trained social workers,

facilitated trust and engagement among students and their families, significantly impacting students' behavioral and academic trajectories for the better (McMorris et al., 2013).

The research of Anyon et al. (2016), Atticot and Kamm (2023), Cremin et al. (2012), McMorris et al. (2013), Payne & Welch (2015), and Winn (2018) showed that restorative justice practices in educational settings are problem-solving and community-building supports to address student misbehavior through non-punitive measures. Anyon et al. (2016) outlined a four-part process involving pre-conference meetings, inclusive voluntary conferences, structured dialogue, and collaborative reparation plans. This method emphasized inclusive and collaborative decision-making among all parties that were involved. However, Payne and Welch (2015) and Winn (2018) highlighted significant challenges in implementing restorative practices, mainly due to current disciplinary policies and racial biases. All three noted teachers' difficulty in shifting away from their current disciplinary measures to adopting restorative practices.

Similarly, Atticot and Kamm (2023) emphasized the positive impact of restorative justice on reducing exclusionary discipline, particularly for students of color, while acknowledging a common thread of implementation barriers such as time and logistics. They advocate for a holistic approach that integrates community building and cultural shifts, aligning with Cremin et al.'s (2012) perspective. Cremin et al. (2012) stressed the need for a cultural shift within schools to effectively implement restorative justice, warning against reducing it to techniques and strategies. Winn (2018) echoes this by advocating for transformative justice through ongoing education and community engagement as she highlighted successful programs like the Student Circle Keepers. McMorris et al. (2013) gave solid proof that restorative justice practices work well. They found that the Family and Youth Restorative Conference Program led to big improvements in students' behavior and school performance. This shows the importance of

organized and collaborative methods to get good results. All authors argued that restorative practices were a relational approach that required a shift in thinking of current disciplinary measures by educators (Anyon et al., 2016; Atticot & Kamm, 2023; Cremin et al., 2012; McMorris et al., 2013; Winn, 2018).

Restorative Circles

Anyon et al. (2016), Atticot and Kamm (2023), McMorris et al. (2013), and Winn (2018) are just some of the researchers that have mentioned the use of restorative circles in an effort to achieve restorative justice. This leads one to believe that restorative circles are vital to restorative justice practices due to emphasizing community building, empathy, and dialogue. This focus on open communication and mutual understanding between the offender and offeree helps to repair their relationships and return to a less hostile school climate. For example, restorative circles bring together students, teachers, and sometimes parents to discuss conflicts and issues, promoting participant accountability and empathy (Battjes & Kaplan, 2023; Wadhwa, 2017).

Moreover, restorative circles prioritize relationship-building as a fundamental goal. In restorative circles, participants engage in structured and open communication that helps to build trust and strengthen the bonds between students, educators, and faculty. Focusing on these relational aspects, restorative circles, and restorative justice practices create a more inclusive and cohesive school culture. This is particularly important in addressing issues of inequity and a sense of belonging among all students. Likewise, restorative justice practices have been shown to reduce the rates of the school-to-prison pipeline (Hemez et al., 2019; Lustick, 2022).

Finally, restorative circles aim to reduce the reliance on conventional disciplinary measures such as suspensions and expulsions. By addressing the underlying causes of

misbehavior and promoting positive behavioral changes through dialogue in a restorative circle and community building, this approach provides effective alternatives to traditional disciplinary methods. Schools that have implemented restorative circles have reported improvements in student behavior, reduced disciplinary referrals, and a more positive overall school environment. These outcomes not only demonstrate the effectiveness of this restorative practice but also its crucial role in inspiring and motivating a positive school climate where students can thrive both academically and socially (Atticot & Kamm, 2023; Knight et al., 2014; & Skiba et al., 2014).

The Potential of Restorative Justice to Create Inclusive, Equitable, and Supportive School Environments

Anfara Jr. et al. (2015) outlined seven principles for implementing restorative justice in education. These principles are described as an inclusive environment and relationship-focused approach to discipline. The first principle, meeting needs, suggests that unmet needs drive behaviors and that addressing these needs can prevent conflicts. The second principle, providing accountability and support, stressed the importance of individuals taking responsibility for their actions within the school community. The third principle, making things right, focused on repairing harm caused by misbehavior through restitution and reconciliation. The fourth principle was about viewing conflict as a learning opportunity, allowing students and educators to grow from resolving disputes. The fifth principle involved building healthy learning communities, and strengthening respect and connection to prevent misbehavior. The sixth principle, restoring relationships, prioritized repairing relationships over punishment. Finally, the seventh principle addressed power imbalances, advocating for transforming school-wide practices that harm students to promote justice and equity in school environments (Anfara Jr. et al., 2015).

To see how effective these seven principles were, Anfara Jr. et al. (2015) looked at restorative justice throughout the world as a whole to determine the current state of restorative justice within the education system and to see if it is making an impact. First, Anfara Jr. et al. (2015) looked at research conducted by various scholars around the world, including Latimer et al. (2005). Latimer's team conducted a meta-analysis involving 22 studies, finding that restorative justice practices were significantly more effective in achieving victim-offender satisfaction, reducing repeat offenders, and ensuring compliance with the agreed-upon restitution program. They then looked at research by Rodriguez (2007) and Hayes (2005). Rodriguez and Hayes reported lower repetitive offense rates among juveniles and violent offenders who participated in restorative justice programs compared to those who did not. They then turned to McCluskey et al. (2008), who found that implementing restorative justice in Scottish schools led to increased teacher reflection and commitment to the restorative principles provided. In Australia, the largest study regarding restorative justice in schools indicated that employing circles and conferencing improved feelings of safety and understanding of their misdeeds among students, reinforcing positive school values (Suvall, 2009). Their paper then looked at the United States in research by Karp and Breslin (2001), which noted that schools in Minnesota, Colorado, and Pennsylvania saw reductions in major disciplinary issues and substance abuse after replacing zero-tolerance policies with restorative justice practices. Anfara Jr. et al. (2015) showed that restorative justice is not only an educational issue in the United States, but a worldwide issue that has shown positive results in education regardless of country.

Morrison and Vaandering (2012) conducted a study to gain more clarity on the teaching, culture, and discipline of restorative justice within schools. Morrison and Vaandering aimed to define restorative justice as a distinctive paradigm emphasizing social engagement over social

control, contrasting with traditional punitive disciplinary measures. They proposed a responsive regulatory framework by creating relational school cultures. This framework prioritized building, maintaining, and repairing relationships, viewing conflict as a learning opportunity, and addressing power imbalances, similar to the research conducted by Anfara Jr. et al. (2015).

Anfara Jr. et al. (2015) reviewed various restorative justice practices, such as victim-offender mediation, community conferencing, and peacemaking circles, and their implementation in schools across different countries. It highlighted empirical evidence showing the positive outcomes of restorative justice, including reduced offenses, improved school climate, and enhanced student-teacher relationships. This evidence-based approach provides reassurance and confidence in the effectiveness of restorative justice. For instance, in Minnesota, over a three-year period, behavior referrals for physical aggression in an elementary school were reduced from 773 to 153, and suspensions in a junior high school were reduced from 110 to 55. A large-scale study in Scotland also found that restorative justice helped create a calmer, more positive atmosphere in elementary schools and improved conflict-resolution skills among students (Karp & Breslin, 2001; McCluskey et al., 2008).

Anfara Jr. et al.'s (2015) study concluded that restorative justice practices effectively reduce exclusionary discipline practices and promote a positive school environment. However, it emphasized the need to reverse policy from punitive to relational practices to achieve sustainable change. They argued that this shift in thinking is difficult and requires strong leadership from the administration, voluntary participation among all participants, comprehensive training, and a commitment to transforming school culture.

Morrison and Vaandering (2012) also mentioned that while restorative justice has been implemented in various countries and states, research on its effectiveness in educational contexts

is limited and primarily consists of non-peer-reviewed articles and books. The education system has had twelve more years of research and peer-reviewed articles since the publication of Morrison and Vaandering's (2012) article. However, Morrison and Vaandering (2012) argued that it offers a more compassionate and supportive approach to discipline, focusing on repairing harm done to all, nurturing positive classroom environments, making the environment more conducive to learning, and transforming power imbalances. Hence, there is no constant power struggle. Morrison and Vaandering concluded by acknowledging the need for further research and discussing the challenges and suggestions for implementing restorative justice in school settings, which this paper will provide more clarity throughout.

The state of Minnesota also embarked on a comprehensive examination of disciplinary practices, recognizing a disconnection between disciplinary measures and their effectiveness in addressing behavioral issues. A study by Pufall Jones et al. (2018) aimed to refine disciplinary approaches, ensuring they are aligned with students' needs, and conducive to fostering a positive and supportive learning environment statewide.

The study by Pufall Jones et al. (2018) found that the youth who were interviewed generally conveyed a strong desire for schooling within a safe environment where fairness, care, and support from school staff are evident. However, the data frequently noted inconsistencies in disciplinary actions, feeling unfairly labeled based on race and other factors, and lacking opportunities to voice their perspectives or advocate for themselves. School administrators implementing non-exclusionary methods echoed many of the sentiments expressed by the youth, underscoring the potential of such practices and outlining key requirements for their effective implementation. These viewpoints underscore the detrimental effects of exclusionary

disciplinary approaches and emphasize the significance of sharing successful practices nationwide to enhance outcomes for both schools and their students.

Gomez et al. (2021) discussed the potential of school-based restorative justice practices to address racial inequalities in school discipline and overall academic achievements. Their research showed that the current punitive disciplinary measures disproportionately affect students of color and low-income students, contributing to higher suspension rates and lower academic performance (Gomez et al., 2021). They suggested that restorative practices, which focus on repairing harm and reconciling conflicts, offer an alternative to exclusionary discipline. These practices aim to reduce reliance on suspensions, improve teacher-student relationships, and help students manage perceived peer shaming, creating a more equitable educational environment.

Gomez et al. (2021) highlighted various studies demonstrating restorative practices' effectiveness in reducing suspensions and improving student behavior. For instance, implementing restorative practices in Denver Public Schools significantly decreased suspension rates over seven years (Gomez et al., 2021). Similarly, schools in Texas and Oakland, California, reported a dramatic reduction in out-of-school suspensions and aggressive behavior referrals, like physical altercations, after adopting certain restorative practices. These findings underscore restorative practices' effectiveness in decreasing disciplinary inequities, promoting a positive school climate, and enhancing students' social-emotional skills, which are critical for their academic success and overall well-being (Gomez et al., 2021).

Often, restorative justice practices overlap with other non-traditional school-based intervention models, such as school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports, and social-emotional learning programs. While all these approaches aim to reduce problematic

behavior that can lead to punitive measures and increase positive behavior, restorative practices are unique in their emphasis on community building and relationship restoration. By involving students in conflict resolution and promoting mutual understanding, restorative practices create a supportive environment where students can thrive socially and academically. Gomez et al. (2021) concluded that restorative practices hold unique potential to achieve educational equity and lessen racial inequalities in discipline and academic achievement.

Anfara Jr. et al. (2015) discussed principles for implementing restorative justice in education, advocating for an inclusive and relational approach to discipline by addressing unmet needs, fostering accountability, repairing harm, using conflicts as learning opportunities, building healthy communities, restoring relationships, and correcting power imbalances. Their global analysis revealed significant positive outcomes, such as reduced repeated offenses and improved school climates, which Morrison and Vaandering (2012) further corroborated by emphasizing relational school cultures over punitive measures. These studies highlighted the effectiveness of restorative practices in enhancing student-teacher relationships and reducing exclusionary discipline, a point brought up again by Pufall Jones et al. (2018) and Gomez et al. (2021), who pointed out the potential of restorative justice to mitigate racial inequalities and promote educational equity. All of these authors (Anfara Jr. et al., 2015; Gomez et al., 2021; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Pufall Jones et al., 2018) discussed how it is the power of relationships that help transform the school from a harsh environment of discipline to an equitable school environment that promotes academic success.

Restorative Justice Practices Impact on Reducing Punitive Discipline Practices

The next section of this paper will examine how restorative justice practices impact student learning by reducing punitive disciplinary practices and current inequalities within that

system. Simson (2012) investigated whether the introduction of restorative justice programs reduces punitive student discipline and racial disparities in two selected secondary school districts, utilizing suspension data and coarsened exact matching for comparative analysis, with ongoing plans for nationwide data collection. The study examined the impact of implementing restorative justice programs in 143 primary, middle, and high schools across two large public school districts. The findings suggested that these programs have the potential to significantly reduce schools' reliance on punitive disciplinary measures. Schools that implemented restorative justice showed a greater initial suspension rate compared to non-restorative justice schools. However, after controlling for various variables, it was found that restorative justice schools were able to reduce their suspension percentages by more than non-restorative justice schools. Additionally, Simson (2012) explored the reduction in racial disproportionality in school discipline and found that restorative justice implementation helped to address the problem of African-American discipline inequality in suspensions. The research highlighted the effectiveness of restorative justice in promoting dialogue and understanding, as well as reducing punitive discipline in schools (Simson, 2012).

Despite the promising results, the study acknowledged the need for further research. The limitations of the sample and measurement errors in the data collection process are identified as areas requiring attention. It is suggested that future studies should examine schools with similar levels of restorative justice implementation and conduct more in-depth research. Nonetheless, the study's findings provide support for those advocating for collaborative and dialogue-based approaches, indicating that restorative justice programs can indeed be effective in addressing punitive school discipline and promoting a more inclusive and understanding school environment.

An extensive case study was conducted in 2018 by Rubio. According to Rubio, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify strategies related to the successful implementation of restorative justice practices and to uncover the extent to which the strategy decreased off-campus suspension rates and office discipline referrals in five public schools in the San Bernardino City Unified School District (Rubio, 2018). Ten research participants actively implementing restorative justice practices at their school sites during the initial three years were selected for his qualitative case study. Rubio conducted in-person interviews with the participants to gather the necessary data, using open-ended questions to explore and address the research inquiries.

In the study, Rubio (2018) found that 100% of the participants agreed that engaging in restorative conversations with students played a vital role in reducing the number of office discipline referrals and off-campus suspensions. They believed that these conversations were an effective strategy to address disciplinary issues. Additionally, 90% of the participants emphasized the importance of receiving professional development and support from the district to effectively implement restorative practices. They believed that the district's assistance was necessary for successful implementation.

Furthermore, when comparing suspension data from five different schools and the entire district, it was observed that 80% of the schools experienced a significant decrease in the total number of suspensions. This not only suggests that the implementation of restorative practices had a positive impact on disciplinary outcomes but also offers hope for a more positive school environment. Lastly, 80% of the research participants highlighted the need for adequate time to prepare for and implement restorative justice practices. They recognized that sufficient time was a crucial factor when introducing restorative approaches. These findings underscore the

importance of restorative conversations, district support, and careful planning in effectively reducing disciplinary issues and promoting a more positive school environment (Rubio 2018).

Likewise, another study by Hashim et al. (2018) looked at restorative practices in the Los Angeles School District. They discussed efforts to address the disproportionate suspension rates among students of color in the Los Angeles Unified School District through the prohibition of suspensions for willful defiance and the implementation of restorative justice programs. The study used an interrupted time series design with 12 years of student-level data to analyze suspension trends before and after these policy changes. Their findings indicated significant reductions in suspension rates following the suspension ban, the introduction of restorative practices, and decreased suspension disparities between frequently disciplined students and their peers. Additionally, targeted schools receiving restorative justice training saw further reductions in suspensions. However, persistent suspension gaps remain between Black and non-Black students and between special education and non-special education students. This suggests that more time and comprehensive strategies are needed to address these inequities fully.

Both studies by Simson (2012) and Hashim et al. (2018) explored the impact of restorative justice practices on student discipline and racial disparities within school districts. Simson's study analyzed the implementation of restorative justice programs in 143 schools across two large public school districts, finding that these programs significantly reduce reliance on punitive disciplinary measures and address racial disproportionality, particularly among African American students. Similarly, the study by Hashim et al. (2018) examined the Los Angeles Unified School District's efforts to curb disproportionate suspension rates among students of color through a suspension ban for willful defiance and the introduction of restorative justice practices. Both studies highlighted substantial reductions in suspension rates and a

decrease in suspension disparities between marginalized and non-marginalized students following the implementation of restorative justice programs. Moreover, both studies acknowledged the ongoing challenges and the need for more comprehensive strategies to eliminate disciplinary inequities fully. Despite their different methodologies and contexts, both studies provided evidence supporting the effectiveness of restorative justice practices in promoting a more inclusive and understanding school environment while reducing punitive disciplinary actions.

Morgan (2021) took a look at the disproportionate rate of out-of-school suspensions experienced by Black students and its contribution to the school-to-prison pipeline. The article highlighted that Black students are significantly more likely to face suspensions than their White counterparts, with statistics showing that in the 2013-14 school year, 13.7% of Black students were suspended compared to only 3.4% of White students. This disparity is linked to various factors, including biased responses from school personnel, lack of teacher preparation, and more punitive disciplinary approaches in schools with high concentrations of Black students.

Morgan (2021) uncovered the impact of these suspensions on students' lives, emphasizing that out-of-school suspensions increase unsupervised time and reduce instructional time, which leads to higher rates of academic failure and higher chances of criminal activity. Studies cited in her review suggested that students who are suspended are much more likely to be arrested. Likewise, dropouts are over three times more likely to be arrested than high school graduates. Schools with higher poverty and minority populations often hire less qualified teachers, worsening these issues and perpetuating the cycle of poor education and increased incarceration rates.

Morgan (2021) advocated for the implementation of restorative justice practices as a solution to mitigate the school-to-prison pipeline. She defined restorative justice as something that focuses on conflict resolution through non-punitive means, allowing those who were offended to express their needs and for those responsible to make amends. The review notes that schools piloting restorative justice programs have seen significant reductions in suspension rates. However, for restorative justice to be effective, it must be integrated in the school's culture, promoting a supportive and respectful environment characterized by active listening, a sense of equality, and mutual respect.

Lustick (2022) examined how restorative justice practices were implemented in urban charter schools to address structural inequalities and the school-to-prison pipeline. The study analyzed interviews with youth leaders and staff at a specific school, referred to as Justice High School, in an effort to understand the effectiveness and challenges of implementing restorative justice practices across the entire school. Lustick found that while there was a clear commitment to restorative justice, participants often defaulted to exclusionary discipline methods, especially in maintaining order, indicating a tension between restorative justice ideals and traditional discipline approaches. The study highlighted the importance of preparing school leaders to navigate these challenges and emphasized the need for restorative justice practices to be explicitly tied to social justice and structural change to be truly effective.

Lustick (2022) concluded that there was a correlation between restorative justice practices and reduced suspension rates, though this did not always narrow the racial discipline gap. Schools with majority Black and Hispanic students were less likely to fully implement restorative justice, often reverting to exclusionary practices. The study also identified critical components of restorative justice, such as fostering resilience through relationships and

promoting social justice, which were crucial for the success of restorative justice initiatives. Participants expressed the need for a deeper integration of restorative justice into the school's culture and practices, as well as the necessity for staff to engage in restorative justice practices themselves to model and reinforce these values. The findings suggested that while restorative justice had the potential to transform school discipline, its implementation required a robust commitment to addressing systemic inequalities and promoting equity (Lustick, 2022).

A report from Darling-Hammond (2023) through the Learning Policy Institute explored the impact of restorative practices in 485 middle schools over six years using student survey data and California administrative data. In his research, restorative practices were aimed at building community and improving relationships in these schools. After examining the text, his research indicated that restorative practices enhanced academic achievement, reduced suspension rates, and decreased behavioral issues, substance abuse, and mental health challenges among students. Specifically, students of Black and Hispanic descent experienced the most significant benefits. Darling-Hammond's (2023) research continued to highlight the potential for restorative practices to address racial disparities in school discipline. The study used an eight-item scale from the California Healthy Kids Survey to measure restorative practice utilization, finding a correlation between higher exposure to restorative practices and improved school experience, positive academic outcomes, and reduced suspension rates.

The report by Darling-Hammond (2023) provided significant data-driven evidence on the impact of restorative practices in middle schools. In 2014, 18% of Black male students nationwide received out-of-school suspensions. The inequality of suspension rates was addressed by pointing out that Black students were nearly four times more likely than White students to face such disciplinary actions. The study demonstrated that a one-unit increase in restorative

practice exposure was then met by a seven-unit increase in English language arts scores for White students and a 17-unit increase for Black students. Additionally, increased exposure to restorative practices significantly reduced the likelihood of suspensions, with Black students experiencing a decline in days of out-of-school suspension 15 times stronger than their White counterparts (Darling-Hammond, 2023).

Schools that used restorative practices to a higher degree saw a 0.73 standard deviation (SD) improvement in school climate. Other positive outcomes included reductions in misbehavior (-0.46 SD), gang membership (-0.37 SD), substance use (-0.36 SD), victimization (-0.42 SD), depressive symptoms (-0.32 SD), sleep deprivation (-0.30 SD), and illness (-0.22 SD) (Darling-Hammond, 2023). The author noted that access to restorative practices was inconsistent; schools with no economically disadvantaged students had restorative practice exposure scores of 3.8 out of 5, whereas those with Black low-income students had scores of 3.4 out of 5 on the survey the author provided (Darling-Hammond, 2023). This data is on par with previous data mentioned by stating that minority and disadvantaged students show a greater need for restorative justice practices.

Restorative justice practices can help combat racial inequality stemming from punitive disciplinary measures. Both Simson (2012) and Hashim et al. (2018) explored the impact of restorative justice practices on student discipline and racial disparities within school districts. This type of research was also seen in Darling-Hammond's (2023) report. One can conclude that restorative justice practices are effective and improve suspension rates and behavioral misconduct amongst students of color and disadvantaged students. Simson's (2012) study examined 143 schools across two large districts, finding that restorative justice programs significantly reduced reliance on punitive measures and helped address racial inequality,

particularly among Black students. Similarly, Hashim et al. investigated the Los Angeles Unified School District's policy changes, revealing significant reductions in suspension rates and decreased inequalities following the suspension ban for willful defiance and restorative justice implementation. Both studies highlighted the decline in suspension rates and reduction in suspension imbalance among disadvantaged students, affirming Darling-Hammond's (2023) results that restorative practices improve academic outcomes and reduce suspensions, particularly benefiting Black and Latino/a students.

Morgan (2021) and Lustick (2022) further showed evidence to these findings by examining the broader implications of restorative justice practices. Morgan's review continued to discuss the disproportionate suspension rates of Black students and the consequent juvenile criminal justice activity, advocating for restorative justice as a means to mitigate these issues. She emphasized that restorative justice created a supportive and respectful environment, significantly reducing suspension rates. Lustick's study on urban charter high schools also supported this by highlighting the challenges and successes of implementing restorative justice to address structural inequalities. Both articles reinforced the need to integrate restorative practices into school culture to ensure their effectiveness. Overall, all studies (Darling-Hammond, 2023; Hashim et al., 2018; Lustick, 2022; Morgan, 2021; Simson, 2018) showed that restorative justice practices led to a more equitable school environment and reduced student misbehavior, leading to punitive disciplinary actions.

Teaching Restorative Justice Through Pedagogy

Atticot & Kamm (2023), Cremin et al. (2012), Morrison and Vaandering (2012), Winn (2018) have consistently highlighted the need for integration of restorative justice principles within the pedagogy of teaching. This integration ensures that educators are equipped with a

solid foundation in restorative justice from the beginning of their training. By embedding restorative justice into teacher education programs, future educators learn to foster inclusive and supportive classroom environments, emphasizing conflict resolution, empathy, and community-building. This early exposure prepares teachers to implement restorative practices effectively, promoting a culture of accountability and healing in schools, ultimately leading to more positive outcomes for students and educators alike.

Vaandering (2014a) explored what a professional development experience rooted in the philosophical principles and practices of restorative justice might entail. Vaandering described a professional development project aimed at proactively integrating restorative justice principles into schools through a comprehensive, dialogic, and democratic peacebuilding pedagogy. This initiative, named "Relationships First: Implementing Restorative Justice From the Ground Up," adopts a transformative approach grounded in the personal core values of participating educators. The focus is on enhancing educators' relationships and conceptual understandings rather than merely improving student behavior through narrow techniques. Central to this professional development is the practice of critical reflexive dialogue in a circle, organized around key questions that prompt participants to reflect on the impact of their interactions. Rooted in relational theory, this approach addresses challenges in implementing and sustaining transformative citizenship and peacebuilding pedagogies in schools. Vaandering (2014a) provided a detailed pedagogical portrait of the project's rationale, design, and facilitation, illustrating its theories, practices, and insights.

Being an expert on restorative justice and implementing the pedagogy to enhance it, Vaandering (2014b) wrote another article analyzing how placing restorative justice practices in the context of engaged, productive pedagogies better nurture the hoped for relational, peaceful

school culture. Vaandering (2014b) concluded from her findings that to effectively implement restorative justice in schools, several key elements are essential: a broader conceptualization of restorative justice that clearly defines its philosophy and principles, critical reflection by policymakers and educators on their personal core values and their alignment with restorative justice principles; a critical examination of current training and theories to identify and eliminate power dynamics that lead to punitive practices; comprehensive resources to support the development and integration of restorative justice beyond just an introductory level; and the development of pedagogy focused on learning rather than control. This pedagogical shift requires teachers to critically reflect on their interactions with students, aiming to foster students' growth as active, engaged community members while avoiding harm or alienation. In doing so, educators adopt a leadership role as 'transformative intellectuals' within their educational systems.

Both of Vaandering's (2014a, 2014b) articles emphasized that a fundamental shift in power dynamics is crucial for the successful implementation of restorative justice practices in schools. Vaandering (2014a) highlighted the need for policymakers and educators to critically reflect on their personal core values and how these align with restorative justice principles, recognizing and addressing the reinforcement of power relations that lead to punitive practices. It stressed that restorative justice is not just about introducing new disciplinary techniques but requires a deep, transformative change in how educators engage with students, promoting a learning-focused rather than a control-focused environment. Similarly, Vaandering (2014b) underscored the challenges in implementing restorative justice within traditional school structures, where existing power hierarchies can hinder the creation of relational and peaceful school cultures. It argued for a comprehensive, dialogic, and democratic peacebuilding pedagogy

that enables educators to take on the role of 'transformative intellectuals,' actively working to dismantle these power dynamics. Both articles asserted that without this fundamental shift, restorative justice practices cannot be fully effective or sustainable.

Pointer et al. (2023) outlined the foundations of restorative pedagogy drawing from both literature and experiential learning within a course at Vermont Law and Graduate School. The authors identified four essential pillars for effective restorative teaching: prioritizing relationships, engaging in self-reflection, fostering dialogue to uncover social oppression, and employing creative and experiential teaching strategies. These pillars are intended to create an educational environment that deeply integrates course material and encourages community-driven social change. Pointer et al. (2023) underscored the importance of aligning educational practices with restorative values to build trust and promote transformative learning experiences.

One aspect of Pointer et al.'s (2023) research was the use of a course to aid in building a foundation for restorative practices. The course, part of the Master of Arts in Restorative Justice and Professional Certificate in Restorative Justice programs, allowed participants to practice teaching restorative justice theory and skills while reflecting on teaching methods that align with restorative values. The classroom community used circle practices to build relationships, reflect on teaching experiences, and provide feedback. This reflective and interactive approach helped distill the four pillars of restorative pedagogy, highlighting the necessity of subverting traditional hierarchical teaching models in favor of more collaborative and relational approaches (Pointer et al., 2023).

Vincent et al. (2021) took a look at introducing restorative practices through the use of multi-tiered systems of supports (MTSS), which is a system that is currently used in numerous

schools around the country. Their study included five training models for staff that focused on the following: (a) implicit bias awareness as one step towards promoting equity, (b) proactive and preventative community and relationship-building practices in the classroom, and (c) practices to restore relationships and repair harm in the classroom or with the help of an administrator (Vincent et al., 2021).

Their study of restorative practices through MTSS showed promising outcomes, including improvements in the overall school-wide implementation of restorative consequences and gains in teacher use of these practices in both existing discipline approaches and restorative practices like hallway chats and restorative circle dialogues. The circle planning tool was employed to help participants design circles that recognized disrespectful behavior in the classroom, understood its effects, and collectively took responsibility for addressing the issue. Vincent et al. (2021) showed statistically significant improvements in staff perceptions of positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) implementation, which was maintained from the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year to the end of the 2019 school year. Staff reported increased use of restorative questions, impromptu chats, and restorative circles to respond to inappropriate behavior. These findings suggest that training staff in strategies to proactively build positive relationships and restore those relationships when they have been harmed can facilitate PBIS implementation at the high school level. Despite these successes, challenges such as aligning administrative commitment to restorative practices with individual teachers' willingness to change classroom practices and overcoming logistical challenges remained

Overall Vincent et al. (2021) found that restorative practices' success were dependent on several factors. According to them these factors were: (a) depends on top-down and bottom-up support, (b) is a long-term commitment, (c) can require a fundamental shift in values if school

personnel and students are accustomed to traditional discipline approaches, and (d) differs from school to school. One thing to note from their study is that they admitted their data might be skewed because all participants were from non-traditional high schools with small enrollments.

In examining the use of pedagogy to implement restorative justice principles within educational settings, studies emphasized embedding these principles into teacher training programs. Vaandering (2014) explored the impact of the use of a professional development experience on restorative justice practices, finding that such training benefited educators' relationships and understandings of these types of concepts. Pointer et al. (2023) identified critical pillars for effective restorative teaching, such as prioritizing relationships and open communication to uncover social power imbalances. Vincent et al. (2021) reported notable improvements in school-wide implementation of restorative consequences and teacher usage of restorative practices through a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). Their findings indicated that tools like circle planning helped participants address disrespectful behavior, promoting positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) at the high school level. Pointer et al., (2023), Vaandering (2014a, 2014b), and Vincent et al. (2021) shared the challenges of making such a shift, though. Logistics and time were some of the key areas that presented challenges. Also, an overall shift in thinking about the power balance of a school was needed. Overall, these studies underscored that successful implementation of restorative practices depends on the school's ability to make it happen. However, all studies showed that if schools were willing to make the changes stated above, they could reap the benefits of reducing overall punitive measures across the school and changing the school climate for the better (Pointer et al., 2023; Vaandering, 2014; Vincent et al., 2021).

Opposition in Regards to Restorative Justice

The reviewed literature on restorative justice revealed various perspectives on its effectiveness and implications. Two out of the three sources (Anfara Jr. et al., 2015; Rubio, 2018; Simson, 2012) recognized the need for further research in this area, indicating that more studies are required to understand the impact of restorative justice practices fully. Simson (2012) specifically addressed how restorative justice can address punitive racial inequality within school discipline. However, a common observation among Anfara Jr. et al. (2015), Rubio (2018), and Simson (2012) is the absence of a clear-cut explanation of what restorative justice entails, the tiered supports associated with its implementation, and how different school districts are adopting these practices. While the existing research is promising, it highlights the necessity for a more structured system and comprehensive implementation supports to ensure its successful adoption across schools.

Bierdz (2019) examined restorative justice practices through a poststructuralist lens, challenging the conventional understanding of restorative justice in educational settings. Bierdz critiqued restorative justice by questioning how power dynamics and societal structures influence and shape these practices. Restorative justice is often framed as a way to reconcile harm and restore well-being in schools. Still, this perspective fails to consider the broader ideological and systemic issues at play. For instance, restorative justice aims to restore harm through voluntary and honest dialogue. Yet, its implementation is deeply embedded within existing power structures like capitalism and patriarchy.

Bierdz (2019) built a theoretical framework using poststructuralist theories, particularly drawing on Foucault's concepts of power, panopticism, and normalization. Michel Foucault's idea of power is that it spreads throughout society and shapes our actions subtly, not just through

direct control. Panopticism is the concept that people behave because they think they might be watched, leading them to self-regulate. Normalization is defining what is normal, making people conform to these standards and punishing those who don't fit in (Bierdz, 2019). This framework critiques the perception that restorative justice practices can fundamentally disrupt existing disciplinary systems. Instead, Bierdz argued that restorative justice perpetuates existing regimes of power by maintaining disciplinary norms under the guise of progressive reform. The illusion of power shift in restorative justice is critiqued, suggesting that instead of humanizing education, restorative justice practices might reinforce dehumanizing power structures.

Finally, Bierdz (2019) called for critically examining restorative justice practices within the context of 21st-century U.S. schools. It highlighted the necessity of understanding restorative justice through the lens of power and ideology, arguing that without such a critique, restorative justice cannot achieve its purported goals of justice and restoration. The paper concluded with suggestions for future research to deepen poststructural understandings of restorative justice and challenge the uncritical acceptance of restorative justice practices in educational literature.

Graham (2017) discussed the complexities of classroom management in urban schools, focusing on the dual perspectives of democratic classrooms and teacher authority. Classroom management is often viewed negatively as behaviorist or oppressive, yet it is essential for fostering academic and social-emotional learning, particularly in urban schools. Graham emphasized the necessity of integrating democratic and authoritative approaches to combat authoritarian disciplinary methods and prepare new teachers for effective leadership. The study underscored that a combination of democracy and authority is crucial for addressing classroom management challenges and promoting equity.

The democratic perspective, rooted in critical theory, highlights the role of schools in perpetuating social inequalities and advocates for classrooms, where authority is shared between teachers and students to challenge injustice. This approach emphasizes the importance of creating a non-authoritarian learning environment that promotes mutual respect and social justice. However, Graham (2017) noted that while democratic classrooms offer valuable insights, they often lack practical strategies for managing student behavior and rely heavily on theoretical foundations rather than empirical research (Graham, 2017).

On the other hand, the authoritative perspective, which draws from studies on effective teachers of African-American students, stresses the importance of teachers asserting their authority in culturally responsive ways. This approach, exemplified by the concept of the "warm demander," combines high expectations with strong support and caring relationships. The authoritative perspective suggests that clear, consistent authority can lead to better student outcomes and mitigate discipline disparities. Graham (2017) argued that neither perspective is sufficient on its own; instead, a balanced integration of both democratic and authoritative elements is necessary for creating equitable and effective classroom management strategies in urban schools.

Undertaking restorative justice in place of the current disciplinary structure presents significant challenges, as shared throughout this paper. One major difficulty is shifting from established discipline policies to restorative practices, which require building solid relationships and a community-oriented environment. Teachers may find this unsettling and insecure, as traditional methods are deeply ingrained in school culture and pedagogy (Vaandering, 2014). Payne & Welch (2015) highlighted that instinctive racial biases and social pressures contribute to

the differential treatment of students of color, making it harder to implement restorative justice consistently across diverse school settings.

Atticot and Kamm (2023) identified several consistent barriers to implementing restorative practices, including time constraints, mindset shifts, and resources. Like many others, their research emphasized that successful restorative justice practices require a cultural shift within schools, which can be challenging to achieve, especially among teachers who have been in the field of education for a while. The necessity for voluntary participation, strong leadership, and a commitment to transforming school culture are critical components for the successful integration of restorative justice, as pointed out by Morrison and Vaandering (2012). Voluntary participation is not as easy as it sounds and can stop restorative justice practices before they get started. Overall, many have argued that while restorative justice has numerous benefits, the logistics of implementing the practices could be too much to overcome.

The literature on restorative justice in schools highlights it as an alternative approach to discipline. It offers a chance to create more equitable, supportive, and inclusive school environments. Significant challenges remain despite the promising outcomes demonstrated, such as reduced exclusionary discipline practices, improved school environments, and decreased racial inequities among suspensions. These challenges include the necessity for a change of mindset within schools, ensuring training on restorative practices, and ensuring participation from all members involved.

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The final chapter of this paper is meant to summarize the information above. It aims to provide a brief overview of the literature and research studies mentioned. From there, this chapter talks about the limitations of research when writing this paper and provides suggestions for areas to study in future research. This chapter then provides next step ideas for educators who wish to explore restorative justice further, and then it offers a conclusion for this literature review.

Summary of Literature

One must look at the current punitive disciplinary system to shift to an alternative disciplinary system like restorative justice practices. United States schools' current punitive discipline system relies on penalties such as detention, suspension, and expulsion. This system has been criticized for its limited effectiveness in addressing the root causes of student misbehavior (Skiba et al., 2014). Skiba et al. (2014) indicated that such punitive measures often result in adverse outcomes, including increased dropout rates, academic disengagement, and early involvement in the juvenile justice system. This system tends to continue a cycle of punishment and exclusion, failing to allow personal growth or rehabilitation for students. Therefore, educators, policymakers, and stakeholders are urged to advocate for more effective and supportive discipline systems in schools.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 48 percent of public schools reported at least one serious disciplinary action during the 2005-2006 school year, with the majority being suspensions for five days or more (Dinkes et al., 2009). Recent data from the National Center for Educational Statistics showed that 35 percent of public schools took serious disciplinary, like suspension or expulsion, actions in the 2019-2020 school year, primarily for physical attacks or

fight, illegal drug-related offenses, and possession of weapons (Irwin et al., 2022). Dinkes et al. (2009) and Irwin et al. (2022) highlighted the disproportionate impact of exclusionary discipline on minority students, with Cribb Fabersunne et al. (2023) showing significant grade point average decline among Black and Latine students subjected to these measures. The data from Cribb Fabersunne et al. (2023), Dinkes et al. (2009), and Irwin et al. (2022) have shown the need for a shift from exclusionary discipline practices to restorative practices, as highlighted by Losen and Skiba (2010), who documented the rise in suspension rates and their detrimental effects on academic performance and social outcasting, particularly for students of color.

Restorative justice practices have been shown to impact student discipline by reducing exclusionary discipline practices and addressing racial disparities (Carroll, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2023; Gomez et al., 2021; Hashim et al., 2018). Simson's (2012) research investigated the introduction of restorative justice programs in 143 schools across two large public school districts, finding that these programs helped reduce suspension rates and address racial inequality (Simson, 2012). Simson (2012) found that schools implementing restorative justice could lower their suspension percentages more effectively than non-restorative justice schools. Rubio's (2018) study in the San Bernardino City Unified School District revealed that engaging in restorative conversations with students was a significant tool in reducing behavioral referrals and out-of-school suspensions. Rubio (2018) highlighted the importance of district support and adequate preparation time for successfully implementing restorative practices, leading to significant decreases in suspension rates and promoting a more inclusive school environment.

Likewise, Hashim et al. (2018) examined efforts to address inequality regarding suspension rates among students of color in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Their study

showed significant reductions in suspension rates and a reduction in the suspension gap based on race, following the prohibition of suspensions for willful defiance and the implementation of restorative justice programs. Hashim et al.'s (2018) study showed that a gap remained between Black and non-Black students and between special and general education students, suggesting that more strategies are needed to bridge this gap. Morgan (2021) and Lustick (2022) continued to show the effectiveness of restorative justice in creating inclusive school environments by significantly reducing suspension rates and addressing structural power imbalances. Overall, these studies demonstrated that restorative justice practices not only reduce suspensions but also promote a more inclusive and equitable educational environment (Darling-Hammond, 2023; Hashim et al., 2018; Lustick, 2022; Morgan, 2021; Simson, 2012).

Anfara Jr. et al, (2015) laid out several principles in which to implement restorative justice practices: meeting needs, providing accountability and support, making things right, viewing misbehaviors as a learning opportunity, community building, restoring relationships, and addressing power imbalances. While Anfara Jr. et al. (2015) Rubio (2018) and Simson (2012) argued that there is no clear cut definition of restorative justice, Anfara Jr. et al.'s principles help encapsulate the idea of restorative justice. This is further backed up by similar principles being found in the research (Gomez et al., 2021; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Pointer et al., 2023; Pufall Jones et al., 2018; Vaandering, 2014a; Vaandering, 2014b; and Vincent et al., 2021).

One of the most common strategies found within the literature regarding restorative justice is the use of restorative circles (Atticot & Kamm, 2023; Battjes & Kaplan, 2023; Knight et al., 2014; McMorris et al., 2013; Skiba et al., 2014; Wadhwa, 2016; and Winn, 2018). Restorative circles allows for educators a chance to practice a restorative justice approach withing their classroom.

Implementing restorative justice techniques can happen in a variety of ways (Anfara et al., 2015). Rubio (2018) highlighted that 90% of the participants emphasized the importance of receiving professional development. Vaandering (2014a) described that professional development projects should aim at proactively integrating restorative justice principles into schools through a comprehensive, dialogic, and democratic peacebuilding pedagogy. Pointer et al. (2023) identified four pillars for effective restorative teaching that can be used to develop restorative justice skills. These pillars Pointer et al. mentions are prioritizing relationships, engaging in self-reflection, creating dialogue to uncover social oppression, and employing creative and experiential teaching strategies.

Implementing restorative justice practices does not come without any challenges. Atticot and Kamm (2023) found that common challenges regarding the implementation of restorative justice practices included logistics and time. Similarly, Cremin et al. (2012) stressed the need for a cultural shift within schools to effectively implement restorative justice. Bierdz (2019) argued that restorative is difficult to achieve due to the deeply rooted power structures that have been embedded within schools. Graham (2017) echoed this by saying consistent authority can lead to better student outcomes and mitigate discipline disparities. Graham (2017) does acknowledge that democratic classrooms offer valuable insights, but he maintains that they often lack practical strategies of implementation.

Limitations of Research

Though this paper was a comprehensive study of the literature, statistics, and laws regarding restorative justice, it still had its limitations. The studies found within this paper often dealt with a small sample size or alternative type of school. While some case studies within this paper dealt with larger school districts, like the Los Angeles School District, this study would

benefit from several more research studies dealing with large metropolitan school districts in the United States.

This literature review was constrained by the availability of online resources. While a reasonable number of sources were freely accessible for reference, a significant portion of the literature, especially those cited within other texts, was inaccessible due to paywalls. This limitation underscores the need for more open access to comprehensive and diverse sources of information on restorative justice.

Finally, one of the most significant limitations of restorative justice research is that it needs to be more common terminology for an alternative approach to punitive disciplinary measures (Anfara et al., 2015; Rubio, 2018; and Simson, 2012). There are a plethora of ways that a school can try to repair the damage caused by student misbehavior. However, the term restorative justice often puts it in a box by stating that its primary techniques were open dialogue between the offender/offender, agreed-upon reparations by the whole team, and restorative circles involving all stakeholders. Similarly, the research frequently lacked specific examples of the reparations agreed upon by the perpetrator and victim of the incidents.

Implications for Future Research

The literature review of the above research shows the potential of restorative justice practices in transforming school disciplinary systems, yet some gaps remain and would benefit from further investigation. To better understand restorative justice's effectiveness and implementation, future research must pivot towards more extensive group studies, which will provide more thorough data and insights.

Firstly, the range of most studies is limited. The current studies often focus on small sample sizes or individual schools. Expanding research to include more significant, diverse

schools and districts across various educational settings will help obtain better data. This approach will help identify patterns and outcomes representative of broader student populations. Larger case studies can also explore differences in the way restorative justice is implemented and its outcomes, providing a clearer picture of how restorative justice practices perform across different situations.

Secondly, a comparative research study of states that have begun implementing restorative justice practices versus those that continue relying on traditional punitive measures would be beneficial. This comparative research can show the specific conditions under which restorative practices are most effective and highlight any potential challenges or barriers unique to certain regions. By examining state-level policies and their impact on student behavior and academic performance, researchers can provide a better view for policymakers and educators considering a shift toward restorative practices.

Additionally, there is a need for in-depth studies on the success and failure rates of agreed-upon outcomes resulting from restorative circles. More research is needed regarding this topic. Understanding how students and staff develop, follow, and view these agreements is essential in furthering positive techniques that can be used. Such research should explore the long-term impact of these agreements on student behavior, relationships, and overall school culture. Are students and staff finding these resolutions satisfactory? Are the resolutions effective in preventing future conflicts and creating a supportive school environment? Do students feel shamed when they must complete the given task?

In summary, while the initial findings on restorative justice practices are promising, there is still a need for more extensive and research on the subtle details of restorative justice. Larger group studies, state comparisons, and detailed examinations of restorative circles' outcomes

would benefit understanding of how these practices can be effectively implemented and sustained in schools. As the educational landscape continues to evolve and schools look towards ways to create better academic success and reduce student misbehavior, such research will help ensure restorative justice fulfills its potential to create more equitable and supportive school environments.

Implications for Professional Application

This paper provides many insights into how educators can better shape school culture to provide a more equitable and inclusive school that enhances academic success. One of the most significant impacts this paper provides is the emphasis on building relationships with students to create a better school climate (Atticot & Kamm, 2023; Gomez et al., 2021; Knight et al., 2014; Pointer et al., 2023; and Skiba et al., 2014). This underscores the crucial role educators play in implementing restorative justice practices. Anyon et al. (2016), Atticot and Kamm (2023), Battjes and Kaplan (2023), Cremin et al. (2012), McMorris et al. (2013), Payne and Welch (2015), and Winn (2018) have pointed out that building relationships is one of the primary factors in implementing restorative justice practices. This creates a balance in power between students and staff, and allows staff to have open and honest communication when a student is displaying poor behavior.

Another takeaway from this paper is that teachers, schools, and districts can use student-led groups to help influence student misbehavior in a positive way (Battjes & Kaplan, 2023; Knight & Wadhwa, 2014; Winn, 2018). These student-led groups, or restorative circles, are an easy way to approach restorative justice practices within a classroom or whole school setting. The restorative circle allows community building, empathy, and dialogue between students, staff, and other stakeholders. By creating these circles, students who have committed an

infraction can understand the damage done and repair the harm that occurred due to the infraction. As stated above, this can lead to accountability and empathy among all. While it might take some time to start, and students and staff need to participate in these restorative circles voluntarily, it is an excellent place to start practicing restorative justice.

This paper also emphasizes having educators participate in restorative justice professional development and pedagogy training (Pointer et al., 2023; Rubio, 2018; Vaandering 2014a, 2014b), which sheds light on a current issue. As mentioned, restorative justice is an alternative to current punitive disciplinary practices. This model is currently not ingrained in the pedagogy of teaching. Educators would benefit from seeking out these professional development courses, and universities should emphasize restorative justice practices within their teacher training programs to help students succeed academically.

Currently, there are several states that implement some form of restorative justice within their education system. It would behoove educators to access the local department of education to see if their state is one that currently provides restorative justice trainings or supports. This would help with a further understanding of their state's expectations when it comes to discipline and provide a source of information when beginning to implement these practices. Likewise, if an educator is from a state that does not currently practice restorative justice, it would be beneficial to lobby policymakers to develop such educator training requirements. Restorative justice can lead to a more positive school environment, offering hope for a brighter future. It also opens the door for conversations to be had within departments of education to see if restorative justice is an undertaking they wish to explore more.

The ultimate goal of this paper was to review the literature on restorative justice so that educators and stakeholders can approach discipline in a new way. If implemented correctly, this

‘new way’ of discipline, known as restorative justice, can reduce suspension rates and create a more positive school environment (Simson, 2012). School leaders should look at the research to see if it makes sense for their district context, and consider using this powerful methodology.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that restorative justice offers a new approach to traditional, punitive, school discipline systems by focusing on repairing harm caused by student misbehavior, establishing accountability practices, and engaging in overall community-building (Skiba et al., 2014). The research demonstrates that restorative practices can reduce suspension rates, bridge racial inequity gaps surrounding discipline, improve student behavior, and create a better, more inclusive school environment (Carroll, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2023; Gomez et al., 2021; Hashim et al., 2018; Lustick, 2022; Morgan, 2021; Simson, 2018). However, transitioning from traditional punitive measures to restorative justice practices is challenging and requires a significant shift within schools (Atticot & Kamm 2023; Bierdz, 2019; Graham, 2017; Payne & Welch, 2015). This shift involves training educators on techniques, securing participation with everyone involved, and a change in mindset that prioritizes relationships and dialogue over punishment. Despite these challenges, the potential benefits of restorative justice, such as addressing the root causes of misbehavior and reducing racial inequalities in schools, make it a plausible and essential approach to creating inclusive school environments.

References

- Anfara Jr., V., Evans, K., & Lester, J. (2015). Restorative justice in education: What we know so far. *Middle School Journal*, 44(15), 57-63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2013.11461873>
- Anyon, Y., Gregory, A., Stone, S., Farrar, J., Jenson, J. M., McQueen, J., Downing, B., Greer, E., & Simmons, J. (2016). Restorative interventions and school discipline sanctions in a large urban school district. *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(6), 1663–1697. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44245967>
- Atticot, L., & Kamm, B. (2024). Administrator and teacher experiences implementing restorative practices: A phenomenological study. *Journal of Leadership, Equity, and Research*, 10(1), 64-82. <http://journals.sfu.ca/cvj/index.php/cvj/index>
- Battjes, K., & Kaplan, L. Z. (2023). Zero tolerance vs restorative justice in the United States. *CEPS Journal*, 13(4), 185-203. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.1414>
- Bierdz, B. (2019). Everything is discipline: Toward a poststructural critique of restorative “justice.” *The Journal of Educational Thought (JET) / Revue de La Pensée Éducative*, 52(2), 144–161. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26873098>
- Bottiani, J. H., Bradshaw, C., & Mendelson, T. (2016). A multilevel examination of racial disparities in high school discipline: Black and white adolescents’ perceived equity, school belonging, and adjustment problems. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(4). <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000155>

- Carroll, P. (2017). *Evaluating Attempts at the Implementation of Restorative Justice in Three Alternative Education High Schools* [Doctoral Dissertation, University of California, Merced]. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2t95r24f>
- Cremin, H., Sellman, E., & McCluskey, G. (2012). Interdisciplinary perspectives on restorative justice: Developing insights for education. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 60(4), 421–437. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23359844>
- Cribb Fabersunne, C., Lee, S. Y., McBride, D., Zahir, A., Gallegos-Castillo, A., LeWinn, K. Z., & Morris, M. D. (2023). Exclusionary school discipline and school achievement for middle and high school students, by race and ethnicity. *JAMA Network Open*, 6(10), e2338989. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.38989>
- Darling-Hammond, S. (2023). *Fostering belonging, transforming schools: The impact of restorative practices* [Brief]. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/impact-restorative-practices-brief>
- DeNicolò, C. P., Yu, M., Crowley, C. B., & Gabel, S. L. (2017). Reimagining critical care and problematizing sense of school belonging as a response to inequality for immigrants and children of immigrants. *Review of Research in Education*, 41(1), 500-530. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X1769049>
- Dinkes, R., Kemp, J., & Baum, K. (2009). Indicators of school crime and safety: 2008 (NCES 2009–022/NCJ 226343). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of

Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC.

https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009022REV_1.pdf

Dunning-Lozano, J. L. (2015). *Removal, isolation, and discipline in Texas schools: An ethnographic study of a 6th - 12th grade disciplinary alternative education program* [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin].

<http://hdl.handle.net/2152/31676>

Gomez, J. A., Rucinski, C. L., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2021). Promising pathways from school restorative practices to educational equity. *Journal of Moral Education*, 50(4), 452-470. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2020.1793742>

Graham, E. J. (2017). Authority or democracy? integrating two perspectives on equitable classroom management in urban schools. *The Urban Review*, 50(4), 493–515.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-017-0443-8>

Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, H.R. 987, 103rd Cong. (1994). Retrieved from

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/103rd-congress/house-bill/987>

Hashim, A. K., Strunk, K. O., & Dhaliwal, T. K. (2018). Justice for All? Suspension Bans and Restorative Justice Programs in the Los Angeles Unified School District. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 93(2), 174–189. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48543992>

Hayes, H. (2005). Assessing reoffending in restorative justice conference. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 38(1), 77–101.

- Hemez, P., Brent, J. J., & Mowen, T. J. (2020). Exploring the school-to-prison pipeline: How school suspensions influence incarceration during young adulthood. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice, 18*(3), 235-255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204019880945>
- Irwin, V., Wang, K., Cui, J., & Thompson, A. (2023). *Report on Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2022* (NCES 2023-092/NCJ 307328). National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2023092>
- Kang-Brown, J., Trone, J., Fratello, J., & Daftary-Kapur, T. (2013). *A generation later: What we've learned about zero tolerance in schools* [Issue brief]. Vera Institute of Justice, Center on Youth Justice. https://www.vera.org/downloads/Publications/a-generation-later-what-weve-learned-about-zero-tolerance-in-schools/legacy_downloads/a-generation-later-zero-tolerance-in-schools.pdf
- Karp, D. R., & Breslin, B. (2001). Restorative justice in school communities. *Youth & Society, 33*(2), 249–272. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X01033002006>
- Kohli, R., Montaña, E., & Fisher, D. (2019). History matters: Challenging an a-historical approach to restorative justice in teacher education. *Theory Into Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2019.1626613>

- Knight, D., & Wadhwa, A. (2014). Expanding opportunity through critical restorative justice: Portraits of resilience at the individual and school level. *Schools: Studies in Education*, 11(1), 11-33. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/675745>
- Latimer, J., Dowden, C., & Muise, D. (2005). The effectiveness of restorative justice practices: A meta-analysis. *The Prison Journal*, 85(2), 127–144.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885505276969>
- Losen, D. J., & Skiba, R. J. (2010). *Suspended education: Urban middle schools in crisis*. The Civil Rights Project at UCLA. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8fh0s5dv>
- Lustick, H. (2022). Schoolwide critical restorative justice. *Journal of Peace Education*, 19(1), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2021.2003763>
- McCluskey, G., Lloyd, G., Kane, J., Riddell, S., Stead, J., & Weedon, E. (2008). Can restorative practices in schools make a difference? *Educational Review*, 60(4), 405–417
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910802393456>
- McMorris, B. J., Beckman, K. J., Shea, G., Baumgartner, J., & Eggert, R. C. (2013). *Applying restorative justice practices to Minneapolis Public Schools students recommended for possible expulsion: A pilot program evaluation of the Family and Youth Restorative Conference Program*. School of Nursing and the Healthy Youth Development • Prevention Research Center, Department of Pediatrics, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.
- Morgan, H. (2021). Restorative justice and the school-to-prison pipeline: A review of existing literature. *Education Sciences*, 11(4), 159. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11040159>

Morrison, B. E., & Vaandering, D. (2012). Restorative justice: Pedagogy, praxis, and discipline.

Journal of School Violence, 11(2), 138-155.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2011.653322>

Payne, A. A., & Welch, K. (2017). The effect of school conditions on the use of restorative justice in schools. *Sage Journals, 16*(2), 224-240.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204016681414>

Pointer, L., Dutreuil, C., Livelli, B., Londono, C., Pledl, C., Rodriguez, P., Showalter, P., & Tompkins, R. (2022). Teaching restorative justice. *Contemporary Justice Review, 25*(3-4), 271-281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2023.2181286>

Pufall Jones, E., Margolius, M., Rollock, M., Tang Yan, C., Cole, M. L., & Zaff, J. F. (2018).

Disciplined and disconnected: How students experience exclusionary discipline in

Minnesota and the promise of non-exclusionary alternatives. America's Promise

Alliance, Center for Promise. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED586336.pdf>

Rodriguez, N. (2007). Restorative justice at work: Examining the impact of restorative justice resolutions on juvenile recidivism. *Crime & Delinquency, 53*(3), 355–379.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128705285983>

Rubio, R. (2018). *Effective implementation practices of restorative justice: A qualitative case study* (Publication No. 9780438002333) [Doctoral dissertation, The University of La Verne]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, Ann Arbor, MI.

- Simson, D. (2012). *Restorative justice and its effects on (racially disparate) punitive school discipline*. [Restorative justice] 7th Annual Conference on Empirical Legal Studies Paper, Stanford Law School. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2107240>
- Skiba, R., Arredondo, M., & Williams, M. (2014). More than a metaphor: The contribution of exclusionary discipline to a school-to-prison pipeline. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 47(14), 546-564. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2014.958965>
- Suvall, C. (2009). Restorative justice in schools: Learning from Jena High School. *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review*, 44, 547–569.
<https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/hcrcl44&div=24&id=&page=>
- Vaandering, D. (2014). Implementing restorative justice practice in schools: What pedagogy reveals. *Journal of Peace Education*, 11(1), 64-79.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2013.794335>
- Vaandering, D. (2014). Relational restorative justice pedagogy in educator professional development. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 44(4), 508–530. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43941666>
- Vincent, C.G., English, J., Girvan, E., Van Ryzin, M., Svanks, R., Springer, S., & Ivey, A. (2021). Introducing restorative practices into high schools’ multi-tiered systems of support: successes and challenges. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 24(4), 409-435.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10282580.2021.1969522>

Wadhwa, A. (2016). *Restorative justice in urban schools: Disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline*. Routledge. Series: Routledge Research in Educational Leadership Series (Vol.

6). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315692821>

Winn, M. T. (2018). *Justice on both sides: Transforming education through restorative justice*. Harvard Education Press.