

ABSTRACT

Darryl Thomas Jr., RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN A K-12 SCHOOL (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello). Department of Educational Leadership, July 2022.

The purpose of this research is to describe how sustainable restorative practices focused on the intention of using inclusive school leadership, curriculum, wrap around supports, transformative community engagement, high quality teaching, and restorative justice practices at the middle school level. As a school we will use positive discipline practices, such as restorative justice and social and emotional learning supports that are stressed in classrooms so that students can grow and contribute to the school community and beyond. Some other goals are to create authentic parent and community engagement at the school that is promoted so parents or students play a part in planning and decision-making for the school. Also, the focus will be for staff that will work with students on social emotional trauma related to support services for afterschool platforms that are available before, during, and after school that are potentially provided year-round to the full community.

IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE RESTORATIVE PRACTICES
IN A K-12 SCHOOL

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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July, 2022

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IN A K-12 SCHOOL

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DEDICATION

I humbly dedicate this thesis to my wife, De’Vette and my children, Darryl III and Drew who have patiently and affectionately supported me through this extensive and emotional process to triumph of completion. My family challenged me to grow and to finish this part of my scholastic journey. Your support has carried me through this life changing progress and my family continues to be an important source of inspiration for me to pursue my educational purpose.

I would also like to give special thanks again to my parents Darryl Thomas Sr. and JoAnn Thomas, siblings, David, Helena, Johanna for their continuous support of me to be an educational difference maker. Thanks for understanding my life goals and supporting me in this undertaking to grow as a transformative leader. Your prayers and suggestions for me to continue through it all was what sustained me to overcome many obstacles and challenges during this time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and give my heartfelt thanks to Matthew Militello and Larry Hodgkins who made this work possible by supporting me. Their guidance and advice carried me through all of the inspired stages of writing this project. I would also like to thank my editor Katherine Kandalec for editing support, my committee members Steve Lassiter and Travis Lewis for letting my defense be an enjoyable moment, and for your excellent comments and suggestions, thanks to you.

Also, I would like to thank God, for allowing me to get through all the difficulties in moving to a High School as Principal during this process while completing the project during COVID-19 protocols, which prolonged some practices. I have experienced your guidance day by day and faith to dream to be great in future endeavors. You are the one who let me finish my degree. I will keep on trusting you with my future.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the quote that keeps me grounded: Maya Angelou "You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it."

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CHAPTER 1: NAMING AND FRAMING PROBLEM OF PRACTICE (POP)

Schools across the United States continue to use punitive practices to address student misconduct. There are years' worth of data where inner-city school disciplinary practices focused on black youth have led to negative infractions, school estrangement, and criminal practices leading to more incarcerated youth (Losen et al., 2013). The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) reported that of the 49 million students enrolled in public schools during the 2012 school year, 3.5 million students received in-school suspension, 3.45 million students received out-of-school suspension, and 130,000 students were expelled. Losen and Skiba (2010) found that since the 1970s, there had been a significant increase in suspension rates across all grade levels and for all students. They also reported that the suspension rates had more than doubled for non-white students (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Black students encompassed 18% of the total United States public school enrollment but comprised 35% of the total number of students suspended according to the Kirwan Institute (Capatosto, 2015). Disproportionately high levels of suspensions among students of color are a contributing factor in achievement gaps, which stem from unequitable school disciplinary practices (Brown, 2003; Lippman, 2010; Losen et al., 2013)

Students of color continue to be disproportionately impacted by punitive discipline practices (Losen et al., 2013). The yearly discipline data collected by the OCR exposed patterns, trends, and disparities based on students' race and gender according to the U.S. Education Department, Office for Civil Rights collection from 2017-18 (Losen & Martinez, 2020). The most glaring disparity was the out-of-school suspension rate for students of color. The OCR reported that Black students were suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than their White peers. Students of color were also more likely to lose time in school instruction and grade-

level content knowledge when they receive a discipline referral, which then significantly increases their likelihood of dropping out of school (Balfanz et al., 2003). Given the alarming school discipline data from past and current national reports, there has been a continued push by school districts and schools to transform school practices around student discipline, which has led to many schools adopting Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) and restorative practices, which are less punitive.

Restorative practices have been introduced into schools to mitigate the disproportionate discipline trends. Schools are adopting restorative practices because they have prevented student misbehavior by improving school climate and strengthening student-teacher relationships. Restorative practices have also been shown to help students learn to deal with their academic, social, and emotional challenges in effective ways (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). This participatory action project set out to increase teachers' understanding of how to implement restorative practices through targeted professional development in order to reduce unacceptable discipline trends in one middle school. The main goal of the study was to decrease the use of out-of-school suspensions (OSS) and in-school suspensions (ISS) as disciplinary consequences by integrating restorative practices into their classrooms (Christie et al., 2004). High levels of school suspension leads to inferior achievement results on state exams, standoffish engagement, absenteeism, adventuresome behaviors, dropping out of school, alternative placement and possibly incarceration (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016).

Place-Based Focus of Practice

Pitt County Schools (PCS) consists of thirty-eight public schools that supported pre-K to twelfth-grade students, with two early college high schools. The racial demographics of the student body served by Pitt County Schools is 34.8% White, 45.7% Black, 1.6% Asian or

Asian/Pacific Islander, 12.5% Hispanic/Latino, 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Like the district, I recognized that persistent behavior infractions were having a negative impact on student educational outcomes, especially when it came to students of color. As a teacher and then Principal in Pitt County Schools, I have observed the effects of punitive punishments, such as OSS and ISS, on students' educational outcomes. In 2014, the superintendent of the district made decreasing the number of OSS a priority; however, per the analysis of the data at the time, the number of student's suspended out-of-school had continued to increase through the 2015-2016 school year. Forty percent of African American students in PCS received discipline referrals and were more than two and a half times more likely to receive a discipline referral than their White counterparts. Table 1 compares the number of discipline referrals received by African American and White students in PCS. The table highlights through discipline referrals that African American students received 78% of PCS's discipline referrals while White students received 14% of all the district's discipline referrals.

To overcome these challenges, PCS offered more alternatives to long-term suspensions, such as Pitt Academy, which was an alternative setting for students suspended long-term from their home schools. For short-term suspensions, PCS provided students the opportunity to attend Pitt Academy. Pitt Academy continues to help educate students through nurturing them, while encouraging them to display the positive values, characteristics, and behaviors of good citizens. The academy's mission was to empower students to achieve excellence in all areas of life and to give them a second chance to succeed. This alternative setting for short-term suspensions provided students a safe, orderly, and caring environment and stressed that each student was capable of effecting positive change in the world.

Table 1

PCS Total Referrals by Race

Years	Referrals of AA	Referrals of White	Total Referrals (All Races)	AA Proportion of Referrals	White Proportion of Referrals
2013-2014	16,737	3,017	21,664	77.3%	13.9%
2015-2016	32,439	5,321	41,421	78.3%	12.8%

PCS also developed guidelines for the district's schools to follow when referring students to alternative schools, which included the consideration of the appropriateness of an alternative school referral, parent consent for the placement, and a plan of action that outlined the procedures and supports (e.g., counseling or mentoring) that would be available for the students when they returned to their home schools. At the time of this study, E.B. Aycock Middle School was focused on providing front-end interventions for students who received discipline referrals through mediation sessions and administrative conferences. Teachers were also encouraged to provide administrators with the names of students that might be distressed so that they could intervene before a problem arose. As additional support, E.B. Aycock created an educator's handbook that tracked school discipline trends. The goal of this project was to continue the work of helping E.B. Aycock be more proactive when addressing student misconduct by using restorative practices.

E.B. Aycock Middle School is a diverse school of 795 students located in Greenville, North Carolina near East Carolina University and within the PCS district. At the time of this study, it had nine feeder elementary schools, was considered a low-performing school because of current test scores, and had 67% of its students receiving free or reduced lunch. The ethnic background of the students was 63% African American, 23% White, 2% Asian, 6% Hispanic, and 5% Multi-Racial. Greenville, North Carolina was considered a low-income, moderately educated city at the time, with the two most common age groups being college-aged residents (20-24) and young professionals (25-34). The median household income in Greenville was \$35,225 per year, near the eligibility threshold for reduced lunch. According to E.B. Aycock's 2019 discipline data, which is evidenced in Table 2, African American students were suspended at a higher rate than their White peers. During the 2019 school year, 84% of discipline referrals

Table 2

E.B. Aycock Total Referrals Given by Race Implementation Year

Year	Referrals of AA	Referrals of White	Total Referrals (All Races)	AA Proportion of Referrals	White Proportion of Referrals
2018-2019	1,272	93	1,513	84.1%	6.1%

at E.B. Aycock were received by African American students, while White students only represented 6% of the discipline referrals. The disproportionality in E.B. Aycock's discipline data revealed the need for the implementation of restorative practices to address student misconduct.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this participatory action research project was to increase teachers' understanding of how to implement restorative practices through targeted professional development in order to reduce the disproportionality in student discipline at E.B. Aycock Middle School. The main objective was to decrease the number of OSS and ISS disciplinary infractions given to students through teachers successfully engaging students in restorative classroom practices. As a result, four research questions guided this investigation:

1. What do teachers currently know about the implementation of restorative classroom practices?
2. To what extent can restorative classroom practice professional development translate into new teacher classroom disciplinary actions?
3. To what extent do restorative classroom practices impact school discipline data?
4. How does engaging in research with teachers in my school inform my ability to be a more deliberate, engaging, and effective school leader?

Action Research Design Overview

According to Stringer (2014), a diverse group of people should be involved in action research through three research cycles. These action research cycles were implemented with the purpose of gaining insight to the teachers understanding of restorative practices and how it can be implemented in the classroom with pre and post interviews, reflections, focus group and

professional development. The subjects included groups of colleagues with a shared interest in implementing restorative practices to solve common problems in the school. The research involved the participation of veteran and beginning teachers, counselors, and administrators to make sure there were different subsets for data collection. The data collected for this study included pre, post interviews and reflections. In this section, I will present an overview of the three cycles of the participatory action research study; these will be explained in more detail in Chapter 4. Table 3 illustrates the logic model for the study, and highlights the goals, activities, and timeline of each cycle. The three cycles of action research were as follows.

Cycle 1

Cycle 1 began in Fall 2019. The goal of Cycle 1 was to create a Restorative Practice (RP) team that would implement restorative practices in the classroom. The RP team was asked stakeholder questions and pre-interviews were conducted with teachers to understand how restorative practices can influence the rates at which students of color receive discipline referrals. The ultimate goal of Cycle 1 was to determine classroom practices that could be implemented on a trial basis during the rest of Cycle 1 that would be fully ready to implement at E.B. Aycock Middle School for the start of Cycle 2.

Cycle 2

Implementation of the restorative practices identified in Cycle 1 began in Fall 2019 and continued through Spring 2020. Cycle 2 involved meeting with focus groups to get their feedback on the implementation of the practices and discussing emerging themes. The RP team continued to meet to ensure that participants understood the standards of the action and stakeholders were able to share their perspectives on the implementation of restorative practices.

Table 3

Logic Model

Goals	Activities	Timeline
Establish team meeting norms	Creation of a RP team that includes teachers	Cycle 1 Fall 2019
Implement restorative practice pedagogies	Activities selected by team that create a sense of inclusion for all	Cycle 1 Fall 2019
Use information gathered to influence practice	Feedback from participants, surveys, code data, and continued question stems	Cycles 1 & 2 Fall 2019-Spring 2020
Determine how restorative classroom practices impact school discipline data in classrooms	Measure impact	Cycle 3 Fall 2020

Cycle 3

The plan was for the final cycle to begin in Fall 2020. The third cycle of the participatory action research study focused on determining if the implementation of the restorative practices had an effect on the disciplinary practices at the school. The RP team completed post interviews to determine if the inclusion of restorative practices was having an impact on the school. It was also a goal that the findings of the RP team would provide additional insight on how to improve my own leadership practice. During Cycle 3, we continued the application of the model by following the process of Cycle 2 using restorative practices in the classroom. At the end of Cycle 3, we draw conclusions based on the data about how restorative practices could be applied at E.B. Aycock Middle School and similar schools across the nation.

Significance of the Focus of Practice

Like most schools across the United States, E.B. Aycock was searching for a solution to the problem of racial disproportionality in discipline. The incorporation of restorative practices emerged as an effective way for reforming the school's discipline practices. Restorative practices were chosen because it would be a beneficial way to address the concern of high suspension rates, focusing on improving school climate, and examining restorative practice implementation with the aim to more fully understand the specific experiences restorative practices can create in a classroom. This research strikes directly at a universal problem that has significance to practice, research, and policy in and beyond this focus school.

Practice

This study has the potential to provide a way for schools to implement sustainable restorative practices in the classrooms and create strong professional relationships with students through different restorative strategies. As the researcher, I focused on implementing effective

restorative practices from the ground up by involving key staff at the school to create dynamic change in the classroom. Administration and teachers must be active participants in the implementation of restorative practices through informal settings or formal staff development opportunities. Moreover, it is believed that restorative practices in the classroom create a better rapport within the teacher-student relationship. They also helped create a classroom environment with a higher level of trust and more in tune with how everyone feels. Data from this study could help decrease suspensions and help other schools learn how restorative practices in classrooms could replace punitive disciplinary methods like suspensions. With major concerns about the school-to-prison pipeline, creating a safe space of accountability, fairness, and an encouraging climate would benefit all students.

Research

Restorative practices are an emerging field of study in the United States. Restorative practices have origins derived from indigenous practices and have been implemented into the juvenile justice systems as a way to support individuals' growth. School systems are moving towards using restorative practices to examine disciplinary data and undertaking studies that examine high rates of suspensions, resulting in increased attention on the restorative practice strategies of relationship building and discipline interventions designed to decrease punitive, exclusionary approaches.

Policy

Many schools have implemented zero-tolerance approaches, which hurt students' grades and led to additional conflicts with teachers and administrators because students felt their issues were not heard, addressed, or resolved. Implementing restorative practices in a school or classroom would be important in providing students the support they need to navigate those

conflicts. These practices could take away the driver for suspensions because there would be an emphasis on stopping the outcome gaps that are created through retributive discipline. This study could provide the roadmap of policy implementation that schools and districts need to ensure that how disciplinary infractions are handled is equitable, focused on students learning from their mistakes, and gives students a role in determining possible consequences for their actions so that they make better choices in the future.

Study Limitations

This study took place in one school over a relatively short time period. Additionally, the researcher serves as the school principal. As a result, there are a number of limitations as well ethical considerations.

Limitation 1

A possible limitation of the study could be the teachers' implementation of the restorative practices after engaging in the targeted professional development. Professional development is fraught with limitations including: Is the PD contextualized for teachers? Does the facilitator utilize engaging pedagogical techniques? Will the new learning be implemented with fidelity? Will they ultimately change their practice? To address these issues, pre and post interviews will help with understanding the effects of the training on restorative practices and the teachers' implementation processes.

Limitation 2

The research study took place at a single school on different grade levels to see the potential of what could be done or implemented during a short time frame. All of E.B. Aycock's teachers did not believe in restorative practices and the impact they could have on their classroom, so professional development was pivotal to the study's success. Professional

development needed to be focused on helping teachers to understand which restorative practices to implement and how to implement them effectively. As the researcher and principal of the school, I ensured that there were multiple levels of review undertaken at both the university and district levels regarding the ethical considerations in having teachers who were my direct reports participate in the study.

Limitation 3

During Cycle 2, the world was put at a standstill when in March of 2020, COVID-19 stopped the face-to-face educational processes at all schools globally. Pitt County Schools continued with remote virtual learning for students, which hampered progress pertaining to focus groups, interviewing processes, and the implementation of restorative practices in the classroom. During this time, I relied heavily on interviews and my reflections, since I was not able to meet with staff during this time. The COVID-19 pandemic continued into Cycle 3 causing some processes to take longer to complete and delay some implementation practices. The impact of COVID-19 on my study resulted in the necessity of renaming some areas and limiting the amount of information available at times.

Chapter Summary

The rate at which students of color are suspended in schools alarming. Schools throughout the United States suspend students of color at a disproportionate rate. The effects of zero-tolerance discipline continue to adversely affect students' performance, which ultimately can lead to students' school identity continuing to falter. Zero-tolerance policies across the world lead to school-to-prison pipelines and alternative systems such as restorative practices need to replace them (Kafka, 2011). A new approach is necessary to rectify this injustice. The goal for this project was clear: to work directly with classroom teachers to learn and engage in a new,

equity-based, restorative disciplinary model. In the next chapter, I explore literature about the focus of practice.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Before our white brothers came to civilize us we had no jails. Therefore, we had no criminals. You can't have criminals without a jail. We had no locks or keys, and so we had no thieves. If a man was so poor that he had no horse, tipi or blanket, someone gave him these things. We were too uncivilized to set much value on personal belongings. We wanted to have things only in order to give them away. We had no money, and therefore a man's worth couldn't be measured by it. We had no written law, no attorneys or politicians, therefore we couldn't cheat. We really were in a bad way before the white man came, and I don't know how we managed to get along without the basic things which, we are told, are absolutely necessary to make a civilized society. (Deer & Erdoes, 1972, pp. 70-71)

This chapter provides a review of the extant literature that focuses on the aim of the study. The aim of the literature review is to explore the importance of restorative practices in supporting students' ability to improve disciplinary outcomes. The reason to do this is schools' student suspensions result in failures, test scores, and dropouts that affect both the school and student negatively. The use of restorative practices promise to create an environment that creates dynamic student teacher relationships which leads to an atmosphere of learning.

The purpose of this participatory action research project was to increase teachers' understanding of how to implement restorative practices through targeted professional development in order to reduce the racial disproportionality in student discipline at E.B. Aycock Middle School. The aim of the project was to decrease the number of OSS and ISS discipline infractions given to students through implementation of restorative classroom practices.

To understand the promise of restorative practices, I first explore the history and frameworks. A review of restorative practices in schools frame the historical evolution of restorative justice in schools and the connections to restorative practices outside of schools. An examination of normative literature demonstrates how restorative practices are helping schools reimagine how they deal with student misconduct. Next, I review how the incorporation of restorative practices in schools provides school leaders and teachers with the tools needed to find resolutions to conflicts that typically would have resulted in punitive punishments, such as out of school suspension and in school suspensions for students. Finally, I seek to understand the impact that those practices have on schools' efforts to address disproportionate discipline trends and explore the necessary conditions in schools that allow for the successful implementation of restorative practices.

History and Origins of Restorative Justice

Restorative justice has multiple historical roots. Many researchers ascribe the restorative origin to various tribal cultures, places, and times in history that referenced indigenous practices and religious persuasions. Restorative justice is based on ancient values and practices that are central to justice and grounded in religious and ethical traditions. Tracing the history of Restorative Justice practices lead back to aboriginal traditions. Restorative justice draws from aboriginal teachings which have a dynamic linkage that exists in attempting to then further adapt aboriginal concepts and practices for used in restorative programs in schools.

Some applications of restorative justice have also been introduced in the criminal and juvenile justice systems. Restorative justice effectiveness within the justice system evidence proved that RJ interventions can be adapted for social practical practices with petty crimes that are nonviolent (Sherman & Strang, 2007). These practices also show promise for the juvenile

justice system, as they have been adopted as a central framework in New Zealand's juvenile justice system (Zehr, 2002). RJ practices have been adopted widely across Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and other European nations, and then eventually in Canada and the United States (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013), offering theoretical foundations for research and practice in the fields of education, counseling, criminal justice, and social work. Restorative justice programs can be considered restorative if they include two key components: (1) the people harmed and those responsible for the harm meet, and (2) decisions about what should be done to redress the harm are determined between the victim(s) and the wrongdoer(s) according to (Dandurand & Griffiths, 2006). There are thousands of programs developed over decades that identify as restorative, though only "mediation, circles, and conferencing" models meet these minimum requirements (McCold, 2006, p. 23). Some phases typically described in restorative justice programs are training, meeting, and continuation. In the training phase, facilitators work with potential contributors to develop an understanding about restorative justice and explore the implications for contributors of using this approach. Offender groundwork accentuates the modifications between being held accountable to the traditional justice system versus to the victim. Victim groundwork offers the victim to express the impact of the offense towards the offender in an accountability meeting.

Restorative Justice is the preferred way of responding to wrongdoing because it emphasizes the restoration of harmony between the victim and offender. It helps offset retributive unfair disciplinary actions of zero-tolerance policies, which can shift relationships such as those between students and teachers (Hantzopoulos, 2013). A case study of the Maori tribes in New Zealand demonstrated the influence of positive relational trust in restorative justice processes (Wearmouth et al., 2007). A created dynamic restorative-supported classroom can

build a community that creates a gracious space of learning for all stakeholders involved. Student-teacher relationships matter and restorative justice practices allow teachers to establish empathy for working with a diverse classroom of students and not sympathy. This creates accountability measures, reflective dialogue, and allows for the relationships to be repaired with student-teacher learning as a platform (Macready, 2009). Continual evaluation of Macready (2009) found that you have to shift the understanding, communication, collaborative support, and focus on relational problems by class and not by the student. These factors are important ingredients to helping an overall school environment to focus on the value of relationships.

Restorative Practices

Restorative practices seek to steady the needs of the victim and the community; therefore, the victim, offender, and community should be heavily involved in all aspects of the process. This collaborative approach builds a sense of community for all participants, allows for the clarification of restorative values, and ensures that the process will be respectful for everyone involved (Calhoun, 2013). It is important to the success of restorative justice to create an atmosphere that is conducive to others being comfortable engaging in conversations with individuals that might not have the same viewpoints or different values. The three principles of restorative justice are repairing damage, decreasing danger, and empowering the group or community (O'Brien, 2007).

Restorative Justice in education is broadly defined as the practice of restoring relationships and damage caused within the school community using conferences, mediations, and controlled talking circles (González, 2012; Suvall, 2009). The restorative progression, particularly in the form of passing a talking tangible object around a circle as a form of structured communication, has been traced back to multiple indigenous societies across the

world. Some of these groups include, but are not limited to, Native American tribes, the Maori people of New Zealand, ancient Celtic practices, and Aboriginal Australians (Hamlin & Darling, 2012). The best practice for a restorative implementation of discipline in schools employs all stakeholders, including teachers, students, administrators, parents, and community members, to build support for “victims and offenders, providing both with an opportunity to share their perspectives and to work together to reach a reparative solution” (Suvall, 2009, p. 547). There are normally four models from which school-constructed restorative justice is created (Pavelka, 2013). Some models in which students can be an integral part of the process are peer mediation, peer-accountability boards, conferencing, and circles. Peer mediation is a small group of affected people tasked with looking at creating scripted goals, with a facilitator with directed dialogue to manage resolution agreements between parties. Peer-accountability groups include students, offenders, and victims talking about the subject or occurrence. Staff conferencing is based off larger groups of parties and typically has a longer duration because of the purpose and process.

Restorative Circles

Restorative circles may be used to “improve classroom management techniques, guide conversations on difficult topics, and guide problem resolution” (Pavelka, 2013, p. 15). Restorative circles include those participants impacted by the incidence and pertinent community members. The goal of restorative conferencing/circles is to build the relationship back or create one of co-existence. The examination process has to get people to understand the hurt from the victim’s perspective to communication then agreement between the victim and offender to understand the harm or hurt. In restorative justice, restitution practices include, according to the United Nations, the “restitution of property, restitution to the victim by the offender, reparations...” (United Nations, 2003, p. 28). In restorative circle methods students are seated in

a classroom circle facing each other, which allows for face to face contact. Each student is given a chance to speak by passing a talking piece around the circle and then students listen to their peers about the RP circle instructions (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015). The circulated talking piece can be whatever the group chooses, some examples have included a rock, a toy, or something similar that can be easily held and passed around. Once someone gets the talking piece, they have consideration in the conversation and everyone else has to be quiet during that time. This practice is valuable for exploring:

- Post-occurrence interventions, allowing for the expression of perspectives from all stakeholders to repair any harm, conflict or aggression;
- Controlled environments to communicate and develop class goals, create group decisions, and raise students' awareness of the impact of everyone's choices and how to respond to them in the future, which leads to real world conversations;
- Hearing students' perceptions on the conflicts embedded in curriculum content material as learning opportunities.

Pros and Cons of Restorative Justice

While there has been an increase in the number of schools adopting restorative practices, researchers have uncovered some challenges with the implementation processes in schools. Wake County Public schools incorporated restorative practices, particularly restorative circles, and there was significant push back from parents. Parents wanted the district to halt the restorative circle program because as part of the program students were encouraged to share their feelings, emotions, and thoughts with other students in the circle. A few parents felt that the program was an invasion of privacy and could prompt students to share too much information about their families. Parent pushback can be a detriment to the successful implementation of

restorative circles, but schools can create ways to include parents in the process. Another challenge in implementing restorative justice is that some victims do not want to be in a conference or circle with the person that caused them hurt or pain. While victim-offender conferencing is a solution-based process that is geared towards future resolutions rather than an acknowledgment of responsibility for past actions, both parties have to be on board (Carey, 1996). The facilitator has to create norms of collaboration, with an agenda, to ensure that all sides are respected and allowed to contribute to the resolution.

Umbreit and Coates (1992) shared the processes for overcoming this challenge:

- Address the problem as a group.
- Encourage the group to understand the effects of the wrongdoing to all individuals involved or the community.
- Accountability of responsibility.
- Avoid creating disgrace and blameworthiness.
- Promote the healing of the offended.
- Open up avenues of recompense.
- Restore or build working relationships between those involved to coexist.
- Create insider and outsider groups within the community.
- Conversations to promote healing

These processes have been found to help with facilitating restorative groups with students and to also help them better understand the purpose of restorative practices.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

Schools interested in implementing restorative practices must have culturally responsive leadership, connect with students' families and communities, adopt a culturally responsive

pedagogy, foster a culturally responsive learning environment, and engage in culturally responsive student management. This section explores these conditions that are necessary for schools so that restorative justice practices can be implemented with fidelity.

Implementing restorative justice in a school requires a culturally responsive school leader. The goal is to establish a courteous and supportive environment that creates a sense of belonging for parents, students, staff, and the community. Activities that foster this type of environment include creating student groups and peer leaders to familiarize students with a school's culture (Madsen & Mabokela, 2002a). Also, culturally responsive leaders create professional development for teachers that support them in incorporating culturally diverse practices in their classrooms (Magno & Schiff, 2010). Given that this could be a huge paradigm shift for teachers, leadership should look for ways to assist and support teachers in managing these types of platform changes. Culturally responsive school leaders have to realize that their points of views are based on their upbringing, relationships, and personal biases that can affect their perspectives of what they bring to their leadership positions (Lindsey et al., 2005). Engaging in this type of critical reflection allows culturally responsive leaders to help staff eradicate their own prejudices and predetermined assumptions about students of color by providing them other vantage points. The position of a responsive leader is understanding they will be met with resistance but having the resolve to confront barriers of accomplishment for all children (Dovidio, 2009).

Similarly, culturally responsive beliefs can already be ingrained into students, therefore, teachers must have the ability to address social contexts about negative systems or systems that can allow a group of students to feel misrepresented. Culturally responsive leaders can create a shared belief in a culturally responsive school by openly discussing prejudice, fairness, and race.

They support teachers in examining their equity lenses and determining how they are going to improve (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Staff cannot successfully implement restorative justice practices if they are not willing to address equity concerns; therefore, it is up to the culturally responsive school leaders to support their teachers in this endeavor.

Community Connection

Schools that want to implement restorative justice should place a priority on establishing partnerships with parents and the larger community. Schools should look at valuing the home life of students by being welcoming to parents and encouraging them to be a part of the school atmosphere, which helps everyone to feel valued and important (Cooper, 2009). Also, schools have to look at ways to encourage community stakeholders to become active participants in the school and ensure they feel valued, involved, and able to express their concerns. Leaders can accomplish this by offering wide-ranging activities that are easily accessible by the community (Madsen & Mabokela, 2002b). Connecting families with schools can be a daunting task, especially when generations of families have had undesirable experiences in schools or have made flawed expectations about schools based on their cultural upbringing or involvement (White-Hood, 2007). Therefore, schools must provide all stakeholders the tools needed to understand the schools' systems and get parents engrossed in the educational practices.

Culturally responsive schools understand the peripheral issues in the surrounding community and how they can affect the emotional and physical well-being of students (Kozol, 1995). Schools have to integrate agendas that support all students and look at programs like breakfast or summer lunch programs, food banks, after-school tutoring, clubs, on-site mental health care, and uniform exchanges that meet the holistic needs of students.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy supports the implementation of restorative justice in schools. Responsive instruction builds upon the prevailing information base that students already carry with them (Bazron et al., 2005). Students have unique values that they bring from their cultural upbringing and expanding teachers' knowledge of these values through culturally responsive teaching practices can help lead to negotiations, reviews, and assessment methods to better reflect what students already know or are learning (Bazron et al., 2005). Instructional strategies should be diverse and integrate movement, music, rhythm, exploration, and social interaction to get students invested. Also, staff should explore how to involve critical thinking skills that have processes for problem solving, investigation, and invention for student self-discovery. School curriculum needs to also reflect all stakeholders through the inclusion of subject related content that integrates cultural history to better pique students' curiosity (Ladson-Billings, 1994). These influences need to be legitimate to help students integrate content or curriculum (Gay, 2000).

Culturally Responsive Learning Environment

Schools have to become more culturally responsive with teachers integrating resources and providing instruction that highlights the diversity of their students (Bazron et al., 2005). A culturally responsive learning environment implements practices that create strategic learning experiences that support student learning through motivation or project-based learning. Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) found that there are four motivational environments that students and teachers need to relentlessly create. These conditions include:

1. Creating an environment where stakeholders reciprocally respected,
2. Emergent defiance where students apply individual choice,

3. Establishing significance to participate students' perspectives and values, and
4. Creating confidence in students they can accomplish anything.

A responsive learning environment promotes attainment and connects high potentials. Schools have to look at how success is promoted through the school and have achievement at the forefront (Wiggan, 2008). Attainable achievement goals highlight that the school is at the root of the problem but has internal expectations of restorative practices, focusing directly on staff work with students. These expectations should be able to grow within the school through targeted leadership with program development and relationships of valuing everyone. This directly correlates to the student and teacher relationships. Restorative justice is a strategic relational approach to reframing the disciplinary practices happening in schools today. The approach continues to grow as a sustainable method for addressing the high suspension and expulsion rates for students of color and found that restorative disciplinary practices caused a downturn in suspensions and improved teacher-student relationships in the classroom (Kane et al., 2007).

Restorative Justice in Schools

Restorative practices have been implemented in many schools across the United States. The main focus is to restore a good relationship where there has been a conflict and to develop a school climate that reduces the possibilities of such conflicts happening (Kane et al., 2007). These practices support teachers in building an achievable discipline program in their classrooms through participatory learning and decision making, while on a larger scale, restorative practices focus on building transparent classrooms, increasing rational trust, decreasing anti-problematic behavior, and repairing harm that might have been caused (Ashley & Burke, 2009). Any perceived wrongdoing can be addressed as a classroom community leading to proactive

resolutions that can help prevent future infractions that would have resulted in disciplinary consequences for students (Wachtel, 2016).

Magno and Schiff (2010) found that the school-to-prison pipeline is a direct outcome of school suspensions because these types of punitive punishments are based on policies that target students of color with behavioral infractions. Students of color are more likely than their white counterparts to be suspended for similar misconduct (Huang, 2018). Restorative justice practices need to be implemented in schools because the practices focus on restoring the harm done by students and less about students' discipline records.

Restorative practices are grounded in the philosophy that students are less likely to change their conduct when adults don't know how to create change (International Institute for Restorative Practices [IIRP], n.d.; Morris, 2016). The traditional approaches to school discipline tend to be high control-low support, low control-high support, and low control-low support (Kane et al., 2007). Restorative practices intention is to make available high support for both students and teachers in a controlled environment where everyone supports student's growth, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Pre-Implementation Preparation

There are challenges with implementing restorative justice in schools. This approach to school discipline asks schools to re-vision how they define misconduct and the progressions they use to right the wrongs of students. To accomplish the goal of redefining school discipline, restorative justice programs must actually be restorative; however, they can only be restorative if they include the following two key components: the people harmed and those responsible for the harm meet, and the decisions about what should be done to redress the harm are determined

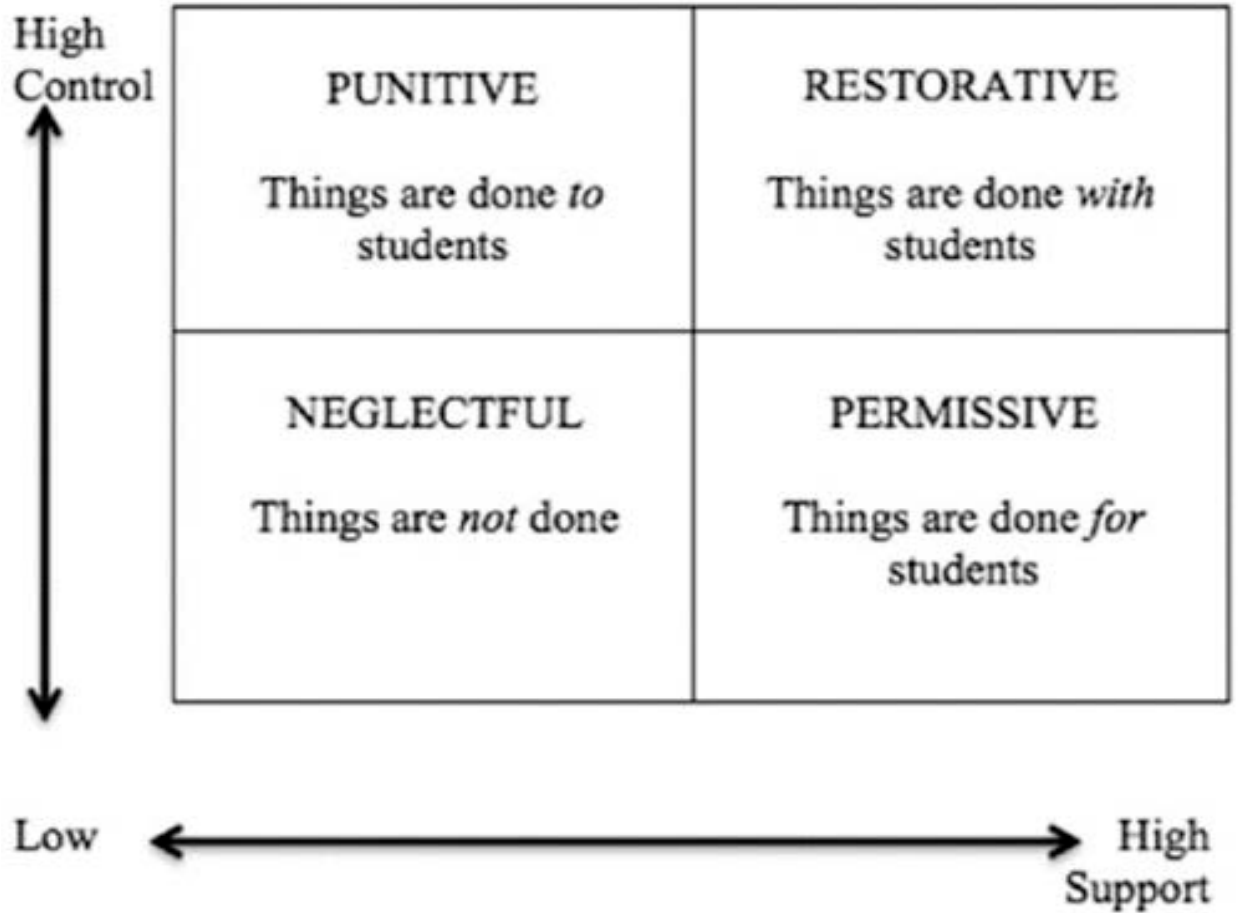


Figure 1. The control-support discipline quadrant.

between the victim and the wrongdoer (McCold, 2006). For this to successfully occur, policies and structures, training, and communication must occur prior to implementation.

The Oakland Unified Schools District used Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and restorative justice to establish a proactive discipline model. PBIS is an evidence-based disciplinary intervention that school districts and schools across the country have increasingly used to address disproportionate discipline trends. PBIS contributed research will transform punitive school environments, offer incentives, and enhance the use of restorative practices through a three-tier system model. In integrating restorative justice practices with PBIS, schools can effectively develop and implement proactive disciplinary models that focus on preventative interventions rather than reactionary methods (Skiba & Losen, 2016).

There have been thousands of programs developed over the past decades that are recognized as restorative, yet only mediation, circles, and conferencing models meet that requirement. González (2012) examined a restorative program that used mediations, conferences, and circles and found that when schools implemented these practices in response to student misbehavior, there was a decrease in the schools' suspension and expulsion rates. Other research studies have shown that it is beneficial and important to reform, re-norm, and rename dangerous punitive school disciplinary methods by integrating restorative policies and practices (Armour, 2013).

Implementation Strategies

Restorative justice is broadly defined as the practice of restoring relationships and the damage caused within the school community using conferences, mediations, and controlled talking circles (González, 2012). The circle process is where participants practice the skills of relationship building and express the ideas of restorative practice. Studies have found that

restorative circles should include all those impacted by the incident and pertinent community members; however, the ultimate goal of the practice is to build the relationship back or create one of co-existence with all parties involved (Suvall, 2009). The examination process has to get people through the process of understanding the hurt from the victim's perspective to communication and then the agreement between the victim and offender to understand the harm or hurt.

In circles, everyone should be respected and get the opportunity to share without interruption. The social and emotional well-being of all circle participants is to be honored and valued. The use of restorative circles, particularly in the form of passing a talking tangible object around a circle as a form of structured communication, has been traced back to multiple indigenous societies across the world. Some of these groups include but are not limited to Native American tribes, the Maori people of New Zealand, ancient Celtic practices, and Aboriginal Australians (Hamlin & Darling, 2012). In 2012, Ed White Middle School in San Antonio, Texas implemented a restorative disciplinary program. Teachers at the school received training on how to use restorative circles in the classroom to address discipline concerns. There were weekly practices involving circle check-ins, check-ups, and check-outs as well as forms to complete. The school shared information with parents about the use of restorative circles and parents reported back to the school about their students' feelings about the practice. The study found that restorative circle practices helped the staff to better understand students' deficiencies and behaviors (Armour, 2013). A neighboring district, Wake County Schools, also implemented restorative practices, with an emphasis placed on using restorative circles to address student social emotional learning. According to Wake County Schools public website they are still using restorative practices with the emphasis on circles. Restorative circles can be used to "improve

classroom management techniques, guide conversations on difficult topics, and guide problem resolution” (Pavelka, 2013, p. 15).

Schools wanting to implement restorative justice practices need culturally responsive student management systems, including restorative practices. In culturally responsive schools, student management and disciplinary policies are aligned with the schools’ stated values. Students have to also be made aware of the consequences of misbehavior and the rewards for their continued progress. In addition, teachers need to have discussions with their students about their difficulties with school and conduct interest inventories to learn about their students’ goals. Schools should look at how to implement social contracts that allow for agreed-upon values within the class and organization. This response to managing students’ behavior is contingent upon teachers relinquishing their power in the classroom by allowing students to help create systems where the role of the teacher is to facilitate the transferring of power to students to hold each other accountable (Madsen & Mabokela, 2002b). Teachers also have to implement culturally responsive pedagogy that will increase student learning opportunities. This allows teachers to support students’ understanding that everyone is different and create an environment of shared norms (Cummins, 1997).

Conclusion

There is a tremendous need for further research regarding the role, purpose, and structural process of restorative justice in schools. Restorative justice has the potential to create more equitable schools that lead to a dynamic education for all.

The review of literature details how restorative practices have to be founded on positive student-teacher relationships to help mitigate punitive disciplinary infractions resulting from classroom misconduct. Teachers can then implement restorative practices, like restorative

circles, to establish norms of collaboration in the classroom. Furthermore, the literature shows that students of color continue to be disproportionately impacted by punitive punishments like OSS and ISS. This insight poses leads to the exploration of the extent to which teachers' implementation of restorative classroom practices will impact school discipline practices.

CHAPTER 3: ACTION RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this participatory action research project was to increase teachers' understanding of how to implement restorative practices through targeted professional development in order to reduce the disproportionality in student discipline at E.B. Aycock Middle School. The main objective was to decrease the number of OSS and ISS discipline infractions given to students when teachers can more successfully utilize restorative classroom practices. Four research questions guided this investigation:

1. What do teachers currently know about the implementation of restorative classroom practices?
2. To what extent can professional development focused on restorative classroom practices translate into new teacher classroom disciplinary actions?
3. To what extent do restorative classroom practices impact school discipline data?
4. How does engaging in research with teachers in my school inform my ability to be a more deliberate, engaging, and effective school leader?

This chapter describes the methodology used for this study, including a rationale for using the participatory action research design, who the participants were and how they were selected, and an explanation of data collection methods. A description of how the data was analyzed, the researcher's positionality in the study, and the confidentiality and ethical considerations is also provided.

Participatory Action Research Design

Research is the process of steps used to collect and analyze information to increase our understanding of an issue and improve practice (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research is the “study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social

or human problem” (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative research method was chosen for this study to highlight the impact of restorative practices on a school’s discipline data. A qualitative research approach is most appropriate for this study because I wanted to capture participant experiences and feelings that are difficult to quantify in order to understand concepts, opinions that can give insight into a problem, or which can generate new frameworks to implement.

Supporting teachers in learning and engaging in a new, equity-based, restorative disciplinary model is a complex issue. Some of the complexities include getting staff to understand the purpose, why it is needed, letting go of their inhibiting thoughts, and then implementing restorative practices to benefit students. The qualitative research paradigm helped to explore specific aspects of the problem of why Restorative Practices are needed at schools to support students and it also helps to provide insight into how the school’s context influenced the classroom disciplinary actions of teachers.

Action Research Design

Participatory “action research is a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems” (Stringer, 2014, p. 8). It provides organizations, like schools, the opportunity to address problems that are unique to their settings and contexts. This “rigorous method of fact-finding and experimentation to practical issues” allows the action researcher and members of the organization not just to develop solutions to those issues, but also garner “important learning from outcomes both intended and unintended, and [contribute] to actionable knowledge” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). This “research *in* action, rather than research *about* action” approach aligned with the goals of this study and considered the researcher being the leader of the school in which the

research was conducted (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Also, the critical role that context played in the study made action research the ideal methodology for this study.

Action Research Cycles

Action research has a cyclical, four-step process that involves (1) planning, (2) acting, (3) observing and (4) reflecting (Foulger, 2010). This study was completed using three action research cycles, the steps taken in each cycle are depicted in Figure 2.

An outcome of using Restorative Justice is to build support for “victims and offenders, providing both with an opportunity to share their perspectives and to work together to reach a reparative solution” (Suvall, 2009, p. 547). There are normally four models from which school-constructed restorative justice is created (Pavelka, 2013). Some models which include students as an integral part of the process are peer mediation, peer-accountability boards, conferencing, and circles. Peer mediation is a small group of affected people with looking at creating scripted goals, with a facilitator to manage resolution agreements between parties. Peer-accountability groups include the offenders and victims talking about the subject or occurrence. Staff conferencing is based off larger groups and typically has a longer duration because of the purpose and process. Restorative circles may be used to “improve classroom management techniques, guide conversations on difficult topics, and guide problem resolution” (Pavelka, 2013, p. 15). Restorative circles include those impacted by the incident and pertinent community members. The goal of restorative circles is to rebuild the relationship or create one of co-existence. The examination process has to get people to understand the hurt from the victim perspective to communication then agreement between the victim and offender to understand the harm or hurt.

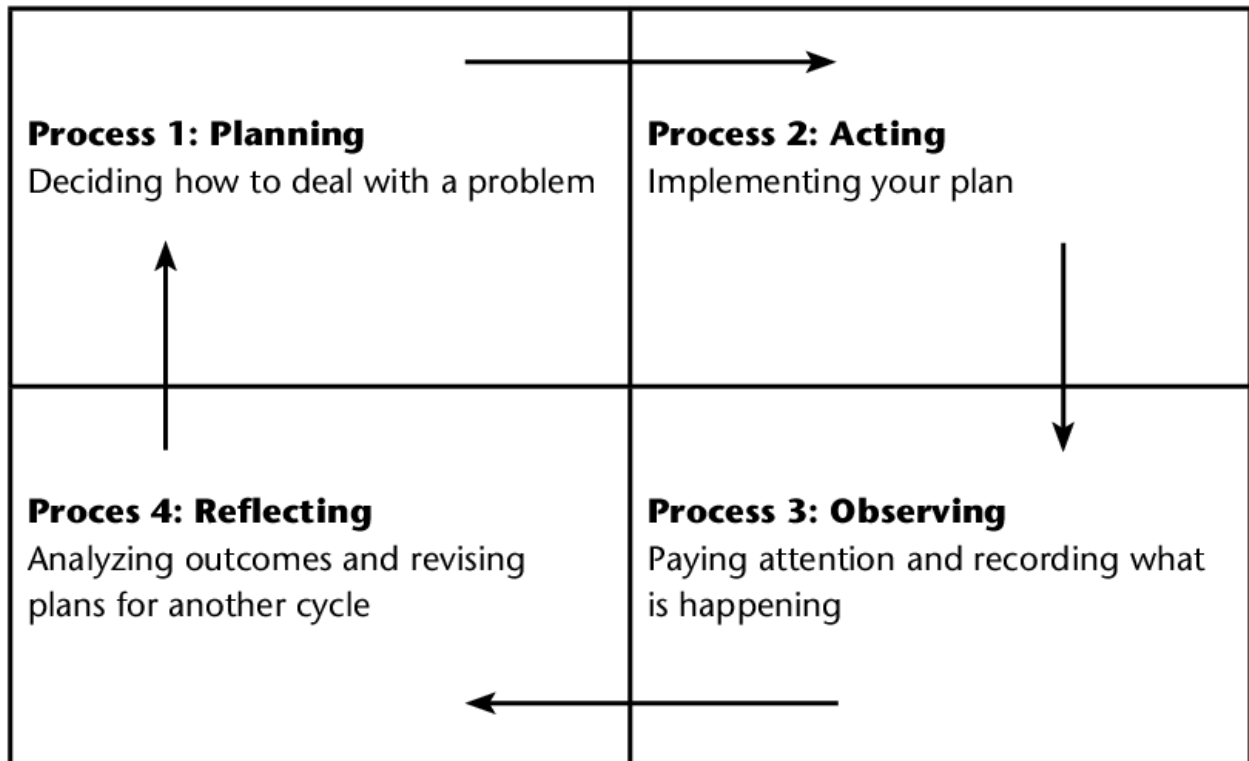


Figure 2. The common four-process action research cycle.

In this study, data was collected from restorative circles, community learning exchanges, teacher implementation, student participation, and reflective exit tickets. The data was then analyzed to find codes and identify themes that can be used to continue the implementation of restorative practices at E.B. Aycock.

Before the implementation of each cycle, the Restorative Practice (RP) team met to collaboratively determine, design, and plan restorative practices to be used. Based on identified needs, I facilitated professional development based on prior work through East Carolina University for the RP team prior to implementation, which continued with coaching during meetings. The teachers then had the opportunity to implement the restorative practices in their classrooms. I supported their learning through classroom observations and individual and group meetings. We worked collaboratively as a team to improve classroom practices towards a common goal of transforming classroom disciplinary actions.

Participants

We are a very diverse school of 795 students located near East Carolina University and located in the middle of the city of Greenville, NC. We have nine feeder schools that send students to E.B. Aycock Middle School. Approximately 67% of our students receive free or reduced lunch. The ethnic demographics for students are currently 63% African-American, 23% Caucasian, 2% Asian, 6% Hispanic, and 5% Multi-Racial. We are considered a low performing school at this time because of current test scores. Greenville is a low income, moderately educated city. The two most common age groups are college-aged residents (20-24) and young professionals (25-34). The median household income in Greenville is \$35,225 per year, near the eligibility threshold for reduced lunch.

The purpose of this study was to create restorative practice platforms that can be incorporated in a K-12 level classroom in order to decrease disruptive behaviors by looking at restorative circle implementation, community learning exchanges, and mediations with measured baselines of key school elements. The six frameworks to align with restorative practices include: Inclusive School leadership, Inclusive Curriculum, Wrap around Supports, Transformative Community Engagement, High quality teaching, and Restorative Justice Practices at the middle school level.

Data was collected through participation in equity conferences, parents' and students' questions and reflections at community learning exchanges, students completing restorative circles journals, peer mediations, and conversations with teachers and students. The goal of the study is to decrease black students' suspension rate, build stronger student-teacher relationships, build community partnerships, decrease student trauma with proactive vs. reactive steps, and create wrap around supports including mental health supports.

Also, as a school we moved towards using positive discipline practices, such as restorative justice and social and emotional learning supports, that are stressed in classrooms so that students can grow and contribute to the school community. Some other goals are to create and promote authentic parent and community engagement at the school so parents and students play a part in planning and decision-making for the school. Also, the focus is for staff to work with students with classroom restorative implementations processes to help with the social emotional trauma related to support services for afterschool platforms that are available before, during, and after school that are potentially provided year-round to the full community.

According to Stringer (2014), a diversity of participants should be involved in action research. He emphasizes that "a fundamental premise of participatory action research is that it

commences with an interest in the problems of a group, a community or an organization” (Stringer, 2014, p. 14). In this section, the grade level and teacher experience of the stakeholders that are involved in this process is explored. These individuals help with collecting data from the middle schools’ students, participate in focus groups, and are interviewed as part of the cycles of inquiry.

During the processes, restorative practices were intended to bring about positive relationships with students and staff built on a shared interest to improve the middle school community in and out of the classroom. The implemented process of restorative practices and the goal was to bring about long-term change to the school and stakeholders’ lives. Stakeholders worked with students to create restorative circles that help with dialogue sessions between all individuals. Students were positively impacted as they worked with teachers through dialogue that promoted community partnerships.

Researchers must be intentional when deciding who should participate in a qualitative participatory action research study. In action research, participants are selected based on the extent to which the group or individual is affected by or has an effect on the problem or issue of interest (Stringer, 2014). Stringer (2014) suggests that all stakeholders, people who are impacted by a study, participate in determining and exploring the problem. For this study, the teachers were selectively involved in order to have representation from numerous subject areas at the school. These staff members have been at the school ranging from four years to twelve years’ experience. Also included was a teacher new to the school, but who was going into her fourth year as an educator. The subject areas for teachers included Science, Social Studies, Math, and ELA. The teaching demographics are outlined in Table 4. All teachers who participated in the

Table 4

Teacher Demographics

Teacher	Grade Level	Experience
Teacher A	8 th grade	Veteran Teacher
Teacher B	7 th grade	Experienced Teacher
Teacher C	7 th grade	Veteran Teacher
Teacher D	6 th grade	Beginning Teacher

study did so voluntarily, and they were all employed by PCS and worked at E.B. Aycock and were chosen because they have been interested in the past in restorative practices.

Cycle of Inquiry

Three participatory action research cycles were implemented for this project over a span of 18 months. The purpose of the cycles was to gain insight into what extent teachers' increased understanding of restorative classroom practices had on their implementation of new classroom disciplinary actions and E.B. Aycock's discipline data. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What do teachers currently know about the implementation of restorative classroom practices?
2. To what extent can professional development focused on restorative classroom practices translate into new teacher classroom disciplinary actions?
3. To what extent do restorative classroom practices impact school discipline data?
4. How does engaging in research with teachers in my school inform my ability to be a more deliberate, engaging, and effective school leader?

Data Collection

The goal of collecting data is to inform and produce discussions through the gathering of artifacts that reveal facts, opinions, and insights (Yin, 1994). As the researcher, I played a vital role in following the methods of collecting data.

Interviews

The interview process involved teachers giving their responses to questions that were open-ended with follow-up questions as needed. These questions were posed through focus group meetings and one-on-one conversations. The interviews were intended to be conducted

through informal face to face dialogue and data collected by surveying teachers about restorative practices. Due to COVID-19, interviews were instead completed by survey question format and asked teachers to share their thoughts. Information will be kept securely and used only for research purposes. As the researcher, I sought permission from participants for the data collection to protect the study. The interviews took place at E.B. Aycock. Teachers participated and they filled out information and shared it with me.

Reflective Memos

Throughout the study, I was able to journal my thoughts, opinions, and reflections. My journal entries were written to allow me to document the cycles, my reflections, and notate any emerging themes in the responses and experiences. The memos allowed me to provide an account of what was going smoothly and what practices could be adapted for the next cycle. It also focused the data to draw connections and determine relationships in the data that I was collecting from participants.

Data Analysis

The process of analyzing the data started at the beginning of the study and continued to the end. During each cycle, artifacts and evidence were compiled together to be analyzed based on interviews and reflections. I was able to take notes pertaining to each cycle indicating the categories found. The categories were then studied to determine what emerging themes were present in looking at the data. During the cycle themes and patterns were determined by studying collected data and documenting the information mentioned by the participants. The researcher sorted and counted words used by participants to include the findings in the study with initial coding (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). The qualitative data was examined for comparisons and

variances and this allowed for me to continue with the second cycle of using interviews and reflections to drive the direction of the study (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016).

Coding is the process of “analyzing qualitative text data by taking them apart to see what they yield before putting the data back together in a meaningful way” (Creswell, 2007, p. 156). Through the use coding through the cycles, terms can be found through code landscaping. Through code landscaping, word-based and pictorial methods were implemented to help identify developing themes. The tool called Wordle was used to determine word occurrences as a visualization of the data that was completed in the first cycle. Through this coding, categories were linked and determined how they were related.

Themes and patterns from the cycle were discussed during focus group meetings and assertions were created from this process. Figure 3 shows the process in which data was turned into assertions. Then the research questions, the emergent codes and themes, and the source documents were aligned to determine if the assertions were valid. Table 5 shows the links between each sub-question to the data source from which information was gathered. The data articulation was done with fidelity to make sure all information was used correctly for respondents learning (Creswell, 2014).

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program modules on the ethical principles of conducting research. The purpose of this training was to provide the researcher with the knowledge and skills needed to ensure minimal risk to participants and their personal information as a result of taking part in this study.

As the principal of E.B. Aycock, the researcher fully utilized the information learned during the CITI program. The modules from the program provided the researcher with an understanding of how to ensure the privacy of the participants in the study. All participants were

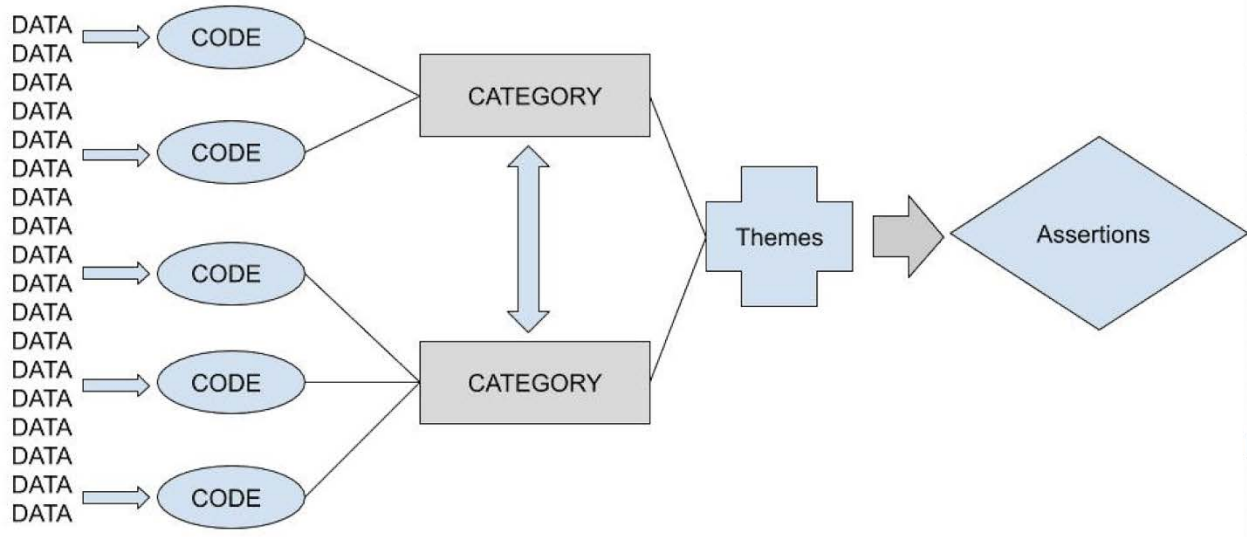


Figure 3. Codes to assertion model.

Table 5

Linking Data to Research Questions

Sub-Question	Data Source
What do teachers currently know about the implementation of restorative classroom practices?	Focus Groups Documentation from Cycles Meeting notes Memos Conversation notes
To what extent can restorative classroom practice professional development translate into new teacher classroom disciplinary actions?	Focus Groups Documentation from Cycles Meeting notes Memos Conversation notes
To what extent do restorative classroom practices impact school discipline data?	Focus Groups Memos Conversation notes Meeting notes
How does engaging in research with teachers in my school inform my ability to be a more deliberate, engaging, and effective school leader?	Focus Groups Memos Conversation notes Meeting notes Observations

voluntary and did not receive any form of compensation for their participation in the study. They also were not penalized for choosing not to participate in the study or choosing to leave the study before it concluded.

The researcher made sure that all participants understood the purpose of the study and their role in the study. Prior to beginning the study, the researcher obtained written permission from all of the participants. Since the researcher knew the participants personally and worked in a supervisory role, the researcher made sure that the climate continued professionally with procedures and protocols.

Methodological Assumptions and Limitations

An assumption of this study is that restorative justice practices can be implemented in the classroom and work for all students to meet their needs to be successful. Through restorative justice practices, students, staff, and the school will develop better relationships with each other and understand each other's perceptions of reality or that of an offender or victim. This assumption should lead to more collaboration and learning from each other no matter if they agree or disagree. These processes should take place in classrooms as models and developed throughout other classrooms.

Some critical parts of the study are to create norms for students and make sure that it is developed that restorative circles, community mediations, and peer mediations have to be done. Restorative justice practices in the classroom are intended to build community and create and maintain healthy vital relationships. This assumption that creates the norm for restorative practices is the focus to resolve conflicts between offenders and victims to create a platform to heal any harm amongst the group. Some of the behaviors will be addressed with all parties

involved and these practices presume to assume all students, with staff supervision, are worthy of equal evaluation during the process.

Scope and Delimitations

A delimitation of this study is that it utilized teachers from a middle school with about 790 students that are 65% African American, 30% Caucasian and 5% classified as Other and largely come from lower economic status backgrounds. Teachers were selected based on their current experience in working with restorative practices. The sample size was five staff members who have roles working directly with students. Administrators, counselors and teachers helped with research-based practices, and I conducted informal observations in the classroom with formal observations as needed.

Interviews were created for students to learn the processes and then implement these processes with teacher-led guidance. Some examinations were through pre-written questions and were designed help to improve student's goals. Hopefully from examinations, interviews and conversations, definition of practices can be created. Student relationships should be fostered through experiences with different restorative practices goals. Data collections and analysis will be very important to the school dynamics of how implementation will be adopted within the school. The researcher of the study was the Principal of the middle school, but will also collect data from other school personnel that are implementing practices in their classrooms through professional development within the school. The research will take a foundational year to complete to see the overall protection of the restorative practices implemented in classrooms with fidelity. These were guiding questions for the initial meeting to set goals.

Some interview questions teachers were asked to voluntarily complete:

1. What do you feel EBA can do to help students control their anger/behavior?
2. As a teacher what type of restorative practices would you like implemented?
3. What role should students play regarding topics in restorative practices?
4. What are restorative practices?
5. How can community learning exchanges affect community partnerships?
6. How can EBA support students during the school day with wrap around supports?
7. What would Teachers, consider as a barrier for successful restorative practices?
8. As a parent what are your initial thoughts about restorative practices?
9. Do you trust your child's teacher to implement restorative practices?
10. What is the role of the students to increase implementation?
11. What professional development can be provided to teachers?
12. To what extent is Transformative Parent and Student Engagement applied at the school?
13. What is high poverty, high performing schools doing differently to implement this?
14. What are the barriers funding plays into implementation?

Limitations

Limitations of the study included how teachers implementing the restorative practices were able to make sure students understood the norms of collaboration. Another limitation would be which teachers were used to make sure that the implementation processes were as controlled as possible using the same strategies in order to compare to future work. The researcher used veteran and beginning teachers, counselors, and administration to make sure there are different subsets for data collection. The study took place at one single school with different grade levels

to measure the potential impact of what can be done or implemented. One other main limitation is that the researchers had to maintain employment at the same school to keep up the accurate data collection throughout the study.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher in this study is the current principal of E.B. Aycock Middle (EBA) school, who has been in education since 2004 and started his career as a lateral entry teacher at a K-8 school. The researcher has direct knowledge of each of the participants of the study, both educators and students, at EBA. The researcher also has direct knowledge of the students who are receiving direct, researched-based interventions, and whose data is being collected and analyzed.

To ensure the integrity of this study, the researcher sought and received approval from the Internal Review Board of East Carolina University prior to conducting all research and interviews with participants, this approval is provided in Appendix A. The researcher also successfully completed Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program trainings on the ethical principles of conducting research with children, as well as federal regulations, assessing risk, informed consent, and privacy and confidentiality. This training was also done prior to research being conducted with participants. The purpose of this training was to provide the researcher with the knowledge and skills to ensure minimal risk to participants and their personal information as a result of taking part in this study.

Being the Principal of EBA, the researcher will fully utilize the information learned during the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program. The CITI modules provide the researcher with an understanding of privacy and discretion relating to the

participants. All participation is voluntary and participants will not be compensated or penalized for participating in or choosing to leave the study at any time.

The researcher made sure all participants understood the study and their role in the study. The researcher received written permission from the participants before any surveys were conducted or data were collected and analyzed. Since the researcher knows participants from being educators or students at EBA, the researcher made sure the climate continued in a professional manner with procedures and protocols. Participants had the ability to leave the study at any time.

Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent

For this study the researcher completed the CITI program course before submitting for the Institutional Review Board at ECU for approval of the study. The participants were teachers and students from the school pertaining to data collection or survey completion. Individual participation was voluntary and participants were given letters of consent to use their information for research purposes. Participants in this study were chosen by the researcher based on the need for veteran, beginning, and novice teachers to be a part of the study. Also, participants in this study were chosen by the based off them being active teachers in the classroom setting using their pre- and post-evaluation of what restorative practices can be.

The researcher explained the processes of best restorative practices to be implemented in middle school classrooms, teachers will have some latitude in how they would like to implement them with their students. The research with this study would benefit students in the school district because it will look at ways to help build teacher-student relationships and help with the disproportionality of black students' suspensions in schools.

Teachers were informed why restorative practices were central to the research conducted, which will help with participants understanding of the processes that will take place. Also, the researcher informed participants about the study's length and made sure everyone's identity and statements are confidential and secured for documentation purposes. Participants were also informed they do not have to participate in restorative practices, including restorative circles, surveys and pre/post assessments of their learning. Upon final completion and publication, the study will be available for any participant to review.

Inferences and Next Steps

Important in the implementation of sustainable transformative practices in teaching practices is that there are different strategies of encouragement to complete restorative practices. Also, I have learned that inclusive school leadership has to model the restorative practices at the school level and participate in professional development to make sure all employees understand the correct protocols. The use of sustainable transformative practices will lead to teachers adopting culturally responsive teaching practices to facilitate learning through restorative circles, conferences, mediations, which deal with students stating their experiences from their point of view to others, who might not otherwise understand their perspective.

My belief in focusing on implementing sustainable restorative practices is that schools can identify key teachers or staff that can serve as model classrooms. Also, schools can help shape their communities and student population with the correct reflective processes at the K-12 level. As a school leader I will continue to provide the educational community with school resources creating teachers and students as change agents that will move from the classroom into the community.

Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations

Participants in this study were chosen by the researcher based on the need for veteran, beginning, and novice teachers to be a part of the study. Prior to the data collection, consent was given in order to talk with participants and gather information through interviews. Everyone was informed that their participation was strictly voluntary and that they could remove themselves from the research at any time. There was informed consent in Appendix B.

All participants were informed about the purpose and potential length of the study. Also, the researcher made sure everyone's identity and statements were secured for documentation purposes.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlines the action plan for assisting teachers with implementing restorative practices in the classroom by developing pedagogies in the focus group. During each cycle, the teachers and I explored these pedagogies together. I gathered data from interviews and questions for the effectiveness of these practices. By analyzing the data, recommendations and adjustments for teachers to implement restorative practices in their classrooms were made. In the following chapter, I explain my findings from the cycles.

CHAPTER 4: CONTEXT, CODES, AND CYCLES

This participatory action research (PAR) project explores how the implementation of restorative practices affected teacher practices and student outcomes. This chapter details the data collected, including memos, interviews with teachers, and personal notes to help me document and reflect on our progress. The goal of collecting data is to inform and produce discussions through the gathering of artifacts that reveal facts, opinions, and insights (Yin, 1994). In this chapter, I provide a detailed account of the activities that the teachers took part in as well as the data collection and analysis that took place. These practices will supply deeper understanding of what was done to set the stage for the subsequent emergent themes that came from the focus group meetings and the self-reflective journey lines, which each participant completed reflecting upon their own past educational experiences.

The PAR project took place from September 2019 through September 2020, allowing for the RP team focus group to meet across two academic years. Disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 created many obstacles to implementing restorative practices, most noticeably the shift to remote teaching and learning beginning in the Spring of 2020. At the beginning of the project, I sent an email to all staff of E.B. Aycock inviting everyone to be a part of a Restorative Practice focus group and informing them that participation would involve the implementation of some type of restorative justice practices in their classrooms. Restorative practices were modeled at this initial meeting as we sat in a circle and had a talking piece that was passed around the room to each individual, speaking only when in possession of the talking piece, to create norms of collaboration. Teachers were able to understand the processes needed and trust was set to create a gracious space. During our first meeting, we discussed the process of

using the restorative discipline design, agreed that traditional discipline is not working, and explored how restorative practices would work in the classroom.

Data Collection and Analysis

This research will provide evidence of three emerging themes of implementing restorative practices that made themselves apparent through questions, conversations, and artifacts; restorative circles, mutual respect, and building healthy relationships. Restorative Practices implementation protocols allowed for the RP team to focus on the three themes through the use of four main questions to guide the study. First, I examined the importance of the implementation of restorative classroom practices and if professional development focused on restorative classroom practices translate into new teacher classroom disciplinary actions. Secondly, I examine how restorative classroom practices impact school discipline cultures in a classroom and how teachers react. Lastly, I examine how I engage in research with teachers in my school to inform my ability to be a more deliberate, engaging, and effective school leader.

During Cycle 1, I conducted interviews with teachers to determine what restorative practices needed to be put in place. During our initial meeting it was understood that implementation of restorative classroom practices was needed for students in the ever-evolving classroom structures. EBA school had discipline practices in place, but not a restorative system to focus on whole child dynamics to support their anger or frustrations with other students, staff, and themselves. In looking at the findings from Cycle one, I quickly realized that staff had different ways of handling behavioral classroom concerns in their classrooms. Teachers felt that something needed to be done, but simple conversations with students was their number one tool to diffuse behavior impacts for classroom structures. The main focal points from Teacher A were

about showing students they matter, Teacher B was effective communication, Teacher C was to meet them where they are, and Teacher D was relationship building.

The first cycle entailed establishing and creating an initial focus group to formulate a model of discipline using restorative practices that could be implemented during Cycle 1. The goal of the first cycle was to provide a framework for teachers get into the habit of approaching discipline with restorative practices. Throughout Cycle 1, I conducted two interviews with teachers to determine what restorative practices are to them. The main goal from these interviews was to learn more about each teacher's existing knowledge and approach to restorative practices. Another goal was to create a restorative practice team that will be able to work with each other in a manner that allows for self-discovery through targeted questions and interviews. The results of these interviews are presented in Table 6.

During classroom observations during Cycle 1, I was able to discover different practices in each classroom, focused on the initial implementation of restorative practices. Teacher A, a veteran teacher of 14 years, generally worked towards creating talking points, encouraging dynamic mindfulness, using restorative circles, focusing on relationship-building, and addressing trauma. Teacher B, a 7th grade teacher with eight years of experience worked on maintaining clear communication, using restorative circles, and creating a caring atmosphere. Teacher C, a 21-year teacher, focused on conversations, trauma-informed content, and restorative relationships. Finally, Teacher D, a 6th grade teacher with three years of experience, used behavior contracts, conflict management, positive talk, and restorative circles.

The main focus on the September 2019 meeting was on what teachers currently knew about the implementation of restorative classroom practices. Before the meeting I informed

Table 6

Restorative Practice Questions

Question	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D
What do you feel EBA can do to help students control their anger or behavior?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • showing them that they matter to me • know that you are interested in their well-being • my allowing students to talk • I would like to see a school-wide initiative that creates time for mindfulness in each class, and educates more teachers about the benefits of mindfulness • I also would like to see relationship building professional development among staff as well as students to support everyone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • show that each student is important and has something to offer to the educational environment • being able to express oneself in the circle translates into being able to express oneself during times of academic interaction and expression • clear effective communication is very important in life, therefore, providing a platform for students to communicate in a safe environment in turn enhances the academic environment. • behavioral issues somehow become a non-issue when students become contributing members of their classroom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • including mental health training for both students and teachers would help them recognize how trauma affects the brain • I also feel that including parents in the process, if possible, could help bridge the communication gap and better help the student get whatever help is needed, whether individual counseling, a mentor, or guidance about future opportunities • many angry kids feel out of control or lack hope, and giving them skills and purpose might mitigate their need for attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel it is essential to build a relationship with said student. Once a relationship has been established, one may be able to understand the premise of the behavior and help accordingly • it is beneficial to implement a calming zone for students where they may go to calm down. Calming down may require them to color, play a game, talk with a friend of their choice, etc.

Table 6 (continued)

Question	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D
What are restorative practices?	<p>Create dynamic, where students understand what they will be discussing during the restorative processes.</p> <p>Comprehension of said topics is important as students will be sharing their position and how that topic plays a role in their personal experiences. Establishing significance to participate students' perspectives and values.</p>	<p>Effective communication practices that give students communication tools to use when they encounter a situation where they need to resolve an issue without resorting to verbal or physical altercations.</p>	<p>Restorative practices seek to repair relationships and heal trauma rather than punish and shame. They include strategies like mindfulness, restorative circles, honest communication, having a safe environment that embraces diversity and accepts everyone. The goal is not to just get rid of the behavior but to address the underlying need that led to the behavior, to provide emotional and consistent support for students. Instead of punishing, consequences are aimed at restoring what was broken.</p>	<p>Restorative practices are interventions in which an educator or trusted adult will put into place to prevent minor conflicts from becoming larger conflicts that could result in harsher consequences for students.</p>

Table 6 (continued)

Question	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D
<p>What do teachers currently understand and do with restorative classroom practices?</p>	<p>I feel restorative circles should be required of each homeroom for at least once a week for the first 3 months of school and once or twice a month after those initial months. I feel that this is the disconnect that our students have with us and their peers. In order to have a connection, you have to establish some type of relationship.</p>	<p>Teachers become more sensitive and compassionate toward their students who come from different backgrounds than they come from.</p>	<p>At this point, most EBA teachers understand that using restorative practices can be a way to foster relationships between teacher/student and student/student. However, I think a minority of teachers are actually conducting restorative circles/discussions/activities.</p>	<p>Teachers currently understand that restorative classroom practices are beneficial to not only the students, but the educator as well as its effectiveness in building meaningful relationships in and outside the classroom.</p>

Table 6 (continued)

Question	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D
How would restorative classroom practice professional development and resources impact teachers understanding of practices?	<p>Restorative practices address this trauma and allows students space to feel heard and connect with others, skills that precede most learning. The second reason I feel that students would benefit is that connection with the teacher has been proven to coincide with student success. The third reason I feel that restorative practices are essential is the systemic racism and inequality of our society. There is societal trauma as well as individual trauma, and restorative practices can be used to open communication among diverse groups and foster understanding.</p>	<p>It would it more willing for students to participate in the classroom because they now see that teacher cares about them as people.</p>	<p>Professional Development explaining restorative classroom practices is helpful in educating teachers about the importance of restorative justice and about how to implement restorative justice practices in the classroom. Most teachers need some guidelines and some practical examples to feel more comfortable using any unfamiliar strategy.</p>	<p>If teachers are not knowledgeable of restorative classroom practices, the circles are likely to be unsuccessful and lack effectiveness. The impact of professional development and resources are imperative to the development of the teacher as a leader of the circle. If the teacher is not knowledgeable, he or she cannot effectively respond to conflict within the circle.</p>

teachers to create a journey line pertaining to Restorative Practices for the meeting and we will discuss each of the Restorative Practices pedagogies in detail. During the meeting, I asked teachers to reflect on their past experiences and awareness of restorative practices. The teachers' journey lines were discussed on how to function along with reflective process associated with it. Teachers paired up with an individual to share their journey lines during the meeting. In sharing, they were able to provide a brief summary of what each person's journey line represents. Then as a group, it was discussed the events in people's lives that affected their point of view pertaining to practices in their classrooms that shaped their view of others and what events in their life protected them amongst others.

During the first meeting it was a great time to ask teachers questions and document their varied responses about the school, restorative practices, classroom practices, and professional development. Implementing the RP team is the main focus, but in the initial meeting, I wanted to create a gracious space, where teachers felt they could answer the questions freely. As I reflect on their responses, I can see a pattern emerge with the first question about helping students control their behavior. Teachers stated that students at EBA need to have a sense of well-being at the school, clear expectations, positive communication, and assistance in building relationships. As we continued with the questions, it became clear that these teachers need something to help teach students to control their emotions. A consensus was reached that there is a need for identifying the best practices to help teachers to build positive relationships with students. It quickly emerged that restorative practices needs to be established at the school for the benefit of students and staff.

Since the goal was to implement restorative practices through the RP team, the discussion about restorative practices focused on what they thought about resolving issues dealing with

trauma and culturally responsive strategies that can lead to restorative circles. Teachers were characterizing particular perceptions that restorative practices allow for conflict resolution, positive talk, and the ability to create trusted class community partnerships. We continued to talk about restorative practices and it led to discussion about why we need it and an understanding of its purpose. Teachers agreed that it is needed to help form better relationships, which led to the feeling of better experiences in the classroom. The most relevant dialogue was about potential professional development and how it could be introduced; there were differences on how it should be done, since there needs to be passion and buy-in by teachers to implement it. Based on the feedback in the reflective conversation there needs to be established guidelines, comfortability, and resources that can help with the development of creating model classrooms in restorative practices.

During bi-weekly observations of classrooms, I learned that it will take time for staff and students to get used to implementing restorative practices. During the beginning of the RP team, teachers looked at how they could adapt mini goals in their classrooms, like creating positive talking points, relationship-building time, clear communication, and conflict management for students' well-being. This allowed students to prepare for more targeted restorative practices in the future that can have major impact. Teachers A and B were implementing restorative circles, but were not using established frameworks to make sure all students voices were being heard with talking pieces and learning circles.

During the meeting, each participant was asked questions about their journey line. I asked each participant three questions as it related to the classroom environment/culture in their perspective schools growing up during their K-12 school years. The participants provided written responses, provided in Table 7, that later allowed me to then code them into categories.

Table 7

Journey Line Responses

Teacher	How did the environment/culture in the classroom affect you growing up?	How did the environment/culture in the classroom shape your thoughts?	How are you using the different environment/culture experiences to shape your teaching?
Teacher A	It negatively impacted me, because I got into trouble at school. There were no practices put in place to support me.	It shaped my thoughts about why I did not feel confident about myself growing up and sometimes I felt like I was not important.	Make sure students that have difficulty in school with behaviors or academics, gets the support they need every day and see me as a resource.
Teacher B	I enjoyed the classroom, because my parent was an educator. I understood why things were put in place.	My thoughts were that I wanted to be a teacher, growing up and this is what I am going to do to make an impact.	Since I wanted to be a teacher, the different experiences from parents and teachers have prepared me to make a difference in students' lives.
Teacher C	The environment in my classrooms in how I grew up, prepared me greatly and made me ready for the real world.	It shaped me that I need to make sure I am positive to everyone, because of the close-knit area I am from, where everybody knew each other, provided comfort.	Create structures in the classroom for all students to learn literacy skills that allow students to learn content and be successful in their next classrooms.
Teacher D	My classroom experiences were fine, I appreciated the teachers making sure all students got to know each other.	It helped me understand that I need to know everyone in my classrooms, no matter their background.	The experiences throughout school helped me realize that teaching is a passion for me and that truly do enjoy it.

The teachers paired up with another teacher and then picked one question that they wanted to share and elaborate on with each other. After they shared that one question, each person proceeded to find another partner, which allowed them share a different question with another individual. After the processes, as a group the teachers came together and provided some take-away from what they had heard from some of their colleagues. Some of the biggest take-aways was that a lot of how they build relationships in the classroom come from their parents and teachers' practices put in place. In addition to the journey lines, I kept personal memos throughout the cycle and held conversations with all of the teachers.

A critical part of this cycle was the numerous conversations I had in the school environment with teachers, which allowed more in-depth conversations about their experiences with classroom cultures both personally and professionally. The conversations, especially pertaining to how they grew up, provided a deeper understanding of what was done to set the stage for the subsequent emergent themes that came from the memos, group meetings, and the journey lines. The emergent theme was that how teachers grew up in their culture or environment shaped how they currently teach and implement practices. Also, while some experiences were positive like Teachers B, C, D, Teacher A had a different experience growing up, due to behavioral issues in school stemming from home life difficulties. I learned that if restorative practices are implemented with Teachers A, B, C and D, they can continue to impact students based on their passion for teaching, which allows for them to be ready for some form of restorative practice implementation for the future.

I continued to meet with the focus group to continue establish expectations and to discuss the goals of implementing Restorative Practices at E.B. Aycock. All participants were reassured that nothing utilized in the project would affect their overall job performance ratings at EBA.

During the November meeting, we met to discuss restorative practices and ask them to answer questions about which pedagogy they think would work the best. Highlights of these conversations regarding current beliefs and perceived barriers are in Table 9.

One of the main goals was to continue to build mutual trust each other and in the purpose of restorative practices to help with classroom management and to create meaningful relationships. I shared stories of my experiences as staff talking freely about what restorative practices means to them. The overarching focus was to what extent can professional development focused on restorative classroom practices translate into new teacher classroom disciplinary actions.

I collected data through the restorative practice questions about implementing restorative practice pedagogies pertaining to what do restorative practices mean to you now through collection in Table 8 and used these responses as considerations or barriers to guide discussion with the RP team in October and November. This was mainly accomplished by taking reflective memos of the conversations that we were having pertaining to how restorative practices were going in teachers' classrooms. During conversations, we discussed how restorative practices has been implemented, and what were some of the strengths and weaknesses pertaining to the continued implementation of restorative practices. The theme that was being interpreted through data was that restorative practices, especially circles, were having a noticeable impact on student disciplinary referrals. In meetings, three out of the four teachers were implementing restorative circles with classrooms, to create a sense of inclusion of all students. Based on classroom observations and through conversations with teachers, students were enjoying being in the circles talking about various current event topics or educational content. It was stated these allowed students to feel safe in the classroom environment, even if they did not know how to answer

Table 8

Restorative Practice Questions

Teacher	What are restorative practices now to you?	What would teachers consider as a barrier for successful restorative practices?
Teacher A	Restorative practices seek to repair relationships and heal trauma rather than punish and shame. They include strategies like mindfulness, restorative circles, honest communication, having a safe environment that embraces diversity and accepts everyone.	I think that having a consistent plan and implementing that plan at the beginning of the year would improve my process. I am still learning about strategies and working out how best to open up discussion in the classroom
Teacher B	The goal is not to just get rid of the behavior but to address the underlying need that led to the behavior, to provide emotional and consistent support for students. Instead of punishing, consequences are aimed at restoring what was broken.	Feeling like they are losing time from covering curriculum. When actually they are gaining time to teach by being proactive in implementing restorative practices because less instructional time is lost due to behavioral issues. I see restorative practices as an investment...especially with our student clientele.
Teacher C	Restorative practices address childhood trauma and allows students a space in the classroom to feel heard, which lead to vulnerability that allows students to connect with others, before learning can take place	Lack of training, push for testing readiness, large class sizes.
Teacher D	Is still a work in progress, but I enjoy putting my classrooms in restorative circles, which allows every student to have a voice	Teachers may consider a teacher who is not educated on restorative practices a barrier. A teacher who is unfamiliar with such practices may be more likely to traditionally reprimand a child, rather than trying to reach the student on an emotional level of interconnectedness.

Table 9

RP Questions from November Meeting

Category	Frequency	Responses
Build healthy relationships between educators and students	11	Parent/Teacher Engagement – 5 Relationships matter– 3 Restorative Practices – 3
Reduce, prevent and improve harmful behavior	7	Conflict management – 4 Student discipline– 2 Social contract – 1
Repair harm and restore positive relationships	10	Teacher relationships – 4 Student’s relationships – 6
Resolve conflict, hold individuals and groups accountable	9	Restorative circles – 6 Accountability conversations – 1 RP team – 2
Address and discuss the needs of the school community	6	RP professional development – 3 School community –2 School wide discipline – 1

questions or provide feedback. In the question posed “what are restorative practices to you now?” I found that all of the teachers shared a common goal to reduce adverse behavior in the classroom in order to support all students no matter their backgrounds or ability.

During our restorative practice meeting in November, the results of the reflective memo data from teachers was used to guide a larger conversation where I asked teachers to share some positives in their classrooms from restorative practices. The discussion notes where Teacher A felt some teachers did not know what RP was in the school, it’s a way to build positive relationships with students. Teacher C stated that is a great way to create positive classroom interactions with students and reduces disruptive interactions in class. Teacher A stated that it creates shared values in creating a classroom community. Then Teacher D stated that they are working on restorative circle implementation, by getting students to understand their role in classroom practices. Teacher B felt restorative practices are interventions in which an educator or trusted adult will have to put into place to prevent minor conflicts from becoming larger conflicts that could result in harsher consequences for students. Teacher A responded that they understand that using restorative practices can be a way to foster relationships between teacher/student and student/student, but Teacher B felt you have to create student leadership in the classroom by students building community, so students respond to conflict with a conversation that creates empathy with consistent fair classroom practices. Teacher C then stated incorporating entire class protocols can stop potential adverse consequences in classrooms. Teacher D agreed that effective communication practices give students communication tools to use when they encounter a situation where they need to resolve an issue without resorting to verbal or physical altercations.

During this responsive meeting, the RP team realized that while the teachers still did not know everything about restorative practices, they were willing to implement them, so we continued to have conversations during the focus group meetings about limited prior use, restorative circles, disruptive behavior in the classroom, shared values, interventions, conflicts and student voice. The themes from this meeting are illustrated in Table 10.

Mutual Respect

As the Restorative Practice team continued to meet, we completed an activity about journey lines to reflect on practices that influence how teachers deal with students in the classroom based on how they themselves were treated in school growing up. Through these significant conversations each teacher was able to express their thoughts on the environment or culture in which they were raised, which helped to shape their current thoughts and teaching practices. After these questions, teachers met and reflected upon their experiences, the consensus of which was that the culture of a classroom can create an environment of mutual respect. The next emerging theme was creating mutual respect within the classroom by focusing on restorative practices by allowing students to understand the importance of diversity and the acceptance of others. Through the specific question of “what are restorative practices to you now,” findings from staff indicated that repairing harm, trauma, relationships, and shame can be addressed through creating a community of mutual respect. Focusing on mutual respect does come with some barriers, identified by Teachers B and C who were focusing on losing curriculum time, and Teachers A and D making sure it was consistently implemented from day one and emphasized mutual respect.

During my examination of mutual respect in practice in the classrooms, I observed a consistent pattern in the EBA classrooms’ implementation of mutual respect and teachers’

Table 10

CLE Pedagogy

Pedagogy	Description	Purpose	Resulting Artifact
Circle	The group is gathered in a circle and a talking piece is passed around the room with each individual speaking only when in possession of the talking piece.	Democratizing voice and eliciting and honoring wisdom.	Notes, photos, or recordings
Appreciative Listening Protocol	Partners take turns answering a prompt. While in the listening role, the partner may not give verbal feedback.	Confidentially sharing with a partner, a story that connects the person with the learning.	Process notes or photos
Inquiry	Participants sort a set of statements about a topic in ways that reflect their individual perspectives. These are then statistically analyzed.	Engaging participants in data collection and dialogue.	Sorts and the resulting statistical analyses
Journey Line	In response to a prompt, participants plot related events on a timeline based on their importance.	Helping participants tell their stories.	Collected Journey Lines and any analyses completed as a result
World Café	At tables, small groups brainstorm around a prompt for a specified amount of time and then move to another table. A “table host” remains at each table to welcome the new group.	Helping participant’s co-construct understanding and knowledge.	Posters from brainstorming sessions. Notes from culminating meaning-making conversation
Learning Walks	Paired or small group conversations that take place while moving, preferably outdoors.	Using a different type of dialogue to gain a fresh perspective.	Notes or recordings of the conversations

Table 10 (continued)

Pedagogy	Description	Purpose	Resulting Artifact
Performance	Individually or in groups, participants witness, perform or create through various methods (e.g. poetry, visual art, music, etc.).	Utilizing the wisdom or people and inspiring and motivating participants.	Videos or photos of performances

frequency with building healthy relationships between all stakeholders, repairing harm, restoring positive relationships, and holding groups accountable. As teachers continued making sure the classrooms have implemented mutual respect through restorative practices, they similarly addressed the needs of the community classroom structures. One way to understand this consistent pattern in the data is that teachers shared a real-world clarity and vision for how to manage mutual respect in their classrooms. Furthermore, given this emphasis on restorative practices in being consistently applied allowed teachers to build the frequency of positive interactions, which create mutual respect amongst students to students, students to teacher, and students to school. This design is shaping the RP team implementation in healthy ways, changing their understandings as well as their practice around how to build mutual respect through restorative circles, world café, appreciative listening protocols, and performance.

Mutual respect across all four classrooms was implemented differently with respect to the educational understandings and practices in the individual classroom environments and cultures. In this emerging theme practice of mutual respect in this way, I examine the third research question of how students and teachers' perceptions changed since implementing restorative practices in their everyday processes. The findings presented in this chapter suggest it is possible for system designs to shape mutual respect in restorative practice. These practices have the potential to be influential in shaping not only teacher's practice, but also form their understandings of how to build students' fairness, self-sufficiency, and equity in the classroom. Also, the findings provide additional perspective around how to manage mutual respect in restorative practice and why teachers have managed to work mainly on building healthy relationships.

Based on the findings discussed in this chapter, for better understanding and comparison, mutual respect in practice across all four diverse classrooms was based on their teaching experience. This structure involves numerous reflections with the first being the analysis of how to examine whether a teacher has the restorative practice frameworks to manage mutual respect and to what extent does a teacher have to examine the structure for mutual respect. In encouraging students through mutual respect, teachers are focusing on supports through restorative practices through instructional framework, guiding classrooms toward mutually respectful instruction that can focus on state standards, local school cultures, and subject contents.

While there has been a disruption in this school year due to COVID-19, mutual respect can be applied to any classroom virtually or in person. Mutual respect examines the difficulty and disparity that can ensue when educational systems design for increased equality, self-sufficiency, and equity in classrooms needs to be instituted, which should be based on restorative practices. This study describes mutual respect as very much needed in classroom instruction, society, and building healthy relationships. Also, the research further supports the view of mutual respect as collaborating to strengthening any conflicting differences amongst any unexpected circumstance that might arise in each teacher's classroom. As with mutual respect teachers were able to create community for student perspectives that allowed us to better understand how a diverse group of students may inversely experience, and benefit from, mutual respect. Mutual respect allows for students to have a better understanding of their peers and teachers at the school and it is a necessary step to examine how restorative practices in the evolving educational systems is a way to strengthen relationships within the school community.

We met to talk about how implementation of restorative practice pedagogies was going and I continued to ask questions to the focus group. During the timeframe of this participatory action research, I continued meeting with the RP team in January of 2020 and obtained feedback from the teachers on how they had implemented restorative practices during Cycle 1. We also discussed restorative practices pedagogies, mainly focused on restorative circles and building relationships with students. As a team, we used this information to guide our discussion in the second cycle and to determine what pedagogies would be needed next. We reviewed the themes from Cycle 1 that had emerged from the implementation of the restorative practices and continued to focus on meeting the needs of our students. The RP team continued to discuss pedagogies used and the effectiveness of increasing equity of voice. At the first group meeting after coming off of the winter break, many key points were raised, the highlights of which include:

- PD can help students feel they would benefit from restorative practices because many students are dealing with childhood trauma that interferes with their ability to learn.
- Restorative practices address this trauma and allows students space to feel heard and connect with others, skills that precede most learning.
- PD focused on RP can reduce in school and out of school suspensions.
- Restorative practices are essential because there is systemic racism and inequality in our society.
- Restorative practices will not only help teachers build better relationships with students, but it will also keep students in the classroom and at school.
- It can help with the teacher's ability to build relationships through circles of trust.

- PD can focus on societal trauma as well as individual trauma, and restorative practices can be used to open communication among diverse groups and foster understanding.
- PD explaining restorative classroom practices is helpful in educating teachers about the importance of restorative justice and about how to implement restorative justice practices in the classroom.
- Most teachers need some guidelines and some practical examples to feel more comfortable using any unfamiliar strategies.
- If teachers are not knowledgeable of restorative classroom practices, the circles are likely to be unsuccessful and lack effectiveness.
- The impact of PD and resources are imperative to the development of the teacher as a leader of the circle.

During the meeting to focus on implementing discipline practices, I informed the RP team of the pedagogies that could work best in their classroom moving forward, these suggestions are presented in Table 10. Based on feedback from teachers they enjoyed doing restorative circles with students, because it allowed all students to have a voice and it created norms of collaboration that could be used in other classroom experiences or expectations.

As a focus group team lead, I was able to provide the purpose for each Restorative Practice pedagogy shared with teachers and some artifacts they could use as a way that it worked successfully. Then we discussed the statement of how do you, as teachers, think the students and teachers 'perceptions changed since implementing restorative practices in their everyday processes? Their responses include:

- Teachers currently understand that restorative classroom practices are beneficial to not only the students, but the educator as well as its effectiveness in building meaningful relationships in and outside the classroom.
- It seems that the students are more willing to participate in the classroom because they now see that teacher cares about them as people. I have noticed that the teachers become more sensitive and compassionate toward their students who come from different backgrounds than they come from.
- I think that when students engage in restorative practices, they realize that they are not alone in struggling with emotional difficulties, and teachers realize some of the “why” behind student behavior and lack of motivation.
- When evaluating how the perceptions of the involved parties have evolved overtime, I am inclined to believe that the tension that existed amongst students has dissipated. The type of relationships that exist between teacher and student has been amended. Students are more comfortable speaking with teachers when in distress or trouble and are more likely to use techniques and practices learned during restorative circles to self-calm and pacify oneself.

During this part of the PAR project the teachers transitioned to working from home as a result of the global pandemic. It was an interesting time, and we discussed the restorative practices they used during virtual classroom sessions.

The questions asked to the Restorative Practice team allowed for self-reflection of one semester of in class teaching to the second semester of at home teaching. Based on the questions, I was able to pull data and themes from their thoughts and ideas. Through these conversations, I noted connections during the continued one on one meetings, group meetings when able, and

personal memos of what they felt was important. I asked the team multiple set of questions regarding the second part of the PAR project, namely which practices they had put into place during the first cycle versus which parts they put into place during the second. These findings are highlighted in Table 11.

Restorative Circles Implementation

A restorative circle is a method that shapes and reestablishes relationships through equal opportunities to share and listen to others. These restorative circles can assist students in building ways to handle conflicts as they arise because every voice will be heard through talking sticks or circle protocols. Restorative circles are especially beneficial through teaching students how to convey their disappointment or anger in conflict in a practical form by showing respect through listening and responsive expressiveness. Restorative circles can be conducted as a response to misconduct, a corrective approach, to provide preventive aspects, or for content learning. When imminent encounters arise, restorative circles have the power to generate and reinforce proactive support systems between students that will lay the foundation for a mutually respectful and trusting classroom environment.

The findings from Cycle One indicate that staff did not initially know that much about restorative practices, but restorative circles continued to be a process to create opportunities for sharing. Some key themes arising from continued conversations about restorative practices indicate that the teachers believe it could help students with sharing their opinions, viewing others perspectives or values, improving dialogue, repairing hurt, and minimizing conflicts. During these conversations, Teacher C added that it would definitely add to fostering relationships and Teacher D stated that it would help with building relationships outside of the classroom. Teacher A stated that it is also needed to address the trauma that students experience

Table 11

Pedagogies Implemented During First and Second Cycles

Teacher	Grade Level	Experience	First Pedagogy Implemented	Second Pedagogy Implemented
Teacher A	8 th grade	Veteran	Circle	World Café
Teacher B	7 th grade	Experienced	Appreciative Listening Protocol	Circle
Teacher C	7 th grade	Veteran	Restorative chats	Circle
Teacher D	6 th grade	Beginning	Circle	Restorative chats

in their home life and Teacher B added that would help students to understand teachers do care about them. From Cycle One, the overall findings were that restorative practice were needed and became the theme which resonated throughout the other cycles. When making observational notes during Cycle One restorative circles stood out with Teacher A, Teacher B and Teacher D. Teacher C was focused on conversations, but wanted ways to build a better community in the classroom and found restorative circles to be helpful in that regard. Through observational notes and practices teachers continued to implement restorative circles to support the classroom pertaining to conflict or disagreements, but also for content as well.

During continued meetings in September and November 2020, the theme was the use of restorative circles, because Teachers believed it to better way for students to approach topics, conflict and learning. As a result, the restorative circles key findings that emerged from these meetings included that:

- restorative circles can be implemented quickly with minimal setup,
- restorative circles involve a process of classroom relationship building,
- restorative circles can cultivate shared values,
- restorative circles helped students experience joy,
- restorative circles provided an access point into discovering restorative thinking,
- restorative circles allow for every student to have a voice, and
- restorative circles created sustaining classroom friendships.

Ultimately, the feelings were that the restorative circle practices at EBA served to foster relationships among students and teachers throughout all cycles.

Through examination of the disciplinary referral data, we were able to claim discipline referrals in the classrooms at EBA decreased and allowed students and teachers to build and

restore relationships through opportunity sharing and listening protocols. At EBA, these restorative circles were introduced with students as a way to respond to misconduct or struggle through an alternate corrective approach to create positive outcomes through creative dialogue to create discussion when negative encounters arise. Through our implementation of restorative circles, it created foundational dynamics in the classroom that allowed for fewer power struggles within the classroom between peers and staff. I truly believe conducting restorative circles in any school primes students with the ability to have a time each day to have a reflective conversation, where they will be able to value all the voices in the community classroom environment. Restorative circles implementation led to fewer office referrals in the classrooms that implemented these practices, this data is examined in detail in the following sections.

The importance of this study's implementation of restorative circles is to create positive student understandings of how restorative circles can create positive outcomes. The key findings emerged that cultivating relationships through shared experiences and exploring positive outcomes incentivized staff to want to continue to implement restorative circles as a central part of our school culture. In summary, restorative circle practice implementations at EBA assisted in building healthy relationships among students and teachers. Relationships were a fundamental characteristic of teachers' involvement. The power of relationships is the key and led to discipline practices being reduced and mutual respect being created throughout the classroom community. This study pertaining to restorative circles continues to present a discrete and capable process of refining relations between students and staff. Restorative practices were able to establish at EBA more unbiased and reasonable classroom environments that helped teachers promote students' classroom relationships, voices, and mutual respect.

COVID-19 and Social Injustice

In life, sometimes things do not work out the way you had planned and drastic changes cause you to think about life differently than ever been. There was a district-wide meeting of principals where it was discussed that something called COVID-19 was coming and could affect not only our daily operations, but daily life around the world. Of course, at the time, nobody realized how this would change the way education and life existed for years to come. This drastic shift in everyone's daily life played a significant part after the March meeting.

Educators all across the world scrambled to adjust. For Pitt County schools in March of 2020, our educational journey changed and would not return to normal during this cycle of my PAR. I had created a restorative practice team and was ready to implement a community learning exchange like I had done before, with teachers, students, community in a large circle with redemptive dialogue. This was my second cycle, so I had to change some things up, which is what education is.

As staff who were a part of the restorative practices team dealt with COVID-19 and new instructional mandates on what educating students looked like, they also constantly dealt with protests on TV about the racial divide across America as it pertains to social justice. These protests, riots, and violence were in response to the unjust killings of black individuals and how it was wrong in the eyes of so many, yet others somehow justified it. As these events continued to happen, it felt like the world was burning itself. As an educator, it made me realize the absolute urgency of the need for restorative practices. It was not until May of 2020 that I was able to check in with the teachers regarding the PAR following the move from face to face to virtual learning.

All stakeholders were able to share their perspectives on the implementation of restorative practices at the school, which allowed us to determine the impact of the strategies in practice. The RP team discussed how to improve aspects of the discipline system that were not working or needed improving according to the cycle of plan, act, observe, reflect, and then make changes based on collaborative analysis (Herr & Anderson, 2015). During this time staff felt that restorative practices could still be implemented, but felt they missed out on the opportunity to continue the positive momentum due to COVID. Some themes during the May, 2020 conversations related to restorative practices in light of virtual learning and the protests were:

- Restorative practices will not only help teachers build better relationships with students, but it will also keep students in the classroom and at school.
- Professional Development explaining restorative classroom practices is helpful in educating teachers about the importance of restorative justice and about how to implement restorative justice practices in the classroom.
- Restorative practices are essential is because there is systemic racism and inequality in our society.
- PD can focus on societal trauma as well as individual trauma, and restorative practices can be used to open communication among diverse groups and foster understanding.
- Most teachers need some guidelines and some practical examples to feel more comfortable using any unfamiliar strategies.
- PD can help students feel they would benefit from restorative practices because many students are dealing with childhood trauma that interferes with their ability to learn.

- Restorative practices address this trauma and allows students space to feel heard and connect with others, skills that precede most learning.
- PD focused on RP circles can reduce in school and out of school suspensions.
- It can help with Teacher's ability to build relationships through circles of trust.
- If teachers are not knowledgeable of restorative classroom practices, the circles are likely to be unsuccessful and lack effectiveness.

In Figure 4, the RP themes are presented shown by frequency based on the teachers' views on professional development incorporation into EBA.

The themes that emerged from data collection pertaining to questions about restorative practices during COVID-19 were related to what teachers were using and what they believed worked the best during the time-frames up to COVID-19, when teachers had to pivot to online learning. The major theme is that each teacher implemented restorative practice pedagogy and focused on the two most used strategies in their classroom. Even though each teacher tried something different based on the restorative pedagogies, they all implemented restorative circles in their classroom.

Based on restorative circles being successfully applied in their classrooms, my feeling is that this is something that needs to be implemented at EBA for students to be successful with decreasing discipline infractions, but also for creating an environment conducive for learning where every student feels appreciated. This will allow for relationship building to be instituted in a way that allows for a whole school process. Teachers agreed to do school wide professional development based on the RP pedagogies. Based on these findings, restorative circles should be implemented because it allows staff to create a healthy positive way to talk about uncomfortable topics, content, and hurt as well as giving students the ability to voice their opinion one voice at a

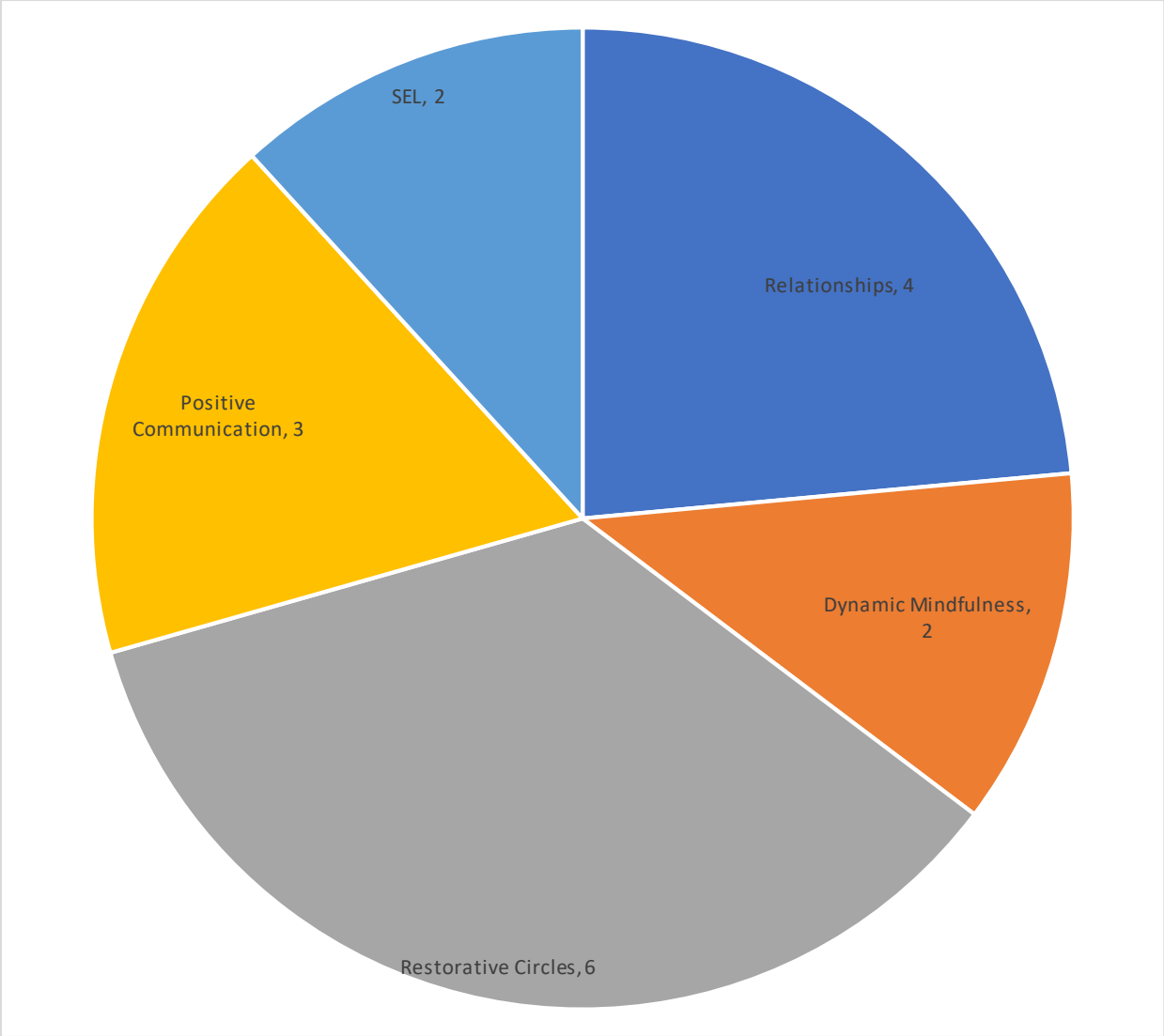


Figure 4. RP representation in PD meetings.

time through circle structures. The next restorative practice themes to emerge were behavioral interventions and how to build relationships.

I believe these two also need to be implemented because throughout this process, when observing teachers or getting their feedback from questions, it always relates back to relationship building being created in the classroom that can lead to positive behavioral interventions being created amongst the group. Also, through data collection it made me realize that professional development of restorative practices has to be created, but it needs to be differentiated based on the teachers' needs in either relationship building or behavior interventions. Throughout the data collection and conversations, I was surprised that even though there were identified themes of dynamic mindfulness and social emotional learning, that they were not higher in the priorities from staff. This showed that when implementing restorative practices for staff at EBA, restorative circles, due to their ability to galvanize a group, is what needs to be prioritized as a solution to behavior processes.

The PAR project was implemented as a unique process put in place during the new academic year starting under COVID-19 protocols and procedures. The Restorative Practice team members were reevaluating educational practices under CDC guidelines, which changed how RP could be implemented. At the beginning of the year about 35% of students were back at E.B. Aycock in the classroom. Pitt County schools allowed student the choice of alternating face to face and virtually weekly or staying virtual for the whole school year. This provided acceleration to inequalities that were already in place with student learning achievement gaps.

During online learning students were learning through the use of Chromebooks, and parents had to support students even more at home. For the shift to virtual learning, teachers who had built relationships with their students were having more engagement in their classroom

compared to others. The school year really pointed out the importance of having a growth mindset v. a fixed mindset and highlighted those restorative practices which were used in classrooms could be applied in a different format of social emotional learning through a restorative practice lens. As the school was moving to non-traditional methods, the whole school used a program called Second Step to meet students' needs during this traumatic time of families losing jobs, houses, family members, and school relationships. Students needed time and a safe space to be able to talk about how they feel about life through targeted programs.

At the start of the school year, all Pitt County schools were asked to incorporate social emotional learning and E.B. Aycock allotted thirty minutes at the end of the day for this summarizing activity. Through Second Step we were able to meet student needs. The program centered on social activities and efforts to build connections with among peers. The term social distancing implies disconnecting socially from all but our immediate family which had been difficult for students to handle, particularly for those whom social connections are so important. This program allowed a way to maintain the physical distance required by social distancing to follow COVID-19 protocols, but still foster the social and emotional connections students need with targeted lessons that involved teachers as well. Throughout this process, I maintained formal and informal discussions with Restorative Practice team.

The final cycle of participatory action research focused on the influential processes of restorative practices in the classroom and took place mainly in September, 2020. The goal was studying the effects that implementing restorative practices had on the disciplinary practices at the school, specific to their classrooms, through data collected from dialogue and disciplinary referrals. The RP team used the lessons learned from the previous cycles to plan and implement the final step, which was measuring the impact of this intervention on classroom discipline

practices. Cycle 3 started in August 2020, and we continued the application of the model by following the process of Cycle 2, which entailed teachers using restorative practices in their classroom. At the start of Cycle 3, we created summary documentation diagrams using different community school platforms for discussion as a RP team. At the end of Cycle 3, we determined conclusions by analyzing the data and determining how restorative practices could be applied at E.B. Aycock and beyond. During this conversation, we realized that targeted professional development is the key for school wide implementation, but applying targeted RP pedagogies in individual classrooms is the best way to get teachers started with implementing restorative practices.

It was also important to address the question of what role should students play in the implementation of restorative practices. This question was asked to RP team teachers during cycle three during the final meeting in September of 2020, the highlights from the responses were as follows:

- Teacher A: Since each class has different personalities and backgrounds, I invite each class period to submit topics. In an effort to support students during the school day, it is important to involve and educate all staff members in restorative practices. That way, when staff are tasked with dealing with a student who is in need of restorative practices, then we are all doing the same things to assist our students as a whole.
- Teacher B: Maybe having a meditation room or exercise room, where students can go for 10-15 minutes instead of getting a step. Or, maybe one teacher per grade level could be available during planning to help de-escalate a student who is upset. I would be up for more training like Reconnect for Resilience to be able to do this.

- Teacher C: Students should be able to suggest or lead topics in restorative practices, because having ownership will draw them in more than just teacher direction. Even if the topic does not end up being productive, the power given to the student may make a difference in his/her buy-in.
- Teacher D: It is important that students understand what they will be discussing during the restorative process. Comprehension of said topics is important as students will be sharing their position and how that topic plays a role in their personal experiences

In addition to addressing the student input for the restorative practices process, we also looked at the actual disciplinary referral numbers pre- and post-implementation. Based on the numbers from each of the participating classroom's teachers, we found that the RP greatly reduced the number of discipline referrals from those teachers. Teacher A, a veteran teacher in an 8th grade classroom, went from an average of 12 referrals per month to an average of four. Teacher B, an experienced teacher in the 7th grade, saw their numbers shift from 14 to five. Teacher C, 7th grade veteran, went from six to one, and Teacher D, the beginning teacher in the 6th grade classroom went from 13 to seven. Based on these four classrooms, restorative practices has had a positive influence.

This data shows that implementing restorative practices allows for teachers to decrease office referrals through targeted interventions that provide the student frameworks that will help them deal with conflict. Most importantly the teachers are given instructional tools to help support all students in the classroom. To see the ultimate impact of restorative practices over a larger timeframe. I was able to look at discipline data from Sept. 2019 to Nov. 2020, which can be found in Table 12.

Table 12

Discipline Data Sept. 2019 to Fall 2020

Teacher	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.
Teacher A	2	8	4	6	9	8	1	0	0
Teacher B	1	10	5	6	2	0	0	0	0
Teacher C	2	5	3	3	7	3	0	0	0
Teacher D	1	1	5	1	6	6	0	0	0

The data show that there were significant decreases in discipline referrals in the classrooms which implemented restorative practices. Teachers expressed that the themes relating to relationships, dynamic mindfulness, restorative circles, positive communication, SEL, and behavior interventions help with creating the decrease in discipline referrals. It was also indicated that the most significant restorative practice was implementing restorative circles at least two to three times a week played a positive role in creating positive relationships in the classroom.

During our final meeting, we discussed the continued implementation of restorative practices. Conversations from staff were outlined through reflective memos, the highlights of which include:

- Teacher A: When evaluating how the perceptions of the involved parties have evolved overtime, I am inclined to believe that the tension that existed amongst students has dissipated. The type of relationships that exist between teacher and student has been amended. Students are more comfortable speaking with teachers when in distress or trouble and are more likely to use techniques and practices learned during restorative circles to self-calm and pacify oneself.
- Teacher B: In order to assist students in controlling anger and behavior, I feel it is essential to build a relationship with said student. Once a relationship has been established, one may be able to understand the premise of the behavior and help accordingly. In the long term, it is beneficial to implement a calming zone for students where they may go to calm down. Calming down may require them to color, play a game, talk with a friend of their choice, and etc.

- Teacher C: I incorporate mindfulness in my classroom, and have seen a decline in classroom disruption. I would like to see a school-wide initiative that creates time for mindfulness in each class, and educates more teachers about the benefits of mindfulness. I also would like to see relationship building among staff as well as students.
- Teacher D: Students should be able to suggest or lead topics in restorative practices, because having ownership will draw them in more than just teacher direction. Even if the topic does not end up being productive, the power given to the student may make a difference in his/her buy-in.

Discipline Practices

As an RP team, we finished with a fall meeting to evaluate if implementing restorative practices rooted in the emerging themes of restorative circles and mutual respect in the classroom affected school discipline positively. This was also framed in light of the school being out due to COVID-19 and few students returning to the classrooms, with only about 35% of students returning to face-to-face education. The emerging theme from implementing discipline practices is building healthy relationships. Teachers were asked what role should students play regarding topics in restorative practices and they each had their opinions. Teachers A and C stated students should submit topics, Teacher B stressed creating a safe space, and Teacher D felt students should relate to personal experiences.

Throughout the conversations, teachers came to realize that while you can't make a child do anything, you can make them want to do better. Instead of creating an unhealthy relationship from punitive punishment, teachers must create ways to teach students ways to cope with others differences through restorative practice strategies to build healthy relationships. The reason to

stress the development of healthy relationships is because it's a growth process in how students form relationships with each other. If the teachers can embrace the execution of restorative practices in the classroom it will provide students the opportunity to become socially accountable and to think critically to problem-solve and be able to work cooperatively in their classroom.

An important theme to implement sustainable transformative practices in teaching practices, students, and leadership is that there has to be different strategies of enablement to encourage others to participate in restorative practices. Also, I have learned that inclusive school leadership has to model the restorative practices at the school level and participate in professional development to make sure staff understand the correct protocols. The use of sustainable transformative practices will lead to teachers adopting culturally responsive teaching practices to facilitate learning through restorative circles, conferences, and mediations, which deals with students stating their stories of experiences from their point of view to others, who might not otherwise understand their perspective.

My belief in focusing on implementing sustainable restorative practices is that schools can identify key teachers or staff that can become model classrooms. Also, schools can help shape their communities and student population with the correct reflective processes at the K-12 level. As a school leader I will continue to provide the school with resources to creating teacher and student change agents that will move from the classroom into the student body and larger community. Overall, I will continue to implement sustainable restorative practices at the K-12 level with professional resources and development to create change agents.

Building Healthy Relationships

Schools continue to have outdated school-based disciplinary interventions and use zero-tolerance disciplinary methods that focus on student harm through out-of-school suspensions,

expulsions, and referrals to alternative schools or programs. The data has shown that restorative practices by any teacher will decrease discipline referrals, which can lead to more students staying in school. Each teacher, by focusing on building healthy relationships, was able to decrease referrals. In individual schools and school districts there have been longstanding policies and practices that create fear and uncertainty around school security. That's why at EBA, we instituted the RP team to replace punitive disciplinary policies with restorative practices in their classrooms, which would proactively build healthy relationships to generate a sense of belonging in the classroom to address conflict.

During the discipline data timeframes from September 2019 to Fall 2020, teachers' goals to reduce disciplinary referrals and to build healthy relationships were achieved through implementation of restorative practice approaches. Teachers' continued restorative practices help create the development of considerate and sympathetic relationships in the classroom through utilizing strategies to build healthy relationship that allowed students to reflect on their conduct and learn how to make changes in actions when it is needed to keep the health of the classroom environment. Through discipline practices the RP team decided to look at the emerging theme of building healthy relationships, which was able to get teachers to focus on the implementation of restorative pedagogies. The main goal through a school approach is to:

1. pro-actively build healthy relationships with and amongst students & parents as well as with and amongst staff,
2. develop with students, agree upon, teach, and consistently reinforce classroom & school-wide behavior expectations as well as consequences
3. actively supervise, monitor, and provide consistent, and
4. implement restorative classroom management strategies.

In summary, the goal of building healthy relationships is for students to meet expectations by fulfilling satisfactory behavior and not punishing misconduct, as restorative methods continue to promote positive student shared habits and standards. As the team reflects on a whole school approach, restorative practices are used principally as an instrument to build healthy relationships in the classroom rather than create division. In considering implementing restorative practices as a whole school approach, the current teachers would serve as model teachers that can create a sense of community for others to visit. So, the practice of building healthy relationships can lead to creating an encouraging school community for all students that might have disciplinary infractions.

Practices for Implementation

During the meeting we decided on factors that could help the implementation of restorative practices for E.B. Aycock in the future and allow administration to understand and operate under purposeful protocols. As the RP team we decided on six best practices that would work in a school to implement.

Restorative Conversations

Teachers felt that this allowed students opportunities to address obstacles and focus on solutions in a classroom setting. One of the biggest goals of incorporating restorative conversations is that it allows conflict and anger to be addressed peacefully in a collaborative manner. It also allows teachers to demonstrate responsiveness and teach students about the struggle to have voice in a positive manner.

Social Contracts

This a contract that addresses the teacher and the students' concerns, options, and agreements in the community setting in the classroom. Teachers believe this agreement between

teacher and students about the values, rules, and consequences for classroom behavior is the key to restorative practices that can be implemented in any classroom or grade level.

Behavior Support Plans

Teachers create a plan with individual students that can assist in building positive behaviors or decrease a challenging or hazardous behavior. These involve student, family, and staff in the development of individual behavior support plans to meet each student's individual needs.

Check In/Check Out

Teachers know that if students select staff for daily check ins and check outs with specified goals around behavior and incentives, there will be an improvement. Also, teachers felt that it relates to multi-tier systems of support as an intervention that can deliver support to groups of students with similar behavioral needs. It is an opportunity for a student to have a mentor to work with to improve their perception of the school and staff and improve behavior.

Support Services

Teachers work with the school and community to refer support services which can include tutoring, extra-curricular activities, enrichment activities, mental health support, supplemental instruction, academic counseling, time management assistance, and other provisions. These support services can take place in the classroom or school community as a way to repair any harm that might have been caused to students academically or behaviorally.

Positive Reinforcement

Teachers, through the foundation of mutual respect, were able to be focused on inspiring and encouraging a definite behavior or task through systems of helpful retorts. Positive reinforcement in a school is a way to inspire students to practice positive behavior by providing

motivation for their respectable choices. Some examples teachers expressed were clapping, cheering, thumbs-up, special activities, technology time, games, reading, praise, or food.

Implications

Teachers

Teachers' use of restorative circles can support classroom practices to form an inclusive and caring culture, where students feel empowered when their voice is respected and appreciated. Research has shown that teachers who have built healthy relationships focused on trust and encouragement will lead to less destructive incidents in the classrooms (Zehr, 2002). Restorative circles can be introduced as a productive way to create hope, foster thoughtfulness, and build a fruitful community. Outdated punishing disciplinary procedures in schools normally has teachers being more reactive than proactive with trying to control and manage student behavior, which can lead to an authority struggle to keep control of the classroom. Restorative circles through implementation does seek to give teachers the capability to permit students support with integrated practices that lead to students having the skills needed to self-adjust without a recognized disciplinary action (Tyler, 2006). Establishing a foundation for building healthy relationships and a classroom atmosphere of mutual respect among and between the students and teacher can improve motivation on how instruction is facilitated. These foundations will also lead to better understanding of how to manage behavior in the classroom. Restorative circles are the restorative pedagogy that will be used to build mutual respect that builds healthy relationships which will enable students in the classroom to have voice, create friendships, and allows for critical stakeholders to share their stories in a safe space within the school community.

Students

Through building healthy relationships that led to students' positive experiences that encouraged growth in student-teacher relationships creating relational trust that led to student voice of belonging to the community of practice. Therefore, these characteristics have a robust impression on student's comprehension and emotional social learning performance. Studies have shown how restorative justice practices help reduction in reoffending as well as minimize perils of plausible imminent happenstances with the law (Ashley & Burke, 2009). Establishing restorative practices pertaining to mutual respect in a trusting community can build healthy relationships rooted in fairness with classroom expectations. This supports students with their understanding of how much relationships are rooted in collaboration, cooperation, and self-directive when learning. From the RP team observations, students seemed to enjoy the restorative circles because it helped to contribute to the overall sense of being empowered to share their voice and be heard. Restorative circles provide for a safe space to have discussion, which then leads to the development of trust, which further leads to mutual respect and understanding as indicated in a previous study (Boyes-Watson, 2014). Restorative circles were able to establish better student to student to teacher engagement in both the classroom and school community.

School

The adoption of restorative practices highlighted student perceptions of how connections matter through mutual respect and building healthy relationships. It also allows for restorative circles, for which the literature and the data both indicated a strong need for entire school buy-in and support if it is to be implemented as a school-based practice. Based on observation and the research discussion, it is evident that for schools to implement these practices with fidelity that

you must have sufficient support to implement restorative circles; there has to be demand for continuing professional development, funding for resources, the development of school community buy-in, and acknowledgment of the importance of the shift from outdated punitive school culture to a restorative practice approach.

This study was able to highlight the key elements of restorative practices, which led to the broad implementation of restorative circles, the results of which can be recommended as inferences for educational administrators, teachers, instructional coaches, and students. The findings from this study affirm three emergent themes for teachers, students, and schools that mutual respect, building healthy relationships, and restorative circles can be very impactful restorative practices with the appropriate professional development and collaboration. Some considerations include:

- using restorative circles as an introductory practice for healthy student and teacher relationships,
- implementing a total school approach to guarantee restorative practices are executed with dependability for impactful positive outcomes,
- as a way to create student voice, which leads to empowerment and
- to create more equitable culture environments in the school (Armour, 2013).

Restorative practices give administrators the ability to use a different approach to work with students to address any school behavior. Also, professional development opportunities have to be created and remain ongoing; this was mentioned by teachers in the study as an approach through creating the restorative pedagogies. In having a more all-inclusive approach to adopting a restorative practices disciplinary model, a school's mission and vision on discipline must also reflect a standard that support students. This progression could take from three to five years to be

implemented school wide (Karp & Breslin, 2001). Research indicates that students who are suspended are more likely to be detained a grade level, proposed to attend an alternative setting, drop out of school, and become involved in the juvenile justice system (Fabelo et al., 2011). Restorative practice interventions can help combat the schools-to-prisons pipeline by having support tools in place. In building healthy positive relationships as a basis in mutual respect through restorative practices, it will help with conflict resolution and alternative discipline through the restorative discipline design. The research clearly indicates that there are benefits that show a reduction in offenses from students in the classroom through restorative practices (Suvall, 2009). Overall, the generational impact that restorative practices can have at school to create authentic engagement show strong implications of increasing the positive outcomes for students in building healthy relationships through mutual respect engaged in restorative circles.

Barriers

During this process, there were constant barriers from COVID-19, including limited classroom sizes, social injustices, student input, and teachers' uncertainty about school and life. Throughout this process, instructional time, under the new school schedule, went from ninety minutes to seventy minutes and there were still EOG tests at the end of the year. Even with these challenges, the RP team was still able to answer questions, implement the Second Step program, build relationships, and understand the impact their approaches would have on students. The RP team had great discussions throughout the implementation processes and were able to share their stories through conversations with their students. As stated, building positive relationships, having dynamic mindfulness, implementing restorative circles, having open communication, and social emotional learning are the keys to a successful classroom that can be rooted in restorative practices.

Leadership

Throughout the PAR Cycle I understood that this process would help me gain a better understanding of what leadership can do for others. It also allowed me to view some of my staff through a different lens by listening to them and getting their responses to multiple restorative practice questions. As a leader you must first understand to be understood, which meant so much more during this time. I was able to have conversations outside of the classroom that provided a journey for everyone and allowed for the themes to shine that were the most important.

From continuous conversations and implementations processes, I understood quickly that restorative practices of dynamic mindfulness and restorative circles played a big impact in my leadership capacity. I was able to realize that leadership has to change to meet the needs of its members and that with support, the staff was able to come to a conclusion on what worked best for them during the implementation timeline. During this time, I was able to really use a growth mindset and not get fixated on what worked in the past, but rather was looking into what the future can hold.

Conclusion

This chapter described the process, emerging themes, and implications of the findings throughout the PAR Cycles. As a school leader, I continue to apply the emerging themes through the use of Second Step, community conversations, and relationships with the RP team. The data and emerging themes held implications for each of my research questions and helped to guide me in planning for the PAR Cycles.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The intent of this study was to learn about incorporating restorative practices strategies in middle school classrooms. As a middle school leader, I wanted to facilitate new ways of teaching with restorative practices that would increase mutual respect and build healthy relationships. In turn, these teacher practices would engage students and lead to improved student achievement. While student outcomes are outside the purview of this study, the documentation and analysis of my work with teachers provide compelling evidence that restorative practices provide a pathway to student development as well as teacher well-being.

This chapter begins with an analysis of the findings through the lens of the extant literature previously examined in Chapter 2. I then provided my conclusions and an updated framework for understanding how to better implement restorative practices. Next, I explore the implications of this PAR research through the lens of practice, policy, and research. I also discuss how my practice as an educator has changed through this action research. I then discuss the EdD framework used in this study and the limitations for this study. Finally, I share how this work affected my own leadership development with equity and conclude by looking toward the future on sustainable restorative practices focused through possible integration through the use of inclusive school leadership, curriculum, wrap around supports, transformative community engagement, high quality teaching, and restorative justice practices at the middle school level.

Summary of Project and Findings

The original aim of this project was to increase teachers' understanding of how to implement restorative practices through targeted professional development in order to reduce the disproportionality in student discipline at E.B. Aycock Middle School. I wanted to support teachers to help alleviate classroom disruptions by helping them build better relationships and

create opportunities to understand the different perspectives that are present. My unique personal journey of becoming a teacher helped me to understand why building relationships is vital to helping students succeed mentally and emotionally. My action research project aimed to decrease the number of OSS and ISS discipline infractions given to students through implementation of restorative classroom practices. Through qualitative methods, I collected and analyzed teacher feedback through question stems, which allowed me to determine what disciplinary infractions existed and develop a plan to implement restorative practices. Through the reflections of teachers' experiences with restorative practice implementation, we were better able to understand students' perspectives.

At the core of implementing restorative practices was a focus on equity. The setting for my project was E.B. Aycock Middle School in Pitt County, North Carolina, which is located in the heart of Greenville, NC. E.B. Aycock is a public school that serves a diverse community of students from 6th through 8th grade. It is also considered a Title I school where 100% of the students receive free breakfast and lunch. The total enrollment is around 770 students and 90 staff members. Diversity is present throughout the student population at E.B. Aycock Middle School. The majority of students at E.B. Aycock Middle School experience life as a minority and are still working to find their voice in classroom settings. These students are culturally and ethnically different, but restorative practices strategies that are implemented within the building can help create student voice.

The participants in this PAR study varied in range from their third year to twenty-one years of teaching. These participants represented multiple middle grade levels and educational experiences that exist within the school, as well as different academic teaching areas and varied extracurricular interests. Data was collected through teachers answering question stems,

classroom walkthroughs, disciplinary referral data, and frequency of restorative practices used in the classroom. The data that was collected focused on restorative practices implementations, and illustrated how office referrals were reduced compared to previous classroom strategies. Restorative circles and building healthy student-teacher relationships were the key, along with some professional development and modeling by a school leader.

Discussion

Three key findings were generated from the analysis of the data collected as detailed in the previous chapter. In this chapter I revisit each finding with an analysis using the frameworks of the extant literature in Chapter 2. I compare the finding to the specific elements in the literature that I have identified which include ‘restorative practices’ and ‘student-teacher relationship facilitated to improve classroom environments.’

Findings and the Extant Literature

The findings from this study helped support what the extant literature presented. In this section, I utilize the three areas from my literature review, restorative practices, community connection, and culturally responsive pedagogy, as a frame for my research findings. In each subsection, I explain how the findings from the PAR either support or do not support the claims from other findings.

The restorative practices that were implemented were guided on best restorative circle practices through literature findings, which supports the implementation of restorative practices in schools. Responsive instruction builds upon affirmations of knowledge of personal values, which reflects the teachers' existing knowledge of culturally responsive teaching practices, which can help lead to negotiations, reviews, and assessment methods to help the teacher assess what students already know or will know in the classrooms (Bazron et al., 2005). Teachers should be

diverse with their instructional strategy practices and integrate how to explore critical thinking skills that that involve or lead to student self-discovery through dialogue. From their implementation, restorative circles have become beneficial in schools, teaching students how to convey their disappointment or anger in a practical form by showing respect through listening and responsive expressiveness to help promote positive disciplinary practices. Restorative circles can be conducted as a response to misconduct, a corrective approach, provide preventive aspects, or for content learning that allows proactive support systems between students that will lay the foundation for a mutually respectful and trusting classroom environment which can reflect all stakeholders' diverse backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Restorative circles can also assist teachers in integrating content or curriculum to meet students' needs (Gay, 2000). Schools have to become more restoratively responsive with teachers integrating restorative circles into the learning environment and providing instruction that highlights the diversity of their students (Bazron et al., 2005).

The entire PAR process was one immense professional development that focused on teachers' preconceived knowledge of their students and then provided them with ongoing dialogue that centered on reflections and findings that respect the perspectives of the teachers. When comparing these findings to the literature, I noticed many similarities. Creating an environment where stakeholders are reciprocally respected, emergent defiance where students apply individual choice, establishing significance to participating students' perspectives and values. and creating confidence in students they can accomplish anything are the main purposes of culturally responsive pedagogies.

The role that administrators play in developing teachers to become leaders who create restorative practices in classrooms is through coaching, professional development, and by

providing other opportunities to promote school achievement (Wiggan, 2008). In this PAR project, this journey with teachers at E.B. Aycock Middle school through focus groups led to shifts in their thinking on how to implement restorative practices. The support and understanding allowed for the teachers to grow and receive feedback that allowed for positive changes in classroom practices.

Mutual Respect

A main foundation of my PAR project was that classroom restorative practices help create a better understanding of how students create meaningful relationships with the teacher and the classroom community. In addition to building focused connections with their students through dialogue, teachers were looked upon to broaden their connections and extend them to their classrooms. While comparing these findings with the literature, I discovered some similarities. In research (Ladson-Billings, 1994), teacher relationships with students are connections that extend to the classroom and beyond into the community. As discussed throughout PAR process, I found this was a common theme in the discussions and reflections with the teachers; restorative practices worked when comparing disciplinary office referrals numbers and students participating in restorative circles. Mutual respect is the foundation for relationships and teachers were able to self-reflect and acknowledge their progress on the continuum. In this PAR project, I found that the teachers shifted their mindset and approach with students after implementing restorative circles rooted in mutual respect. As noted in conversations and reflections, the teachers understood their students came from different backgrounds, but would not allow them to set low expectations for themselves.

Mutual respect integrated in the restorative practices were influential in shaping teachers' practice through relationships, but also created the understanding of how to model students to

participate in equitable practices in the classroom. The findings provide additional insight around how to manage mutual respect in restorative practice and how teachers have utilized it to help improve student teacher relationships.

Based on the findings, mutual respect in practice in the classrooms focused on reflections and frameworks to establish and manage in encouraging students. Finally, through mutual respect, teacher supports through restorative practices focused on instructional framework to guide classrooms toward mutually respectful instruction that can focus on state standards, local school cultures, and subject content.

Building Healthy Relationships

Focusing on restorative circles with mutual respect led to building healthy relationships, which allowed teachers to examine how they treat others in the classroom. Teachers continued restorative practices to help create the development of considerate, sympathetic relationships in the classroom through building healthy relationship strategies that allowed students to reflect on their conduct and learn how to make changes in actions when needed to keep the health of the classroom environment.

Restorative methods continued to promote student shared habits and standards in the classroom that led to building healthy relationships as well as creating an encouraging school community for all students, particularly those that might have disciplinary infractions that were causing misbehavior. The focus from teachers were ingrained in restorative conversations, social contracts, behavior support plans, check in/check out, support services, and positive reinforcement. Throughout this PAR project, a major goal was to reflect and implement, but also model restorative practices in the school. As part of the modeling of restorative practices, I was able to do a restorative circle at the end of the year with staff, to correlate with restorative

implementation frameworks. As both the researcher and the administrator, the journey of self-reflection and awareness was interesting from my perspective. The support and understanding from the focus team became second nature and we were able to recognize when restorative practices that led to building healthy relationships did not necessarily promote voice for all students.

Student-Teacher Relationship Facilitated to Improve Classroom Environments

The data that was collected from the PAR project was reviewed through the content of the extant literature. From that review, it was clear that there were some emerging themes that could be used in the future. First, the teachers that were self-aware were able to take an inside look within their personal experiences through questions stems before, during, and after implementing restorative practices. These reflective questions allowed teachers to reflect and determine how their experiences shaped their perceptions and ideas. Secondly, the teachers that implemented restorative practices strategies in their classroom were able to build healthy relationships with their students in the classroom community. Finally, these implementations allowed for the teachers to better learn through dialogue. While reflective questioning was greatly a part of the focus groups, by focusing on restorative circles and having students participate in them, teachers were also able to share their individual stories to make the processes run smoother through reflective modeling.

Due to the timing of the PAR project, dialogue was centered around classroom content as well as the changing dynamics of the world. As the world dynamics were changing, teachers who were implementing restorative practices were able to build healthy relationships focused on trust and encouragement, which led to harmonious classroom situations (Zehr, 2002). Restorative circles continued to create hope, thoughtfulness, and build a productive community within the

classrooms, even with the culturally challenging times around the world. Some of these events that were being broadcast through the media were highlighting the need for accessible restorative practices. Through restorative implementation, teachers created student supports with unified practices that led to students being able to adapt to the classroom needs (Tyler, 2006).

As a result of the findings, by continuing to establish restorative practices rooted in building healthy relationships and in mutual respect allowed for improved classroom behavior and environment. As E.B. Aycock middle school staff realized the importance of restorative circles, students voice in classes changed, healthy relationships were formed under positive intentions, and this allowed for the teacher to be the critical stakeholder to lead a community in the classroom built on positive intentions. This is why the teachers continued to focus the restorative practice work on the most important persons in the school, the students.

In the following section, I make connections between my findings and how they relate to one another. These practices allowed for me to develop how the three emerging themes of restorative circles, mutual respect, and building healthy relationships as well as allowing for a deeper empathetic view of the edifying framework.

Findings and the Extant Literature

An extensive literature review focused my understanding of teacher-student relationships and the PAR method permitted me to experience the process of developing relationships with the teachers which then allowed for a more expansive approach to the students in their classroom environments. This led to students building healthy relationships rooted in mutual respect that then allowed for restorative circles. The most impactful restorative practice was implementing restorative circles, which led students to experience an encouraging growth in peer and teacher relationships thus creating relational trust that led to student voice and a feeling of belonging to a

community of practice that was willing to learn in public. There are substantial steps needed in order for a teacher to develop the skills to build the healthy student relationships rooted in mutual respect created in restorative circles.

Restorative practices build the students' personal skills to help support their need to participate in self-sufficient instructional frameworks for teachers to adapt in their classrooms. The teacher at all times needs to be self-aware, then take initiative and understand if there is any unconscious biases that influence their own perspectives and actions. As noted in the reflective questions posed to teachers, they have to look back at their belief system, educational journey, and current role as a leader in their classroom. This perspective allows for teachers to self-reflect and identify any support they need to make sure all students voices are heard, regardless of students' background or ability. For equitable implementation, restorative practices can meet the needs of any student, regardless of background or ability. After a deeper understanding of restorative practices, teachers must be willing to look through a critical lens to establish frameworks to promote the development of trust (Boyes-Watson, 2014). These different viewpoints support students' ability to be accepting of others, rooted in the process of change from student voice and classroom structures. As the administrator, the first part was setting the stage through focus group meetings and building sustainable practices that can be adapted within the school. The teachers believed that it should begin with implementing the restorative circles strategy to shift mindsets in the approach to the students, based on school specific actions of development.

The teachers' goal should be to create more equitable culture environments in the school through practices to meet all students' needs no matter their background on ability (Armour, 2013). After incorporating restorative circles and teachers becoming more self-aware, the goals

should be for the school community to meet students' social, behavior, emotional, academic, and health needs to foster the creation of meaningful healthy relationship that are rooted in mutual respect.

Research Questions Revisited

The research questions for my participatory action research project was: *What do teachers currently know about the implementation of restorative classroom practices?* Teachers often enter the education field with not a lot of understanding of their students' need for social emotional support. This lack of understanding from teachers on what restorative practices are and what they can do for students' needs can affect students' ability to learn, socialize, and build a healthy relationship with the teacher. Currently, teachers often do not know about restorative practices. Therefore, the aim was to get teachers to understand that there are different approaches to meet students' unique needs and to meet the diverse classrooms needs and cultural differences that exist within the school community. The three principles of restorative practices are repairing damage, decreasing danger, and empowering the group or community (O'Brien, 2007). The goal is to make sure any biases students might experience in classrooms related to stress, anxiety and low self-esteem can be avoided. Teachers enter classrooms every year looking for ways to create classroom cultures to promote positive interactions and teachers do not want students out of their classroom for behavior concerns because they miss learning content. Teachers are expected to provide rigorous instruction, provide social-emotional support, and maintain an encouraging and cultivating atmosphere while dealing with diverse ethics, values, upbringings, and experiences. The aim for restorative practices is to make high levels of support available for both students and teachers in a controlled environment where everyone promotes students' growth.

My first sub-question was: *To what extent can professional development focus on restorative classroom practices translate into new teacher classroom disciplinary actions?*

Teachers need support through professional development on how to implement strategies that create classroom connections that are supportive and meet student's needs. During my PAR cycle, teachers continued to answer reflective questions to see the differences amongst their students to provide equitable restorative practices. Throughout this PAR cycle, I realized that teachers sometimes struggle in their classroom disciplinary actions, which has prevented teachers from building healthy relationships with students leading to disagreements, and misunderstandings with students in the classroom community. Teacher student relationships were a work in progress, but had not advanced into mutual respect. Through restorative practices embedded in restorative circles helped with the understanding process of making sure the proper steps were taken to create a positive environment. Teachers, through focus group meetings, received direct instruction on approaches that could be implemented in their classroom to help improve building healthy relationships. The dialogue during meetings allowed the opportunity for teachers to implement strategies to eliminate barriers and build up relationships. Since the teachers were able to experience restorative practices first hand, they were able to see how these strategies could be effective in the classroom to support students. Teachers embracing the execution of restorative practices in the classroom gave students the ability to create socially accountable relationships, and were then able to think critically to problem-solve to be able work cooperatively in the classroom.

My second sub-question was: *To what extent do restorative classroom practices impact school discipline data?* Restorative circle implementation strategies allowed teachers to better understand the diverse learners in their classroom to create an atmosphere conducive for learning

and following directions. In return, creating restorative practices provides an opportunity to build healthy relationships to increase support for practices like restorative circles. Restorative circles became a very relevant process to allow teacher student relationships to become more trusting as relationships were developed during the course of the PAR. Restorative practices focused on improving school discipline data through the use of restorative circles, which specifically help with the inclusion of all students, no matter their backgrounds or ability or cultures. Teachers were able to reflect on their progress with both classroom culture and disciplinary referrals throughout the school year. The impact of restorative classroom practices was discussed during focus groups, meetings, and professional development and teachers stressed how easy these restorative practice strategies were to implement with fidelity to meet students' needs.

My final sub-question was: *How does engaging in research with teachers in my school inform my ability to be a more deliberate, engaging, and effective school leader?* Through my experience, this PAR project has allowed me to have a unique perspective and opportunity to reflect, implement, and advance the progress of restorative practices from a micro-level in individual classrooms to widespread across the school. As the leader of the school, I now know the school can use and utilize restorative practices as a model to engage and influence students in a positive manner. Through this PAR cycle, I have come to realize that this needs to be applied in all areas of the school, so it has made me rethink our practices and reexamine my relationships with my teachers, students, and school community. This reexamination has created a priority to make sure relationships I have established with staff are founded in restorative practices to continue to support students and teachers succeed in their learning achievements. Significantly, through restorative practices, students' voice becomes rooted in daily classroom activities that allow for collaboration. By providing these opportunities, students were able to rise to meet the

expectations of teachers, which was showed in the office referral data. Through my leadership lens, I was able to adopt restorative practices myself that helped me understand the importance of creating a conducive environment where students feel supported while creating opportunities for teachers to grow. Also, through my leadership perspective, the use of sustainable transformative practices led to teachers adopting culturally responsive teaching practices to facilitate learning through restorative circles through students sharing their stories of experiences from their point of view to others, who might not otherwise understand their student voice.

This PAR project provides a therapeutic systemic process of getting teachers to build healthy relationships through restorative circles that allows for the classroom to operate in mutual respect centered around implementing restorative strategies. The larger impact is that through these findings it magnifies the process of getting classrooms to decrease oppositional disciplinary practices that cause undue harm to students which can then create negative views of the teacher and school. From a students' perspective, healing their harm from damaging classroom practices from their past is very important as you establish a new foundation of understanding for the students. As a result of these findings, frameworks were created allowing teachers and administrators interested in creating restorative practices to be implemented through mutual respect and building healthy relationships through focused restorative circles.

Implementing this process has had a meaningful impact within the teachers' classroom and my leadership through our self-reflections, incorporating restorative practices, and willingness to learn from each other in a gracious space of continued development to make sure the focus stays on students' improvement. In the next section, I explore the implications from this study.

Implications

The results of this PAR project are comprehensive that can lead to different implications for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. In the following sections, I explore the implications for practices and policies within the education system pertaining to disciplinary practices. After that, I present perspectives to researchers some other possible areas to supplement the research to extend this research to meet more student's needs in schools. Finally, I discuss the implications for the work on my leadership.

Implications for Practice in Schools

Implications for practice are important to consider because the research used in restorative practices can improve strategies that leaders use to lead and teachers use to teach. These implications have the potential to transform classrooms, teachers, and leaders. The three key areas for implications are teachers, students, and leadership.

Implications for Teachers

Teachers' use of restorative circles can support classroom practices to form an inclusive and caring culture, where students feel empowered when their voice is respected and appreciated. Research has shown that teachers who build healthy relationships focused on trust and encouragement will lead to fewer destructive incidents in the classrooms (Zehr, 2002). Restorative circles can be introduced as a productive way to create hope, thoughtfulness, and build a fruitful community. In schools, outdated punishing disciplinary procedures typically have teachers being more reactive than proactive with trying to control and manage student behavior, which customarily can lead to an authority struggle to keep control of the classroom. Restorative circles does seek to give teachers the capability to permit student support with integrated practices that lead to students having the skills needed to self-adjust without a recognized

disciplinary action (Tyler, 2006). As a result of these findings, establishing a foundation for building healthy relationships and a classroom atmosphere of mutual respect for student to student and student to teacher can improve motivation on how instruction is facilitated through interventions that will lead to better management of behavior in the classroom. Through staff discovery of the importance of restorative circles, the restorative pedagogy that will be used to build mutual respect that builds healthy relationships, staff have the ability to enable students in the classroom to have voice, create friendships, and allows for critical stakeholders to share their stories in a safe space within the school community.

Based on the research restorative practices, especially restorative circles should be introduced and modeled in teacher preparation programs in colleges or universities to introduce perspective future educators of strategies to create mutual respect grounded in building healthy relationships. Notwithstanding its growth, many teachers, administrators, and educators have had little exposure or no exposure to restorative practices growing up in classrooms and especially not in educator preparation programs. This can be measured by procedural processes being implemented in colleges or universities. An emphasis on restorative practices can help educators of different backgrounds or abilities to relate to student voice and understanding earlier with restorative protocols relationships matter built in structures.

Implications for Students

In the classroom environment, building healthy relationships founded on mutual respect leads students to experience an encouraging growth in the progression of peer or teacher relationships creating relational trust that led to students' sense of belonging to the community of practice. Therefore, these characteristics have a robust impression on student's comprehension and emotional social learning performance. Studies have shown how restorative justice practices

help reduce occurrences of re-offenses as well as minimize perils of plausible imminent happenstances with the law (Ashley & Burke, 2009). Restorative practices build the students' personal skills to help support their participation in self-sufficient educational instructional frameworks. This orientation supports students with the understanding of how much relationships are rooted in collaboration, cooperation, and self-directive when learning. Based on observations, students enjoyed the restorative circles because it helped to contribute to the overall sense of being empowered to share their voice by being heard. Restorative circles provide mutual respect for a safe space to have discussion that leads to the development of trust, which lead to understanding as indicated by a previous study (Boyes-Watson, 2014). Restorative circles were able to establish better student to student to teacher engagement in both the classroom and school community.

Implications for School Leadership

This approach highlighted student enablement and exposed student perceptions of restorative practices rooted in mutual respect and building healthy relationships. It also allows for restorative circles for which the literature and the data both indicated a strong need for entire school buy-in and support if implemented as a school-based practice. Based on observation and meeting notes, it is evident that for schools to implement with fidelity you must have sufficient resources to implement restorative circles and that there is a need for continuing professional development or trainings, funding for resources, the development of school community buy-in, and acknowledging the importance from outdated punitive school culture to a restorative practice approach.

As a result, this study was able to bring out the key elements of restorative practices, which led the biggest implementation of restorative circles, which can be recommended as

inferences for educational administrators, teachers, instructional coaches, and students. The findings from this study affirm the three emergent themes for teachers, students, and schools that mutual respect, building healthy relationships, and restorative circles can be very impactful restorative practices with the appropriate professional development and collaboration. Some considerations include: (a) using restorative circles as an introductory practice for healthy student and teacher relationships, (b) implementing a total school approach to guarantee restorative practices are executed with dependability for impactful positive outcomes, (c) as a way to create student voice, which leads to empowerment, and (d) to create more equitable culture environments in the school (Armour, 2013).

Restorative practices give administrators the ability to address any school limitations and structures and have support as a school-based application of restorative practices, which help guarantees how effective it works in a school wide model. Also, professional development opportunities have to be created, be ongoing, and were also mentioned by teachers in the study as an approach to create a restorative discipline design to focus on school viewpoint. In having a more all-inclusive approach to adopting a restorative practices disciplinary model, a school's mission and vision on discipline must also reflect a standard that support students. This progression could take from three to five years to be implemented school wide (Karp & Breslin, 2001). Research indicates that students who continue to be suspended are more likely to be detained a grade level, proposed to attend an alternative setting, drop out of school, and become involved in juvenile justice system (Fabelo et al., 2011). Restorative practices interventions can help combat the schools-to-prisons pipeline due to having support tools in place. In building healthy positive relationships based in mutual respect through restorative practices, it will help with any conflict resolution and alternative discipline through the restorative discipline design.

The research clearly indicates that there are benefits that show a reduction in impending offenses from students in the classroom through restorative practices (Suvall, 2009). Overall, the generational impact that restorative practices can have at school to create authentic engagement show strong implications of increasing the positive outcomes for students engaged in restorative circles in building healthy relationships through mutual respect.

Schools in all educational settings can utilize the findings of this PAR project to embrace restorative approaches to create a significant change from past outdated models of disciplinary practices that can affect school climate practices in a disproportional manner. Schools have to work on integrating restorative practices into school settings and understand that it first starts with relationships from the school, teachers, community, and leaders. Schools have to be a part of the change process to model to their community that it is important for the school to be proactive and not reactive regarding student discipline. Leaders have to lead the work for ultimate change in the school to implement restorative practices. Through this study, it became increasingly clear that I needed to be vulnerable on what I did and did not know about restorative practices and also be willing to learn, as well as willing to take risks in implementing restorative circles. This created the necessary groundwork to set the conditions for teacher transformation to use new strategies that led to improved student outcomes leading to positive classroom environments.

As a school leader implementing these restorative practices at my school informed me that these processes need to be implemented in beginning teacher support programs. The goal would be to prepare new educators in a way to create processes that lead to a better understanding of why a restorative approach matters in classroom procedures. As a school leader as you work with beginning teachers, you look for opportunities to train your staff, counselors,

fellow administrators to properly inform them about the utilization of restorative practices. This would be very relevant to how a school leader could move a school through restorative practices by professional development, classroom modeling and introducing strategies to staff in meetings. By implementing with BT support programs, you would use data on how BT's are using the practices to reduce classroom disruptions, create community and build relationships.

The important next step for schools could be to create platforms to share our teachers' and students' personal experiences, restorative implementations practice, and create collaboration efforts with the community. This process of sharing experiences could be created via platforms such as the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) to guarantee that the school will hear from the voices of the community and school stakeholders to reflect on improvement strategies. This would allow opportunities for students, parents, teachers, and leaders to create a sense of community to give opportunities for change and appreciation of others. This intentional CLE would allow for connections to be made with all stakeholders, but especially create community by building teacher-student-parent relationships. All schools should create ways to explore opportunities to hear from their school community families and to hear their perspectives about their own educational experiences, because all school experiences matter in context to their child's development. Again, CLEs in this contexts give ownership to the community and schools to honor the cultures and diversity of others that they serve in order to foster the development of trust through being proactive.

Implications for Policy

This PAR project was implemented but did not change any existing district policies, though restorative practices should be considered as a district approach to decrease discipline frameworks and disproportionate practices towards all students. School districts should think

intentionally about their responsibility to implement and then assess restorative practices that can decrease discipline. School districts should create model schools with school leaders that believe in restorative practices, along with appointing a district restorative practitioner that can work with schools to provide professional development. This includes the development of data gathering structures that keep up with district behavior incidents to accurately gauge infractions across the district, which can serve to narrow focus on restorative practices needed for the district. This would allow districts to disaggregate data by race, gender, and other student subgroups. By gathering this data, the restorative practices personnel can offer support to schools in determining which restorative approaches could be formally put in place to improve infrastructures.

The adoption of district level policies that support restorative practices send a message that revisions are needs for districts' codes of conduct to include restorative practice interventions as responses to potential misbehavior in the classrooms. Another way to create district support would be to create a restorative district, that has liaisons, social workers, and district staff tasked with creating training focused on restorative practices as well as providing K-12 schools with in-school experts that can implement restorative approaches. This also will allow for a restorative behavior design that is driven by more interventions than out of school suspensions. The goal for any district that wants to support their students would be to eliminate the zero tolerance discipline policies and create resources that support more opportunities for students, teachers, and the district to promote relationships, mutual respect, and restorative practices. Some larger national policy changes would be to make restorative practice implementation a requirement when schools have continued negative discipline reports over a certain number of years or reportable crimes that meet certain conditions. The U.S Department of

Education could support this by creating testing requirement changes that reduce the stress on teachers, students, and leaders pertaining to student achievements that leads schools to be low performing. This would allow teachers and school leaders to invest more time into restorative practices being implemented with fidelity through federal policy. Overall school districts have to put in place policy that allows schools to receive funding that put restorative practices at the forefront for their school leader and district leaders that can model this practice throughout teacher and principal preparation programs throughout the school district. As a school district a major policy could be that if your school discipline meets an OSS threshold you are required to have restorative practice approach implemented in your school for an agreed upon timeline.

Implications for Research

This study was limited because it took place in one 6-8 middle school. For a more in-depth process or analysis future research opportunities would need to include a K-5 or High School or address district infractions to create procedures. Elementary and secondary education settings should be used to see if implementation of restorative practices at a lower or higher education level changes results due to student's ages. In addition, extending the length of the research's data collection could provide some more insight of how long it could stay reliably implemented in a classroom after its initial application. This research happened over about ten to twelve months using four teachers sharing information in focus groups and through question stems, but it was limited at times due to some barriers. A study could follow-up on the time frame of how long things can stay restorative at a school as they adopt restorative approaches.

The framework provided by restorative practices prepares teacher and student relationships by creating a setting that establishes educational systems to have protocols for success. This PAR project was a qualitative study and I encourage school or district educational

leaders and future researchers to employ more qualitative approaches to data collection to provide more unbiased insight. There has been much research centered around restorative practices being implemented in school districts to help with disciplinary concerns pertaining to disproportionality of suspensions of students of color and creating a positive environment amongst others through relationships. This research highlights the impact restorative practices can have on a school, no matter the barriers. Later researchers could then examine the disciplinary data from teachers who have applied restorative practices versus those teachers that do not apply restorative practices in their classrooms. This research could take many divergent paths and could benefit teachers, school leaders, and, most importantly, students.

Some other studies to test these research questions could include a large-scale national survey sent to school districts to see how restorative circle work is impacting schools not only through discipline, but also connected to student outcome data as it pertains to school achievement. For a more qualitative study, it could be a different unit of analysis about school districts, to include principals and teachers that do not want to integrate the use of restorative practices in their schools, classrooms, or school districts, which examines their reasoning why. This would allow for a direct correlation of the reasons restorative practices are not being implemented, and could lead to professional development training and actionable steps for national implementation of restorative practices.

Implications for Practice

Different areas of implications reverberate for school leaders, particularly school leaders who are faced with decreasing school disciplinary practices at their schools. To create restorative practices a school would have to implement focus groups and make time for teachers to collaborate on commonality of the restorative approaches to be implemented in the classroom.

Also, school leaders would need to create professional development space for self-reflection opportunities to lead to respectful communication allowing individuals and schools to create supported activities. Another area that could support school leaders is by establishing a school culture that is conducive for the understanding of restorative practices.

This essentially is for leaders to evaluate how the combination of restorative practices perspectives and philosophies can affect school policies, which can change belief systems on the implementation of restorative practices. Finally, this PAR project can model the way school leaders can accumulate and examine data to make conclusions to advance their schools. School leaders based on this PAR project should be seeking out stakeholders to hear their voices and working to become active listeners on how a restorative practice approach can create buy in at their school and district. Stakeholders' power of speech can become very influential to others understanding of a restorative practice that can be experienced in the future and this process will allow school leaders to make adjustments as needed. During my experience, this has been the most useful way of building restorative practice implementation support.

Summary

This PAR study provided numerous inferences for practice, policy, and research for school leaders through teachers recognizing that students need support to understand the changing dynamics of schools. School leaders and teachers should take an insightful method through reflection about how targeted essential effective restorative practices supports all in classroom settings. In the next section, I explore how this PAR project has influenced my servant leadership practices.

My Leadership Development

Throughout the PAR Cycle I understood that this process would help me gain a better understanding of what leadership can do for others. It also allowed me to view some of my staff in a different light by listening to them and getting their responses to multiple restorative practice questions. As a leader you must first understand to be understood, this viewpoint meant so much during this time. I was able to have conversations outside of the classroom that provided a journey for everyone and allowed for the themes to shine that were the most important.

From constant conversations and observing the implementations, I was able to gain an understanding that my staff enjoy dynamic mindfulness and restorative circles. As documented in memos I was able to realize that leadership has to change to meet the needs of its members and that staff was able to come to a conclusion on what worked best for them during the research timeline. During this time, I was able to apply a growth mindset and not get fixated on what worked in the past, rather looking into what the future can hold, such as the implementation of Second Step program to help all students.

As a result of this PAR project and the recurring conversations held throughout this process, I view myself always reflecting on what I have learned or talked about with teachers. The opportunity during this process to look deeper inside myself allowed me to view some responses from the teachers as learning experiences. As you talk with teachers about the restorative practices, it does allow you to reflect on your approach as a school leader to make sure that you give the opportunity for all staff to learn about restorative practices and what it can do for their classroom. As a leader, I needed this PAR project for my school and for me to make sure that I was aware of the restorative practices teachers felt were most beneficial.

Since becoming an active participant in implementing restorative practices at the school, I plan to advocate more for restorative approaches to make sure inclusion of equity is across all domains. I plan to seek help from district leaders to empower them to address main concerns, because I believe as a school leader, I am the best advocate for the diverse levels of teachers we have. The consistent conversations and dialogue with the school community were invaluable to get feedback about the challenges of implementation.

Finally, educational systems have to find ways to stop the disproportionality of school suspensions pertaining to any subgroup. The purpose is for restorative practices to be introduced into schools to mitigate the discrepancy of discipline trends. Schools are adopting restorative practices because they have prevented student misbehavior through improving school climate and strengthening student-teacher relationships. As the school leader, it provided me a larger viewpoint than others, because the PAR project had me observe teachers, reflect with them through questions, and we were able to build an appreciation of our own backgrounds and abilities. Teachers were able to overcome their own biases, boundaries, and obstacles which allowed for the researcher and participants to share the joys, fears, concerns, and misunderstandings about restorative practice implementations for this powerful PAR project.

Conclusion

The intention of this PAR project was to implement sustainable restorative practice strategies that teachers can use in everyday classroom situations to promote a positive atmosphere. In this last section, I show the connection of my research questions to the findings. The sub-questions were (a) What do teachers currently know about the implementation of restorative classroom practices? (b) To what extent can professional development focus on restorative classroom practices translate into new teacher classroom disciplinary actions? (c) To

what extent do restorative classroom practices impact school discipline data? (d) How does engaging in research with teachers in my school inform my ability to be a more deliberate, engaging, and effective school leader?

Restorative Practices

Throughout the entire PAR process, the evidence supports the claim that implementing restorative practice strategies with teachers, with a focus on students through restorative circles, will improve relationships. Teachers expressed at the beginning of the process they did not know that much about restorative practices, but understood that a strategy needed to be put in place as a model for the school to use to improve classroom structures and disciplinary infractions. Teachers predicted some of the barriers and the misunderstandings that could come from implementing restorative practices but, from dialogue with the focus group, believed it would benefit students to focus them, especially through restorative circles to share their stories to build healthy relationships. Throughout the progression of the project, reflection activities allowed teachers to gain more confidence and the goal was to create empowerment to be able to implement restorative practices focused mainly on restorative circles. In between focus group meetings, teachers who were a part of the process continued discussions with each other and shifted processes as needed to create mutual respect amongst their classrooms. As a result, the teachers felt more secure with their student-teacher relationships at the school. Thus, the data collected from this PAR project provides enough evidence to claim that restorative practices that are detailed, thoughtful, and intentionally implemented within a school classroom can support creating building healthy relationships with the goal of mutual respect amongst teachers and students.

Restorative Circles

As part of the PAR project, teachers received professional development through focus group meetings and dialogue on how to implement restorative circle strategies to create a more cohesive classroom environment. The main goals of implementation are to build relational trust through teacher driven coaching supports during restorative circle processes. Discussions were held with teachers to hear their perceived benefits of using restorative circles, which did lead to fewer discipline referrals per teacher compared to previous semesters. Also, self-reflection was related to the exploration, installation, and move from initial implementation to full implementation, leading to sustainability for teachers' continued progress. Monitoring to create strategic planning or goal setting for the future to continue to celebrate student dialogue accomplishments as a community was also a key factor. Consequently, the data collected from this PAR project provides enough evidence to claim that restorative circle implementation with the understanding that building healthy relationships embedded with student voices will drive positive student collaboration leading to harmonious restorative practices in the classroom to decrease disciplinary infractions.

Leadership Transformation

This PAR project focused on restorative practices implementation that allowed me the opportunity to cultivate and develop my leadership capacity with my teachers during the process. Throughout this process, I continued to reflect on the focus with teachers to make sure we did implement changes if needed. During this time, I continued to motivate teachers but my leadership style pertaining to disciplinary infractions using restorative practices did transform. Throughout this process, I grew more thoughtful on why restorative practices are not used more in school districts, which made me more focused on the stories of the staff as they were sharing

on their progress with their teacher-student relationships in their classrooms. This allowed me to listen more to understand teachers' experiences, which gave me great hope that restorative practices in these teachers' classrooms can continue. Gradually, I incorporated restorative circles in staff meetings to model this process, and continued to look for more ways to create diverse opportunities in the school for both teachers and students. This PAR project allowed me to focus my approach with individuals to be more responsive and understanding of all differences at the school. Hence, the data collected from this PAR project provides enough evidence to claim that participation, contribution, and reflection in restorative practice implementation transformed my leadership as a principal.

Summary

This project was originally intended to describe how sustainable restorative practices focused on the intention of using inclusive school leadership, curriculum, wrap around supports, transformative community engagement, high quality teaching, and restorative justice practices at the middle school level. The concentration aim was improved when having dialogue with teachers led to more discussions on how teacher-student relationships could improve through restorative practices. This led to a focus on creating more discussions for the RP team which in turn led to us focusing on restorative circles in the classroom. My intentions as the researcher were seek to understand and learn to listen to teachers' processes that they felt were working. This allowed me to document and analyze this process through the experience of the teachers present at my school. By allowing myself to be vulnerable and paying attention to teacher's discussions as a team, it helped me understand the school's deficiencies in adopting new practices and how, as their principal, I can improve my modeling of restorative practices with the staff. As a result, I was able to take the findings from this PAR project and develop procedures,

systems, and structures that could implement restorative practices with teachers in any situation, no matter their knowledge, background, or experience level.

During the time of this study, I was surprised to see restorative circles become the major restorative practice chosen to be implemented in the classrooms at E.B. Aycock, both from the direct conversations and data from this research. The discussions allowed for the focus group to continue to share stories and create opportunities to learn from each other. The biggest overall change was making sure teachers were proactive in how mutual respect was done, which led to building healthy relationships. These incremental changes allowed teachers to handle students more confidently to reduce disciplinary infractions, which then became a more intrinsic focus for the whole teacher team. Teachers were allowed to do a journey line through their educational purpose, which allowed them to know their story and how their story can relate to their current students. This understanding allowed the teachers to better appreciate what the students were able to bring to the classroom. Throughout this study, the goal became to see how restorative practices could decrease disciplinary infractions in the classroom, which would lead to fewer office referrals. In order to create this integral change in the school, buy-in from the stakeholders was important, as well as the understanding that the buy-in was embedded in trust and understanding necessary in order for the school to make change. By listening to others and responding effectively to teachers, I was able to grow as a leader. During this time, it became my role then responsibility to gather the thoughts of others and reflect on how restorative practices were affecting students and staff.

Purposely, this project started by trying to create sustainable restorative practices focused on teachers at the school creating a model restorative practice approach to support students in forming positive teacher student relationships. Through building healthy relationships, it allowed

teachers to continue to support students through creating mutual respect, where everyone's voice was heard. This project goal for students was to meet expectations by fulfilling satisfactory behavior standards through restorative practices and not punishing misconduct. By the end of this project, the school use of restorative practices can be implemented in every educational setting and organization that is looking ways to create a positive atmosphere, no matter the age group. The main takeaway I learned, especially from restorative circles, is that voices matter and are important to any educational setting to maximize individual strengths. As a school leader I have to continue to recognize all stakeholders' voices as I continue on my leadership journey to create safe spaces. Lastly, I learned from this PAR project that building healthy relationships integrated through mutual respect is the decisive factor which can take a school from good to great when impacting students' futures.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: Darryl Thomas
CC: Matthew Militello
Date: 1/22/2020
Re: UMCIRB 19-002695
RESTORATIVE PRACTICE

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 1/22/2020. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 2B.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Adult Consent Forms.docx(0.02)	Consent Forms
APPENDIX D INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.docx(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
D. Thomas Proposal DefenseM.pptx(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Interview Questions.docx(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions

For research studies where a waiver of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(2)(ii) has been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: ADULT CONSENT FORM

East Carolina

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

University

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in Research

That Has No More Than Minimal Risk



Title of Research Study: RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN A K-12 SCHOOL

Principal Investigator: Darryl Thomas Jr under the guidance of Dr. Matthew Militello

Dr. Militello: Institution, Department or Division: College of Education

Address: 220 Ragsdale, ECU, Greenville, NC 27858

Telephone #: (919) 518.4008

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this study is to create sustainable restorative practices at a K-12 school to create processes to build positive student teacher relationships and use the restorative practices to potentially utilize the approaches at a Community Learning Exchanges (CLEs) as the methodology for collaboration among this diverse set of constituents. The CLEs are information exchanges centered on a topic that directly affects all constituents. One of the goals of the project is to influence the discipline process in a school where the processes of student learning through teacher-guided reflective dialogue and co-constructed consequences and action plans to promote positive change, not as a system that prescribes specific punishments for specific infractions of school rules. Students will be dealt with equitably, as unique individuals who have

the right to dialogue with the teachers as they are lead through a reflection process that will encourage them to consider learning from what prompted the disciplinary process via agreeing on proper consequences and a plan of action for future change. This participatory action research will necessitate the participation of key stakeholders in the school to work together to help create a data-driven system that will encourage student learning above simple punishment that typically goes against the equitable treatment of others. We will go through three cycles of participatory action research. You are being asked to participate to help improve the discipline system here at E.B. Aycock Middle School to benefit student learning and moral development.

You are being invited to participate because you are either (a) an administrator at the participating middle school, (b) a teacher at the participating middle school, or (c) a parent of a student at the participating middle school.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

There are no known reasons for why you should not participate in this research study.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?

You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted at your school. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is at least one to three meetings per month for the first semester and then one to two meeting per month after that. There will be one 15 minute interview per semester over several semesters.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to participate in one or more interviews and focus groups and participate in decision making pertaining to this action research project. Interviews and focus groups will be audio/video recorded. If you want to participate in an interview but do not want to be audio recorded, the interviewer will turn off the audio recorder. If you want to participate in a focus group but do not want to be video recorded, you will be able to sit out of field of view of the video camera and still be audio recorded. Interview questions will focus on the process of articulating a discipline system that focuses on learning to promote positive change rather than punishment. Interview and focus group questions will also focus on your reflections and experiences in Community Learning Exchanges.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?

We do not know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We do not know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- The people conducting this study and professors at East Carolina University. No other person outside of the study team will have access to the study's data.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?

The information in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Consent forms and data from interviews will be maintained in a secure, locked location and will be stored for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

What if I decide I do not want to continue in this research?

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at darrylthomasjr@hotmail.com

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at phone number 252-744-2941 (days, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm). If

you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of the ORIC at 252-744-1971.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN A K-12 SCHOOL

Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to meet with me today. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this focus group interview and will limit the time to about 30 minutes.

My name is Darryl Thomas Jr. I will serve as the moderator for the interview. I am conducting research as a graduate student at East Carolina University. The interview is part of a participatory action research study to articulate a non-punitive approach to student discipline that focuses on reflective dialogue and restorative practices that produces positive change in the lives of students through positive relationships. Lessons learned from implementing the innovative evaluation model will inform how we might improve how we implement the discipline process at E.B. Aycock Middle School. The interview is part of a study to assess the extent to which Restorative Justice Practices and Community Learning Exchanges increase equity of voice within this school and, as a result, allow us to better serve this diverse community.

Disclosures:

- Your participation in the study is voluntary. It is your decision whether or not to participate and you may elect to stop participating in the interview at any time.
- The interview will be digitally recorded in order to capture a comprehensive record of our conversation. All information collected will be kept confidential. Any information collected during the session that may identify any participant will only be disclosed with

- your prior permission. A coding system will be used in the management and analysis of the focus group data with no names or school identifiers associated with any of the recorded discussion.
- The interview will be conducted using a semi-structured and informal format. Several questions will be asked about both the individual knowledge and skills gained and the organization practices used. It is our hope that everyone will contribute to the conversation.
- The interview will last approximately thirty minutes.

Interview Questions

TURN RECORDER ON AND STATE THE FOLLOWING:

“This is *Darryl Thomas Jr*, interviewing [*Participant Code*] on [*Date*] for the participatory action research study is to assess to what extent a non-punitive approach to discipline can produce positive change in the lives of students.

Individual Interview:

To begin the conversation, please introduce yourself and describe your role and involvement (if any) in implementing non-punitive system of discipline that focuses on restorative practices such as dialogue, guided reflection and the co-construction of consequences and action plans that are intended to produce positive change in the lives of students.

Question #1 – What made you agree to be a part of this process?

Question #2 – To what extent do you feel students change positively from the experience of going through Restorative Practices? Please give reasons for your ideas.

Question #3 – How do you think the process of a Restorative Practices can be improved?

Question #4 – Do you prefer a more traditional approach to discipline that requires punishment?
Why or why not?

Question #5 – How did you feel about participating in the CLE?

Question #6 – What, if anything, did you want to share but were unable to in the CLE?

