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FROM ZERO-TOLERANCE TO RESTORATIVE PRACTICES:

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FROM ZERO-TOLERANCE TO RESTORATIVE PRACTICES: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF THE TRANSITION IN POLICY AND PRACTICE

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

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In memory of my brother Bradley Alan Buckmaster.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements iv

List of Figures vi

Abstract vii

Prologue 1

Topic and Background 1

Background for the Exploration 6

Need for the Study 8

Significance of the Study 9

Procedures and Organization 13

Chapter 1: Circles and Stories 16

Chapter 2: Methodology 26

Chapter 3: Year One - Building Circles 36

Chapter 4: Year Two – Circles of Inquiry 74

Chapter 5: Year Three – New to the Circle 99

Chapter 6: The Final Circle 129

Chapter 7: Full Circle 160

References 1711

Appendix 1.A. IRB Letter 194

Appendix 1.B. Interview Protocol 195

Appendix 2. A. Appendix 2.A. Coding Structure Illustration…….200

List of Figures

Figure 1: A photo of the circle that changed me……42

Figure 2: Social Discipline Plane (Wachtel & McCold, 2001) 49

Figure 3: Social Discipline Window (Wachtel & McCold, 2001)..... 49

Figure 4: Detailed Social Discipline Window (Wachtel & McCold, 2001)..... 51

Figure 5: Social Discipline Window with Diagonal (Wachtel & McCold, 2001)..... 55

Figure 6: Compass of Shame (Wachtel, 2005)..... 60

Figure 7: Restorative Practices Continuum (Wachtel, 2005)..... 62

Abstract

This dissertation explores an educational leader's unique journey to establish a new culture for school discipline in a Midwest urban middle school. This study chronicles three years of the implementation of restorative practices. School administrators are commissioned to, above all else, consider the safety and physical well-being of the child. This mindset might compel a leader to adopt a zero-tolerance stance with students who engage in activities that threaten (or potentially threaten) this fundamental ideal. Removing such students from the school community has become common practice for many administrators. Although eliminating these students from the school environment may be a popular choice for keeping schools safe, this work explores how current policies are interrupting the moral formation of students, and thus actually making our schools less safe. The impact that exclusionary discipline can have on the community might warrant a significant reform of pupil-personnel policy and related administrative practice. A restorative orientation and related activity may give an ethical alternative to exclusionary discipline. While schools may present sound reason for using restorative practices, it has been well-documented that the implementation of these practices may be suspect (Wearmouth, Mckinney , & Glynn, 2007; Sartain, Allensworth, Porter, Mader, & Steinberg, 2015; Muschert, 2014). This narrative inquiry study will explore the three years of implementation and address issues of restorative mindset, organizational improvement science, and the lived experience of the author and other staff that experienced the transition from zero-tolerance to a restorative justice approach.

Prologue

Topic and Background

Tolerance, although embraced as an ideal in a range of social exchanges and modes of associated living, has been a dirty word in school discipline policy for many years. School must be safe. For schools to continue to strive to reach their purpose and vision, it is important for leaders to maintain a safe environment to which parents can send their children, and in which children may enter the safe haven required for academic growth. As schools across the country continue to work to increase academic rigor, there has been a significant increase in the punitive discipline issued to students for violating any number of school rules constituting enforceable infractions. In most cases, this may be an effort to safeguard academic interests, and in the long run, the interests of the school and school leaders. (Hirschfield, 2008). As a result of such thinking, zero-tolerance policies have sprouted across the landscape of schooling in the U.S.

Zero-tolerance policies are defined as school discipline policies that contain predetermined minimal punishments -- typically suspension -- for students who engage in behaviors that threaten the safety or academic progress of the student body such as fighting, defiance of authority, or possession of drugs or harmful material. The punishment is issued without consideration of the context, offender rehabilitation, or victim reconciliation, and with a consequence that is considered “severe” (Mateer, 2010). Most zero tolerance policies require that offenders be excluded from the school community for an extended period of time; in some cases, students are permanently removed. Yet, however well-intentioned these policies may be, evidence has emerged to

indicate that strict penalties may have unintended outcomes. A recent study analyzing zero-tolerance policies related to drug and alcohol infractions revealed that such policies have placed an emphasis on rule-following over the institutional goal of an educated and inclusive school community (Stamm, Frick, & Mackey, 2016). Further, these tools (policies) confine administrators to respond in a manner that exhibits equality, or evenhandedness, but do not allow for equity. Frick (2011) explains that fairness as unequal treatment of unequals, is in the best interests of the student. The first step to argue for an alternative model to zero-tolerance is to clearly articulate a need for changing the status quo.

Public schools have created an exclusionary environment for many students. In order to gain public and community support, schools have to show that they are able to do what it takes to maintain a healthy learning environment. Many communities also view school as a social networking opportunity for their child. This may urge some schools to dilute or eliminate interaction opportunities for students considered to be undesirable (Wheeler-Bell, 2017). Although there is virtually no evidence that exclusionary discipline practices have positive impacts on students or the school, schools continue to use the practice of exclusionary discipline even when policies are put into place to decrease suspensions (Baker-Smith, 2018). When these interventions fail to meet the needs of the student, the student typically continues the behavior and is eventually either forced out of school through expulsion or dropping out (McIntyre, 2013; Noltemeyer, Ward., & Mcloughlin, 2015). Students who have been excluded from the school for any amount of time are more likely to drop out (Arcia, 2006; Curran, 2016, Skiba & Peterson, 1999). It has become the status quo for public schools

to develop a “not in my backyard” mentality as it pertains to students who need extra time and attention for behavior concerns. The problem with this status quo within public education is that, while schools that force out students may feel like they are giving that student a fresh start, these students often exhibit an increase in self-destructive behavior issues as a result of being institutionally excluded (Skiba, 2014). Further, students who choose to not return to the school will continue to exhibit a lack of obligation to the community, and thus be less motivated to follow social norms and avoid causing harm. Students who are forced out of schools are more likely to engage in behaviors that cause them to serve time in prison which is a phenomenon referred to as the “school to prison pipeline” (Baroni, Day, Somers, Crosby, & Pennefather, 2016). The status quo must change.

Background of Study

Charter Schools

This study took place within a charter school system. Some schools are specifically commissioned by the state to enact change in hopes to become a guiding light for the direction of public schools at large. Charter schools have been given the authority in many settings to initiate change within the public schooling status quo (Wells, Lopez, Scott, & Holme, 1999). Charter schools have the inherent authority to issue strict zero-tolerance policies or alternative solutions. Charter schools may be authorized by agencies that are given the autonomy under charter school law. The sentiment that charter schools exist because the public school has not done their job is common within the charter school movement (Wells, Slayton, & Scott, 2002). For this reason, charter schools are often a manifestation of a failing within the public-school

setting. As the charter school movement began in the late 1980s (Frick, 1994; Lubienski, 2003; Wells, Lopez, Scott, & Holme, 1999) coinciding with this movement was a public outcry about safety in society and schools. After the shooting in Columbine High School in 1999, parents and communities started to look for alternatives for schools, especially within inner-city schools where the public perception regarding school safety was poor (Wike, 2009; Altheide, 2009; Kostinsky, Bixler, & Kettl, 2001; Addington, 2009). To reach the demands of the community, many charter schools during this time were founded with a "tough on crime" school discipline policy and philosophy.

Zero-Tolerance Discipline Policy

Zero-tolerance policies have been exposed recently to have negative effects on students being served in a variety of school settings. Many schools have noticed harmful effects of zero-tolerance policies, including higher dropout rates (Suhyun, 2007). Zero-tolerance policies typically involve stringent out of school consequences for levels of infractions, depending on their severity. Though this might seem like it would create an improved culture, students who are suspended only one time are significantly more likely to drop out of high school (Arcia, 2006; Curran, 2016, Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Schools that adopt zero-tolerance policies also see an increase in the disparity between minority and majority student suspensions. Minority students who attend schools with these exclusionary discipline practices are more likely to be suspended as compared to their white peers (Hall, 2012).

The Setting (Historically)

In 2001, the University of Oklahoma chartered a school located in the south side of Oklahoma City. The school was designed to be an alternative to the public offerings which were, at the time, experiencing multiple cases of violence, and had parents searching for alternatives. With the onset of gangs, increase in violence, and incidents of weapon possession, the school was founded on principles congruent with a zero-tolerance protocol. However, the school was also founded by visionary leaders who committed using a holistic approach to community transformation and holding students to a higher standard of responsibility and thriving (Jordan, 2010). Although the school exhibited exclusionary core values by reflecting a zero-tolerance philosophy, the institution has undergone policy changes with exclusionary practices regarding discipline interventions. Many schools throughout the United States have endeavored to make similar changes in policy and practice. Public charter schools may be authorized to exist alongside inner-city schools to help in areas where there is a community perception that regular public schools are underperforming or unsafe (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2001). Zero-tolerance policies may be implemented in such areas to ensure a safe educational environment for the student body. The vision of such public charters is also to bring restoration to the inner city. This may compel a school to keep students involved in restorative practices instead of sending them back into the community without reintegration. These two purposes may appear to conflict when school communities are developing and carrying out discipline policies such as suspension for violent behaviors. Restorative practices may be designed to work in the best interests of the student (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016; Stefkovich, 2014), despite being inharmonious with deep-rooted safety policies of the school and educators' worldview

and value system. This conflict may be of particular interest to school leaders as they consider the implication of policy that may be incongruent with the personal experience and deep-seated beliefs and worldviews of those carrying out the policy and practices. The lessons learned in US school policy literature are replete with the lesson, "you cannot mandate what matters" (Rowan, 1990; Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985; Rosenholtz, 1987; Fowler, 2009; Price, 2012). The markedly controversial nature of restorative justice practices in general, and schooling in particular, within society at large compels those who study it to pay particular attention to those who implement the practices (Daly, 2003; McCold, 2004) Understanding the operating orientations and worldviews of practitioners (including the author of this work) who are to carry out the implementation of student discipline reform is essential if restorative discipline is to take a foothold, at any scale, in schools across the country.

Background for the Exploration

The setting for this study is a charter middle school in a large city located in the Midwestern United States serving approximately 750 students who are mostly Latino/a with low socioeconomic backgrounds. The school changed physical location during the three-year journey. The location started in the middle of a south side neighborhood. The building was old and in need of renovation and repair. During the third year, the school location was moved to an old department store at an abandoned mall. The location of the new building was along a highway and no longer in the neighborhood, and the inside of the building was all new school construction. The school district is located in a relatively impoverished area of the city. The initial school location was surrounded by dilapidated and abandoned homes located in a high-crime area, especially for gang

related criminal activity, and is home to over 120 registered sex offenders within a square mile of the original school location.

The school was chartered in 2001 to be an alternative to other schools located in a regional jurisdiction of the city and founded on community and parent need for students to attend a safe school. Other schools in the area were adding surveillance, metal detectors, and police officers. Parents who knew the community and their own needs determined that it was necessary to establish a school on the idea that safety comes from building strong relationships. At this school, you will not find metal detectors, but it is considered one of the safest schools in the city.

The majority of the school population lives in the surrounding area. The school is a free public charter that accepts all applicants through a first-come, first-served waiting list. When more applicants apply for what space allows, students are selected through a lottery. The school always has many students on the waiting list. Approximately 90% of the students enrolled fall on or below the poverty level, as measured by students qualifying for free/reduced lunch. Federal guidelines qualify the school as eligible for the maximum amount of Title I grant funds. The majority of students speak Spanish at home, and many students qualify for English language development services. Many students are first-generation American citizens.

Academics at this school are competitive when compared to state test scores of other schools in the same area of the city. Although the impact of standardized state tests on student learning is controversial (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005), it provides some of the only data available to compare schools. The most recent state report card designates this school as a “C” which qualifies the school as middle-achieving school.

This score reflects student achievement scores and other factors such as attendance rate as compared to other schools in the area. While the school is competitive locally and throughout the state, it does not fare so well nationally. Students' Measure of Academic Progress (MAP test) scores reveal that most students are below national average on reading and math. This has recently prompted the school district to start a new vision for academic achievement in these categories.

The students are friendly and kind. Currently, the discipline issues at the school are typically not what might be expected at a medium-sized, urban middle school. However, this was not the case when the school was chartered through a community movement to establish a school that would be safe. During its early, formative years, the school adopted the popular zero-tolerance mindset for behaviors that were physically harmful to students, such as fighting. As the school gained stability and a positive school-wide culture, key leaders in the school district became open to restorative practices as they began to reimagine their school discipline policy. As such, this study follows school personnel through the piloting and initial implementation of restorative practices at the high school. Then, after the initial pilot in the high school, the author of this study was moved to the middle school to make the transition from a zero-tolerance policy to student discipline to a restorative approach. This study explores that journey.

Need for the Study

I have had the privilege of working with district leadership and with my staff to undergo a major undertaking in the realm of student discipline in policy and practice. I worked with a team who helped to consider the ethical and historical significance of this kind of transition. The school was highly effective in student discipline using zero-

tolerance and physical conditioning as punishment. The transition from a zero-tolerance requirement to a restorative culture revealed a plethora of considerations around restorative practices, organizational improvement science, and the human experience. The story is unique and significant. My hope is by sharing my story that it might aid other leaders as they create their own story in their journey to a more equitable and ethical approach to student discipline. I hope my story can serve as both a cautionary tale and source of inspiration for those looking to reform, decrease, or eliminate student exclusion.

Significance of the Study

Schools need to be able to meet basic human needs if they are going to be a constructive institution within society. Although one may argue that feeling safe is a necessary prerequisite for academic flourishing, (Maslow, 1943; Young, Williamson, & Egan, 2016) it may be time to look at truly protecting our students instead of maintaining appearances (Sanner & Bunderson, 2015). Schools are designed to help protect our students from health threats outside of the school; however, as school violence continues to make headlines, the concern for safety may require school leaders to face the threats that lie within the school walls. Social stability may be a transcendent goal of schools to help facilitate community transformation.

There is an irony that we find in schools in the U.S. regarding efforts to make schools a safer place for our students. The most common reaction to students who exhibit unsafe behaviors is to enact exclusionary discipline consequences through zero-tolerance policies. This, in turn, separates the students from their peers and creates a sense of isolation. We know from analyzing offenders of school violence that a feeling

of alienation and rejection is an accelerator and motivator for school violence and promotes increased violence at school (Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, & Roth, 2004; Morrison, 2006; Muschert, 2007). What we are currently doing to make our schools safe is actually making our schools less safe, according to what we know about school violent offenders. Therefore, a goal for educational leaders is to deal with conduct violations in a highly-controlled and staunchly supportive environment that does not alienate any member of the community, including both the victim and the offender. Thus, an alternative approach could be, at the very least, a useful tool to be operationalized in some capacity to make schools a safer and more stable environment for our students.

While it is hard to conceive that zero-tolerance policies are creating less safe schools directly, the effect of the policy on the moral formation of students may be more obvious. Covaleskie (2013) has argued that it is in the school where students are educated not only academically, but also morally, through the process of developing democratic virtue. Morality is developed through the internalization of norms that are constructed through exposure to community expectations (Covaleskie, 2013). It is not simply enough to know the rules and follow them because of a systematic dispersal of carrots and sticks; instead, it is important that our students internalize norms by considering the intrinsic value and rightness of an action. Of potentially greater concern is the ability of society to care for all students. For a democracy to work (or to work ethically), it is important that we have a morally conscientious population. Schools may try to achieve this by training students to "mind their manners" or be subject to discipline procedures. Alternatively, it may be beneficial for school administrators to

emphasize the concept of care by modeling compassion and understanding as a more purposeful approach to giving value to student voice and community building (Noddings, 1992). In fact, when schools enact policies that limit students' space to think about or consider their actions beyond threat of punishment, we rob our youth of a crucial opportunity for moral formation. A less paternalistic approach may serve as a hallmark for not only resolving discipline issues in school, but also helping students internalize values in such a way that protects the best of democracy and our society as a whole.

Restorative practices, by their very nature, require a choice by everyone involved. It is a choice by the victim, the offender, and the community to employ the practices. According to recent studies of discipline in practice, the educator also has a choice. Considerable documentation points to the fact that implementation challenges with restorative discipline occur consistently (Wearmouth, Mckinney, & Glynn, 2007; Muschert 2014; Sartain, Allensworth, Porter, Mader, & Steinberg, 2015). Knowing and understanding why these practices are not being utilized is significant for school leaders considering school discipline reform.

Restorative practices within public school settings have been implemented and outcomes of the approach have been studied (Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011, Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2014, Gonzalez, 2014). Positive results have been documented such as: 1) lower number of discipline events that needed to be referred to the principal, 2) fewer severe behavior disruptions, and 3) increases in standardized test scores in schools that implemented restorative practices (Sherman, 2007). However, not all school districts that have implemented restorative justice have seen continued

success, such as Chicago Public Schools, where high numbers of exclusionary discipline referrals continue to take place with an accompanying disparity affecting minority students (Sartain, Allensworth, Porter, Mader, & Steinberg, 2015). School districts, such as Chicago Public Schools, have shown positive results when supplemental practices, such as the use of a restorative justice protocol, are operationalized within the discipline policy. However, among student incidences that resulted in exclusionary discipline, restorative practices were implemented as part of the process less than twenty percent of the time (Sartain, Allensworth, Porter, Mader, & Steinberg, 2015).

The reason for the failure to use restorative practices by schools has been attributed to a lack of resources (Sartain, Allensworth, Porter, Mader, & Steinberg, 2015). Teacher leaders listed a lack of time, resources, and coordination as key elements that resulted in the low implementation of supplemental discipline action. Although schools may prioritize discipline and character development through practices such as restorative justice, funding to hire new staff, such as a restorative practice coordinator, may be hard to justify in an age of academic accountability. This lack of financial support for the more transcendent human development aspects of schooling has manifested in recent years in public education through the realignment of school counselor duties. Experts who are professionally trained to work with students in a manner that could result in students learning coping mechanisms, conflict resolution, and other necessary emotional competencies, have been diminished to working through compliance paperwork and coordinating state testing (Gysbers, 2014). It is likely going to be the challenge for a leader wanting to implement restorative practices within a

district to do so with minimal additional resources. Criticism of restorative practices persists due to the time it takes to implement. It is impossible for only a few staff members to carry out all the practices. For this reason, it is imperative that a full complement of staff including administration, counselors, and teachers be developed to carry out the philosophy and practices.

This study will document the implementation of restorative practices in an inner-city charter school. The charter school that will be studied has deep zero-tolerance roots from its inception, as well as a fundamental commitment to transform its community. Therefore, staff members, and teachers in particular, likely situate themselves differently along a range of dispositions and outlooks with varying alignment of their own views to the vision of the school. The author's journey will be documented and presented in a matter so that readers can expand the lessons learned to other contexts where appropriate to better inform a school leader on the issues of restorative justice implementation, cycles of inquiry, teacher attitudes, and worldviews.

Procedures and Organization

Circles (a restorative discipline practice that serves as an organizational metaphor for this research), and the lessons learned from them, are the common thread throughout this study. This study operationalizes the narrative inquiry approach to studying a phenomenon over time. Details of the narrative inquiry methodology will be explained in Chapter 2 (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, Zilber, 1998). The first two chapters will highlight the importance of circles, storytelling, and the narrative approach, plus the rationale behind exploring this topic with the chosen methodology. Chapter 3 will begin my story as I explore the first year of

implementation and imbed the research and scholarship behind the ethical decision to pursue restorative practices. Chapter 4 will explore my second year of implementation and also tackle the organizational improvement science and how cycles of inquiry were operationalized during this process. Chapter 5 and 6 will explore the final year of implementation and the lived experience of the author and others. Finally, Chapter 7 will be a final reflection on the three-year journey. I will use calendar notes, official student discipline documentation, recollection of restorative circles and important discourse, contracts created during restorative circles, the data from a group interview of teachers, and additional memories to create an accurate picture of the three-year implementation. During the narration, I will express not only my memory to best paint an objective view of the series of events, but I will also express my feelings, viewpoints, and underlying bias to help the reader gain a fuller understanding of my experience. By understanding my voice (and thus the author's subjectivity), it will hopefully better serve those who will be undertaking a similar initiative. This piece of work is to be interactive with the reader and the author to help create meaning that is useful in the field and to serve as a research-to-practice study (Shiver & Watson, 2005).

Summary

Restorative practices are being used around the world as leaders begin to explore more effective and ethical ways to address student discipline in the school setting (Ryan & Ruddy, 2017). This study explores a unique transition from a school that was dedicated to zero-tolerance policies into a school using restorative practices as to guide decisions about student discipline. I will attempt to tell the whole story of the initial implementation of restorative practices, the cycles of inquiry, and the human

experience. By exploring my story, the characters, the conflict, the failures, and the resolution, I hope to create a powerful knowledge base and interactive text to inform and inspire as other leaders live their own stories.

Chapter 1: Circles and Stories

Picture a family circled up in the living room while the parents tell stories of their family history. Think about a group of teenagers huddled around a campfire while an elder conjures up pictures in the youths' imaginations to express a cautionary tale. Recall the image of Native people forming a Drum Circle or a Pow Wow to exchange thoughts, values, and ideas. People have circled up to exchange ideas as long as we know, even dating back to a time before written word (Edosomwan & Peterson, 2016). A good story has power. It has the power to draw in the listener or the reader. It has the power to engage a student and guide them to consider what matters. A story can help people know what it means to live, to love, and to experience life to the fullest. Stories can cross cultural and physical boundaries and bring people together. A narrative is one perspective of a story that is told as an event or series of events as it is played out by the characters (Abbott, 2008). Stories are performed by the storyteller, but in live settings such as the circles described earlier, it is also an interactive affair from the storyteller to the story listener. The interaction between the storyteller and story listener is an important exchange that elicits thoughts, feelings, and emotions, compelling one to understand the story being told as it relates to their own story and ethical considerations. "Stories invite dialogic moments because they help group members negotiate the tension of self–other" (Black, 2008 p. 93). In this way, a story and a storytelling experience is not the same as discourse or dialogue but can still have some of the same interactive properties. African storytelling for example, is considered to be an interaction with the storyteller and the audience and typically will end with a moral or virtuous lesson (Tuwe, 2016). Throughout the world, we see examples of how

storytelling is used to not only pass along important cultural values but also resolve real conflict. Restorative practices continue to utilize this time-honored tradition of gathering in circles to tell one's story. In a restorative circle, one may move from being the storyteller of their personal experience, later to the audience as they engage in active listening (Coburn, 2011; Bhandari, 2018).

In considering the kinds of circles and storytelling that will be addressed by this study, it will be prudent to explore the history, origins, and cultural aspects that are tied to the restorative practices themselves. Many restorative justice scholars attribute the current movement (sometimes only the current movement within the United States) to the Maori tribe in New Zealand. This tribe has a long tradition of highly-controlled conferencing that involves the entire community. According to Wearmouth (2007), the conferencing has procedures that mirror some of the modern practices such as "speaking in turn, not interrupting anyone who is speaking, conferencing until the elders judge that a consensus position has been reached, and a collective responsibility to uphold the decision of the hui" (p.197). According to some, the movement for restorative practices began in the United States after American criminologists were impressed by the indigenous community's ability to work through victim-offender reconciliation programs with more productive results (Wachtel, 2004; Braithwaite, 2002). Ted Wachtel of the International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP) is often credited for taking the concept and making it applicable in the school setting. Although the Maori population may be the origin for the movement of restorative practices, the philosophy behind the restorative practices originates much earlier.

Consedine (1995) associates restorative practices with the customs and discipline behaviors of the Celts, Maori, Samoans, and other indigenous peoples. Despite being widely considered a secular movement for character development and societal transformation, the restorative principles find their groundings with many religious ideologies. The principles of Hebrew tribal law incorporate many of the principles that are embodied by the modern Maori tribe, such as an emphasis on individual and collective voice and a sense of harmony. The concept of shalom, which is a foundation of the Jewish creed, is "the vision of living in a sense of rightness with each other, with the creator, and with the environment" (Zehr, 2015 p. 12). A sense of rightness is seen throughout restorative practices as an onus for the offender and the community to find ways and create ways to make collective life together right. Braithwaite (1989) points to Arab, Greek, and Roman civilizations as setting the stage for some of the ideals of the restorative movement. Although these societies are typically characterized as historically practicing punitive justice philosophies for crimes against the state, the crime was not only considered to be an offense against the state as it is today. Instead, offenders and their families were required to settle accounts with victims to avoid any further issues of violence (Van Ness, 2013). The original canon law of the Christian church was developed to be congruent with the Roman culture and society's tribal codes of self-rule (Hamilton, 2002). However, these codes eventually evolved into the priests' laws, which were a major reversal from self-rule to a much more punitive mindset (Zehr, 1990). Considering the historical perspective of restorative practices, it can be argued that a congruency exists to study such a method through storytelling.

Storytelling is an effective and accepted way to address a topic through research. While research done through storytelling will undeniably look much different than the traditional quantitative or even more eclectic qualitative social science, it offers a personal approach to bring life and illuminate the subject being studied in a completely different way (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). While there is still work to do in creating a more rigorous theoretical base for storytelling as a method for studying education and schooling, it can be argued that it offers much more in addressing the complexities of education than traditional quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Further, it is important that a narrative study is more than just a recall of events, but that it serves as a method to study a phenomenon instead of just a story of a particular case (Gallagher, 2011). Boundaries are important for a researcher that may operate using storytelling as a legitimate method for scientific exploration and inquiry (Gallagher, 2011 & Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber., 1998). Storytelling can be powerful by bringing back the "I" pronoun, while other research may be less apt to reach to the soul or the human side of the reader (Daitute & Lightfoot, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). While storytelling is powerful, it is the responsibility of the author to remain true to the traditions of using storytelling as a method and not use it to sensationalize or exaggerate a point for political or other kinds of personal gain (Gallagher, 2011). Lyotard (1984) explains how storytelling can break through a traditional linear outlook on a scientific inquiry

> Rather than taking experience and stories as the grounds for ethnographic authority in traditional forms of research in both anthropology and education, ethnography as a storytelling method for analyzing political and cultural

> practices in ‘a field’ has brought us closer to Arendt’s much earlier notion of the consensus-resisting, more dialectical, and circling nature of storytelling. Her method, and current struggles to resist the ethnographic truth story, position storytelling not as a place at which to arrive, but as a place to begin inquiry. (Gallagher, 2011, p. 52)

In both this study and in restorative practices the story being told is a personal story that requires the listener to be mindful of a few ideas. When presenting a personal story as research, it is important to address the context which can be framed into three spheres: the intersubjective relationships, the social field, and the cultural and meta-narratives that give meaning to any life story (Zilber, Tuval-Mashiach, & Lieblich, 2008). To understand the intersubjective relationship context within a narrative, it is important to note that all dialogue and conversation happens as an interaction. Understanding the interaction helps one understand the message. So, for one to gain full awareness as it comes to the intersubjective context, I must spend time explaining the influencing factors of the character’s interactions. The character’s relationship to the author, the kind of event in which the interaction occurred, the time, and the place in which the interaction takes place are all-important in the creation of the most accurate story (Zilber, Tuval-Mashiach, & Lieblich, 2008). Next, one must understand the setting as it relates to the sociohistorical context. This was made important by social scientists seeking to deepen their understanding of the story while examining the author’s situation as it corresponds to institutional structures and historical context (Mutch, 2006). My goal is to paint the best picture for the reader to interact with the story. It may be less beneficial to understand an objective view of the sociohistorical context in

which the story occurs. Instead it might give a more accurate and useful level of context to reveal the author's understanding as it comes to how their perceived institutional context (be it either controlling or liberating) and their perceived historical influence (Zilber, Tuval-Mashiach, & Lieblich, 2008). Finally, the last sphere of context as one seeks to fully understand a personal story is cultural meta-narratives. Meta-narratives are typically less understood by the author or storyteller but comes from the reader or listeners' understanding of the overall culture of the situation where and when the story occurs. "[Metanarratives] are discovered (and reconstructed) by reading and comparing many stories and abstracting general cultural patterns (plot lines, figures' roles, moral lessons, typical scenes, etc.) or brought in by the researcher while implementing insights from the research literature" (Zilber et al., 2008 p. 1054).

Narrative analysis is an important concept for this kind of research. Narrative analysis refers to the act of the researcher to glean important insight into a story by focusing on different aspects of the narrative. Narrative analysis can frame a story by how it affects human development (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). Narrative analysis considers the human experience and how dimensions such as spatial, relational, corporeal, and temporal may influence the interaction of the author and the reader/storyteller and story listener (Knowles et al., 2009). Tools that a researcher engaging in narrative analysis may use include the use of life-story as recalled from the author, multiple interviews, narrative questions, and textual sources of narrative data (Earthy & Cronin, 2008). As most people's experience with stories, it is all about how the facts are presented that can elicit an interaction with the story itself. It may be deemed necessary that the author decides to be creative in how this analysis is

conducted. Within the field of narrative analysis, it is common practice for the author to engage in poetic logic to present data in a way that is both compelling and clear to the reader (Polkinghorne, 2008). The data collected from the narrative analysis is much different than what is expected from more traditional quantitative or qualitative social science. Not everything that can be counted or categorized matters, and not everything that matters can be counted or categorized. Narrative analysis asks the readers to consider a deeper meaning that might come from various sorts of data that are within the different spheres of context, then organized by the storyteller as they see fit (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). This exemplifies the importance of the intentionality of both the storyteller and the story listener within a narrative analysis.

To aid with this complexity and bring meaning to this kind of literature, it may be beneficial to establish categories of this research to frame meaning for both the author and the listener. The field of narrative research has four kinds of stories based on two dimensions: holistic versus categorical, and content versus form (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). The first discerning factor of narrative analysis is holistic versus categorical. This takes into account how much of the person's life story will be analyzed. Typically, when one wants to look at a particular event or a particular issue they will engage in categorical analysis and only focus on that particular part of the person's life story as it relates to that event or series of events. In contrast, the holistic approach will focus more on the person and their entire life story. This could be a choice by the researcher to decide to focus on how a particular issue, event, or series of events affected the person and their entire life story rather than focusing on the event itself. The other two considerations when framing narrative research is to look at the

difference between content and form. Narrative researchers that focus on content will be interested in the where, what, and when of the event, while researchers interested in the form will be paying attention to things like the structure of the plot, relation to time, sequencing of events, complexity, and the thoughts and feelings evoked by the story (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). This creates four different kinds of research to organize the narrative analysis. Holistic-content will focus on the entire life and be more focused on factual details, similar to reading a case study (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). The holistic-form will be looking at the life of a person and how their life's plot was carried out. This would be similar to a literary student analyzing and critiquing a book, but instead of a fictional book, it is an analysis of a life story. The categorical-content approach is also known as content analysis. This approach is a more in-depth and systematic examination into the facts of a particular aspect of a personal story. Finally, a categorical-form of analysis of storying telling "focuses on discrete stylistic or linguistic characters of defined units of the narrative" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 13).

While I will undoubtedly be a major character of the story being told, the actual story being studied could be another life story or maybe the life story of an organization for an institution. Organizational theory consists of different ways that one may analyze an organization (Jones, 2013). Organizations are a group of people that share ideals, values, and a common goal. While forms of organizational theory and analysis may attempt to look at the data or outcomes of an institution to better see the efficacy of an entity through the elimination of distractions and variables, the narrative approach to organizational theory seeks to add to the complexity and invites diverse viewpoints,

interactions, and creativity (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Czarniawska (2000) explains organizational narratives in relation to anthropology. Just like an anthropologist would consider all findings to be valuable, fieldwork including conversations that an author retells (among other things such as more concrete field documents) should be considered as important data for the narrative. By evaluating the story as it happened within the context and the interaction of the characters through dialogue (in person or via telecommunication) the researcher seeks to gain more real and genuine data than could be produced through more traditional social science approaches (Czarniawska, 2004).

Understanding one's own biases are vital for practitioners of narrative studies. Bias, in general, is a tendency, inclination, or prejudice toward or against something or someone. While other forms of research attempt to eliminate bias, narrative research seeks to understand it. For quality narrative research, the author must be forthcoming and honest about personal bias, and the reader must be open to understanding these biases as well. This kind of approach asks for the storyteller and the story listener to interact in such a way to understand the thoughts, feelings, and underlying motivations behind actions (Czarniawska, 2000; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998).

So, what makes for good storytelling? Further, what makes for quality narrative work in social science? Runyan (1984) addresses the idea of internal criteria and external criteria when evaluating narrative research. He gives the following guidelines for evaluating storytelling and narrative research:

1. Providing “insight” into the person, clarifying the previously meaningless or incomprehensible, suggesting previously unseen connections;
2. Providing a feel for the person, conveying the experience of having known or met him or her;
3. Helping us to understand the inner or subjective world of the person, how he or she thinks about their own experience, situation, problems, life;
4. Deepening our sympathy or empathy for the subject;
5. Effectively portraying the social and historical world that the person is living in;
6. Illuminating the causes (and meanings) of relevant events, experiences, and conditions; and
7. Being vivid, evocative, emotionally compelling to read. (Runyan, 1984, p. 152)

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Chapter 2: Methodology

Circling an Approach and Finding my Voice

There are many different ways to explore a phenomenon. Each way holds its strength and weaknesses. Chapter 1 explored the use of stories as it relates to restorative justice and narrative analysis. In this chapter, I will review important aspects of narrative inquiry, detail the specific methodology, and explain the rationale for using this approach to explore my experience implementing restorative practices. If the overall goal of academic research is to gain insight to practice positively, then I hope that my story can bring guidance, clarity, and inspiration to others who are also writing their own stories.

As far as stories go, this particular study will not be a holistic approach. Instead, this study would be best classified under the categorical dimension of narrative inquiry (Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R., & Zilber, 1998). However, by placing myself at the center of the implementation story, the reader must understand my background. While it is not a vital part of the story being told, my personal history may need to be understood at some level to provide context regarding why restorative justice and the associated ideals are a part of my journey. Further, understanding my life outside of a building administrator role may help the reader better understand the rationale for the narrative inquiry approach.

In a phenomenological stance, the researcher's role is to uncover important artifacts and recall accurately the story, but at the same time, to interpret and analyze the narrative in a meaningful way to the reader. It is not necessary to remove oneself

from the research, as it is impossible to work outside of bias. Instead, the point of emphasis is maintaining a sense of hermeneutic alertness (van Manen, 2016).

Hermeneutic alertness confronts the researcher's awareness of their preconceptions about the phenomenon being studied (van Manen, 2016). While the researcher is an important part of the study, the researcher is not who is being studied. Instead, the researcher is trying to get a picture of the organizational shift that the school experienced, along with the lived experience of those intimately involved, when going through the restorative implementation. The researcher must be able to take a step back to have an etic, or outsider perspective, while at the same time being explicit when the perspective is being influenced by the researcher's involvement in the reform. Being upfront about the emic, or insider perspective is very important. This kind of transparency is imperative to maintain integrity in this kind of research.

At this point, it is prudent to reveal the background to my story to provide the rationale for implementing restorative practices and to study it through narrative inquiry. School gave me hope. In elementary school, if I were to make a pros and cons list about the school, there would have been many more cons. I had terrible handwriting, I hated playing outside, and I had to wear the same clothes every day, just to name a few. But those things did not matter, because school afforded me something that I could never find at home: hope.

I always felt integrated into the school setting. I had amazing relationships with my teachers and school administration. I was never a part of the discipline process at school. I followed the rules and stayed in line. My teachers encouraged me to be the best version of myself and pushed me to pursue academics beyond high school.

Although it was not a norm in my family to pursue a university degree, my school experience gave me the latitude to not only be accepted but to acquire the scholarships necessary to pay for higher education. Beyond academics, teachers encouraged me to involve myself beyond the classroom. As a teenager, I was involved in sports, a creative problem-solving competition, and a rock band that was eventually signed to a major label. I credit my school, and the relationships built at my school, as the genesis of the profound opportunities that I was afforded as a young person. Further, I credit these relationships and experiences as a crucial part of my academic, emotional, and moral development.

While it may be easy to look at my story to boast about how my school helped inspire me to pull myself up by my bootstraps, I do not look back fondly upon the impact the work of the school had on the lives of the people I love the most: my family. I have four siblings. I was the only one who found the teachers to be a positive force in my life. My older brother Chad, who is brilliant and creative, found school to be uninspiring and was left unmotivated by the school and surrounding community. My only sister Whitney lacked the relationships necessary to be connected to the school community and found no opportunities for moral formation. My brother Luke came out of the closet and embraced his true identity in a very intolerant high school, and found the school to be unsupportive and hateful.

I would like to highlight my brother Bradley's experience as it plays a special role in my affinity to restorative practices and my aversion to zero-tolerance policies. My brother had a hard time in school. He never quite felt like he belonged. He moved many times during his high school years trying to find the right fit. He never felt like a

part of any school community. He attended the last school for only a few days. During his first week, he was approached in a bathroom and engaged in mutual combat. The fight was about how my brother wore a belt buckle. He was kicked out of school that day. He would never return to another school again. My brother subsequently started to spend time with drug dealers and gang members. In the last year of his life, as a seventeen-year-old dropout, he was tormented by gang activity, including finding his car by a pond completely burned. Shortly after his expulsion from school, my brother was found dead in his bed from a drug overdose. I believe that he was never given the chance to learn how to be a part of the community because he was consistently moving schools and was eventually banished from the school community due to a zero-tolerance discipline policy, forever losing the opportunity to gain both moral and academic formation through school.

As an adult, I knew I wanted to give back. I became a teacher, and I worked hard to ensure that my students would experience the full, rich experience of the school community. I wanted my students to experience school the way I did, and not the way my brothers and sister did. Years later, I moved into a leadership role where I am working to implement restorative justice at a school level in hopes of fully implementing the practices across the district. I aspire to help other school districts implement restorative practices as well.

Today, I am the principal of a middle school in the US Midwest. I have experience implementing restorative justice as the assistant principal of the same district's high school for three years and have three years' experience implementing it at

the middle school. This categorical narrative will focus on the three years at the middle school.

I was motivated to study restorative practices because I found myself acting outside of my personal and professional philosophy when dealing with behavior infractions. I linked my brother's death to exclusionary practices but found that I was enacting exclusionary discipline myself. I was not sure how or what to do, so I researched alternatives to suspensions and found restorative justice. The philosophical framework appealed to me, and I believed that this kind of discipline system would be in the best interests of my students.

One important practice as an insider engaged in research (Coghian, 2001) is to reflect on the study retrospectively. This helps the researcher not only document the process but also to reflect on how their personal experiences may be influencing their interpretation of the lived experience of others. The journal that is created by the researcher then becomes a "personal tale of what went on in the backstage of doing research" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 741). The analysis begins in many ways with the reflective journal. These journals help the researcher to not only consider their influence but also to look back and see things that they may have missed (Elbow, 1995). The more extensive and detailed the reflective journal is, the better it will serve the researcher in the analysis process. Researcher reflection is a continuing dialog about a phenomenon as the researcher is living it out, deliberately creating perspective and interpretation of the phenomenon, and being reflective of how the elucidation was or was not influenced by personal schema. The piece is created to provide insight and exploration of the subject. This type of work allows for an exploration of how the story

and the person fit into the institution as well as society (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). It is important for the reader to fully understand the author of the narrative; however, this is true for all the characters of the story. How each character is understood will always be influenced by the author's subjectivity (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004).

Beyond understanding my background and subjectivity, it is also important to understand the dimensions in which I am, as the storyteller, working within to convey the message. There is a metaphorical three-dimensional space in which narrative inquiry can be formed. The dimensions include incorporating interactions, continuity, and situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Working within these three dimensions allows me to express a more holistic view by which the story can be understood (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). This is a contrast to the linear view of storytelling in which the author represents the story as a simple beginning, middle, and end. One theoretical basis for narrative inquiry is the ability to explore the complexity, the vagueness, and the ambiguity that is a real aspect of the subject being studied. Narrative inquiry as a methodology of the study also works within different aspects of time. The author may choose, as is necessary, to present the story in such a way that jumps in time from past, present, and future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The narrative inquiry methodology requires the insider researcher to be both subjective and objective. There is a tension that is created within the researcher to make the account both factual and real. Factual accounts are important in narrative inquiry (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1994). One way that a researcher can increase the reliability of factual information is to have quality field notes. This allows the researcher to remain grounded in the facts of the story being presented. Pictures, official

documentation, literature, memoirs, notes, and other kinds of information allow the researcher to stay objective. While staying grounded in fact, it is also important for me to be real. A flattened version of the story does not help the reader understand the important nuances involved in a deeply complex set of interactions such as implementing a new discipline practice. The proximity of the researcher to the participants and subject matter needs to be accountable to an overall understanding of how it might influence the story by both the researcher and the reader (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This study will operationalize calendar notes, official student discipline documentation, the recollection of restorative circles and important discourse, contracts created during restorative circles, a teacher group interview, and additional memories as different forms of field notes and active investigation.

Another theoretical consideration for understanding inquiry is the quest for the "full picture" especially within the social and cognitive dimensions (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, p. 35) One example of this kind pluralistic view of stories can be found within some of the cultural influences of restorative justice as found in the literature (Braithwaite, 1998; Zehr, 2015). One strong underlying value within restorative practices is the theme of justice. Hammurabi's code, otherwise known as "An eye for an eye," has been a major influence for those who seek justice as a core value within the justice system and in a school setting. If one looks at this code within a flat, one-dimensional space, it will have a very simple meaning: if you poke someone's eye out, then your eye should be poked out. However, when looking at it from a more holistic viewpoint, the actual spirit of the code would be much different: if I cause you

to not see, then I need to make it right through being your eyes. The way this is understood is starkly different according to how the full picture is created or revealed.

To help create the full picture, as field notes and other collected data are converted to the narrative research, it must be done with some special considerations. The social significance of the subject being studied is important to convey, as it will influence the interpretation of the story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is also important the work is done with a theoretical context that is congruent with the field of study (Bradley & Nash, 2011). Another consideration that needs to be addressed is practical. There is always a limit to what can be told and what can be understood. While it may be important to add context by explaining details about the lived experience of the participants, there must be decisions made regarding what to include. While more context allows for a deeper understanding, pragmatically, it might be prudent to eliminate some less important details. It is the job of the author to be accurate, but also not forget that if the story drones on with seemly unrelated context, the work will lose value as practitioner-friendly or even scholar-friendly to move the field forward in a positive way.

Narrative inquiry is unique within the qualitative research methodologies. What makes it unique is the ability to add context to the phenomenon through the use of stories (Bradley & Nash, 2011). The story, however, must be organic for it to maintain its value. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Many dissertations are broken into predictable chapters that include a literature review, statement of the problem, results, and conclusion. However, holding to the spirit of the methodology, this dissertation will weave such elements into the story in an organic way.

Finally, when considering the narrative inquiry approach, one must consider ethics and how the story might affect others with intended or unintended consequences. One sticking point for the mythology asks the question, "Who does the story belong to?" Does the story not belong to other participants who play a part in the qualitative rendering? Who owns the right to share the dialogue between colleagues? Copyright for specifics within a person's autobiographical work has changed drastically with the influence of the Internet and the availability of sharing information (Czarniawska, 2004). While it is the right of a person to tell their own story, it may not always be ethical. Telling one's story may cause other's harm. The research needs to protect the participants from this as well as honoring the event or field in which the research is trying to influence (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This must be balanced with the researcher's responsibility to remain truthful. It is important to respect all characters in the story, to protect their privacy, and to honor their work. It is important that before the researcher begins this work they consider ethical conduct throughout the study and gain approval to write and share the narrative. For this story, all parties will remain anonymous. I will use aliases for both adults and students as it relates to the story. To protect students, I will retain the right to change details of the story that might cause someone to identify the people involved. However, while I may change some details of the story to protect students and staff, the critical elements of the story will remain.

Best practices within the narrative inquiry field of study will be operationalized to share my three-year journey of implementing restorative practice at an urban middle school. During this journey, I have maintained a scholarly interest in implementing restorative practices as a doctoral student and have obtained the necessary field notes

and participant involvement to accurately portray the account, the series of events, and the thoughts and feelings associated with this process. The field notes that will be most important will be the documentation associated with each restorative circle. The following chapters will follow each year of implementing restorative practices and will be divided into sections by the important restorative circles, including a separate chapter dedicated to teachers' accounts, that serve as symbolic interactions for the overall story.

Chapter 3: Year One - Building Circles

The Circle that Changed Me

Date: Two Years Before my Implementation Story

There was a gun in the school. I remember the call like it happened last week. We got a call from an anonymous student. “Someone has a gun,” she said, “I saw it in this kid’s backpack.” My heart raced. I remember walking down the hallway with the resource officer and completely regretting my decision to be a high school assistant principal. I just wanted to be back in my sixth-grade science class where I had spent most of my career, enjoying making students laugh and facilitating a love for science, but instead found myself walking down the hallway to potentially find a gun. I was scared. I cannot recall a specific time in my life in which I was more scared than at that moment. I remember walking into the classroom and the rest was a blur. Johnny did have a gun in his backpack. I do not know much about guns, which is strange because I grew up in a small town where shooting cans off of a fence post was a common pastime, but my mom hated guns, so I stayed away from them. I remember touching the gun and feeling the weight of it. I could not help but think about how many moms and dads depend on me to keep their children safe. If I had not received the tip from the student, what could have happened? How much damage could this small handgun have done to the lives and wellbeing of the students in my school? If there would have been shooting, what would be the impact on the school, the families, and the community? This was such an unnecessary and thoughtless act. As I held the gun in my hand, I could only think about how many precious lives could have been destroyed. Later that day, I walked out of the principal’s office and Johnny was sitting in the waiting area. As I

looked at him with anger in my eyes, I had only one thought "I hope you leave and never come back."

In the United States, zero-tolerance is a policy that mandates predetermined and severe punishment for specific offenses (Fries, 2007). The zero-tolerance movement was coined and started with the United States Congress in the 1990s. With the passage of acts such as the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act, schools were thrown into a national crime prevention movement that aimed to deter egregious behaviors (Glanzer, 2005). The rationale for zero-tolerance policies likely coincided with Congress' attempt to prevent crime through overemphasizing harsher and more damaging penalties for things that were not previously considered to be heinous crimes. The outcome of zero-tolerance policies, devised by the national agenda to be hard on crime, may be linked to an outbreak of crime in America, especially when looking at the negative impact of incarceration (Casella, 2003).

Though zero-tolerance policies were originally designed for the specific purpose of providing a clear-cut policy for weapon control at school, the policies have been expanded to reach beyond just dealing with guns at school (Glanzer, 2005). This included the development of swift and harsh punishment for students who exhibit violent behavior, which then evolved to similar policies being enacted for students who have the potential for violence which can be loosely interpreted to include an array of behaviors at school (Casella, 2003). According to research done by McMahon and Sharpe (2006), school policies around the United States are aiming to not help the student who committed the offense, nor to deter the student from committing another offense or exhibit that behavior; instead, the student becomes a message to others.

Zero-tolerance policies were likely proposed to create positive school environments. Such positivity was intended to be in the best interests of the student body of the school (Fries, 2007). Some argue the purpose of such policies was more for appearances than based on evidence that such policies are effective in modifying adolescent behavior. Instead, these policies may have been intended to pacify parent groups that had become unhappy with public education due to the media's reports of school violence (Jenkins, 2012). Further, some argue the policies were specifically designed to emphasize dominance and control in an attempt to strategically maintain the power imbalance that systematically exists within the constructs of modern society (Hamilton, 2008).

Whatever the origin of zero-tolerance policies, they may be linked to the concept of a "culture of control" (Garland, 2001). The most obvious display of the culture of control can be seen within the justice system, specifically the historical rate by which minorities are incarcerated across the country (Garland, 2001). Some refer to incarceration statistics to exemplify the disparity of equity that exists within the racial divide. As of 2007 in the United States, 6.6% (1 of 15) of African American males were incarcerated (Clear, 2007). The same year 0.9% of Hispanic males were incarcerated, and only .009% (1 of 106) white males over the age of eighteen were incarcerated (Clear, 2007). The racial disparity remains to be problematic as Sawyer & Wagner (2019) point out. "Black Americans (who) make up 40% of the incarcerated population despite representing only 13% of U.S residents" (p. 17). Beyond the implementation of zero-tolerance policies, other manifestations of the culture of control that might affect school climate as described by Garland include an increase in surveillance cameras,

metal detectors, police officers on campus, and the use of canine units and SWAT teams within the school (Garland, 2007; Kupchik, 2010). Another interesting phenomenon that has happened within our society is that media coverage has transitioned to showcasing more stories about school violence and fewer about positive aspects of the school. This falls in direct contrast to empirical studies, which indicate that school safety has been improving steadily for the past three decades, leaving schools as one of the safest places in our society (School Crime and Violence Statistics, 2010). In the 2016 of the 1,857 homicides on school-aged children in this country, 18 of the incidences occurred at school while 1,569 occurred away from school (Wang, Chen, Zhang, & Oudekerk, 2020). Despite this trend, according to recent studies, punitive and exclusionary responses to disciplinary infractions show no correlation to preventing further infractions or increasing school safety (Steinberg, 2013).

As explained in Chapter 2, I was already vehemently opposed to zero-tolerance policies due to the impact such policies had on my brother. Therefore, I began my journey as an assistant principal seeking ways to respond differently to student discipline. My first attempt to mediate harmful discipline practices was to simply build a strong relationship with students and lean on that connection to mentor students as they were dealing with their infraction. This became a complete disaster. I had no real plan for how to respond to discipline issues. I knew I wanted to avoid being a tyrant, but without a plan, I quickly became permissive.

The relationship between students and educators has been thoroughly studied and determined to be a core consideration of schooling (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Within the vast array of concepts dealing with the roles and interactions

that exist between students and school staff, it may be necessary to introduce a framework to help one understand restorative practices. When looking specifically at the custodial relationship between a student and an educator, there exists a spectrum of styles that can be explained using the harsh-liberal cycle. This cycle is the repercussion of harsh punishment that results in an exclusionary system (or corporal punishment) in which individuals are estranged from the community and, as a result, may continue to have issues with acting morally. If the system seems to be flawed due to its punitive and uncompassionate nature, then reforms may swing to promote permissiveness. Once the system becomes permissive, the transgressions are blamed on the tolerance of the discipline/court system and reforms begin to move back toward a punitive approach (Wachtel & McCold, 2001). This tendency to shift from one extreme to the other creates a repetitive and unending cycle (Wachtel & McCold, 2001). This shift within the legal/school discipline system forms individuals, including both teachers and students, who have different experiences along the punitive – permissive continuum (McCold & Wachtel, 2003). Such varying experiences among educators may also result in a multitude of diverse values as they relate to discipline practices.

From this framework, one could predict two extreme education styles that mirror two of Baumrind's (1971) parenting styles. Authoritarian educators would find themselves within a punitive worldview, holding to the belief that strict discipline will result in desired outcomes (Wentzel, 2002). These educators tend to believe that this is not only an effective approach for managing classroom discipline but also that it promotes academic achievement (Dever & Karabenick, 2011). The contrasting approach would be the permissive educator. The permissive educator allows students to

forge their understanding in hopes that self-regulation will occur, yielding a more enriched and sustainable moral formation (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989).

After the gun incident, I would feel the pendulum swing happening within me. I was completely over it: no more Mr. Nice guy. I blamed myself for the gun. I thought to myself, "If I had been more of a hard ass, then this would have never happened." As I met with my principal about how we should respond to the gun incident, I was surprised to hear him mention the word *restorative*.

Not too long before that incident, I had been at an ethics conference at the University of Oklahoma and attended a breakout session in which a researcher described a new type of discipline called "Restorative Justice." This person had studied the policies in theory but had no experience with the practice. After the conference, I had described the session to my principal with great excitement and explained that I wanted to fully pilot the idea. The ideals behind it (which I will dive into later in the chapter) aligned with exactly what I hoping to find in discipline reform. I wrote up the proposal and received permission from the district to implement this new and exciting plan for discipline. I had been thrilled about it… until the gun incident.

I wanted to completely throw the proposal away. However, my principal reminded me of all the reasons I had fought hard to be permitted to use restorative practices, and then we decided to go all in. Instead of expelling Johnny from the school, we circled up.

This was one of my first restorative circles, and it happened before I started to become interested in this work as a graduate student. As such, the only actual field artifact that I have of this circle is a picture. I took a picture of the chairs before the

restorative conference began. I never take pictures, but I knew this was a big moment. The picture shows a circle of 8 chairs sitting in the middle of the school cafeteria. Each represented a person that would attend the circle to deliberate upon the fate of this young man. Expulsion was an option that was still on the table, depending on the stakeholders' decision at the end of the circle. At the end of every restorative conference, consequences are assigned and a contract between the offender and the school is made. The decision of what is on the final contract is a group decision by the entire circle. The chairs represented me, the school principal, the district assistant superintendent, two students, a translator (for Spanish), Johnny's mom, and Johnny.



Figure 1. A photo of the circle that changed me (own photo).

I nervously opened by reading a script about how this circle would be facilitated and how we would seek a positive way to move forward together. Throughout this dissertation, I am going to highlight different aspects of restorative practices so that by the end of reading the narrative you will have a complete picture. For this circle, I would like to highlight the idea that everyone who was affected can be invited to the circle and all participants get to speak. The most memorable moment of the circle was when I asked one of the student leaders, "How did you feel when you heard about what happened?" The student broke down and started to cry. The senior explained how her little brother was in the classroom. She expressed her concern of feeling like she never wanted anyone to experience this unsafe feeling again. After the circle, I observed Johnny and the student leader. She hugged him as they ate a snack. She was outraged by this young man. I was too. But if she could forgive, then so could I.

Johnny did serve out of school suspension for some time but returned to our school. He received counseling, did a lot of community service, and worked with local law enforcement as a part of the restorative contract. Johnny ended up being an upstanding student for the rest of his time at the school. I saw him recently at a local grocery store and he thanked me for the circle. Johnny is now working for the city as a civil servant. I can't help but think…*what if we had gone the other way? What if I went with my first reaction and kicked him out?*

Research shows the way schools deal with students like Johnny can have a major impact on the student's life beyond school. Discipline policy, as stated earlier, has been linked to having a direct impact on a student's likelihood of being sentenced to prison, a phenomenon known as the school-to-prison pipeline (Baroni, et al., 2016).

Schools have always dealt with discipline issues, but the way they have reacted to behavior problems has shifted since the beginning of compulsory education in the United States. Early on, at the onset of free public education, there were few discipline issues and thus few to no discipline policies due to the fact that students who exhibited these behaviors were already excluded from the school environment. These students often went to work, which was not unusual for the time (Hyman, 1984).

As laws were enacted around the ideals of compulsory education, school-wide policies regarding discipline began to emerge (Morrissey, 2010). The policies that emerged in early schooling were a reflection of the justice system and in many ways reflected the harsh-permissive cycle. Such implementation of discipline policies caused school misbehavior to simulate and model criminal-like behavior (Hirschfield, 2008). Behavior standards that were reflected in the white middle-class worldview were propagated and privileged in the early public school setting (Noguera, 1995). One reflection of the mainstream white middle-class culture and the justice system manifested in a systematic use of corporal punishment, exclusionary discipline, and humiliation as a means to yield certain student behaviors (Hyman, 1997).

After corporal punishment became passé around 1980 due to its ineffectiveness and overly cruel outcomes, exclusionary discipline became the preferred practice for major offenses. (Losen, 2010). These policies can be linked to a reflection of the United States' historical shift to deal with criminals by punishing them as a means of deterring further transgressions and dissuading others in the community to take the same kind of action (Hyman, 1997). After a series of serious behavioral events that constituted an

overall negative public opinion of school safety, zero-tolerance policies were introduced to public education (Mateer, 2010).

Although schools in the United States are among the safest schools in the world, events such as school shootings and a focus on preventing bullying have continued to make the disciplinary policy a point of criticism in American schools (Skiba, 2000). The following interventions are common in the past twenty years for schools reacting to school violence.

1. establishing zero-tolerance policies;
2. hiring security personnel;
3. adding surveillance cameras and metal detectors;
4. adopting school uniform policies;
5. using in- and out-of-school detention, suspension, and expulsion;
6. establishing alternative school placements and programs.

Although these tactics may help public perception but there is no evidence they have been effective in maintaining a safe environment conducive to learning and social development (Skiba, 2000). The ability to accurately study the effects of current practices is limited due to the varied nature of school environments and policies; however, one can study how these trends have affected schools' ability to maintain a positive environment, consistent with violence-free learning spaces. Some argue that the implementation of these kinds of interventions only gives parents and students a false sense of security (Elliot, 1998). Recently, it has been exposed to the public that many of the exclusionary policies that are commonplace in most American schools have resulted in minority students being punished more often and with longer and more severe

exclusionary outcomes as compared with their non-minority counterparts (The Center for Civil Rights 2013). Further, studies have shown that when implemented with fidelity alternative policies can narrow the racial gap in discipline infractions (Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011).

My first circle served as a symbolic moment in which I knew there was something good, right, and praiseworthy about restorative justice beyond theory and into practice. This circle likely changed Johnny's trajectory, and it certainly changed mine. I wanted to share this kind of amazing approach to school discipline with others, and I started doing circles for other student infractions. The following year, I was honored to be appointed the principal of the district's middle school. This school had deep-seated values supporting zero-tolerance and physical punishment. Three years ago, I introduced this school to restorative practices. The following is the three-year story of this journey.

The First Circle

Date: August 7th and 8th 2017

The first circle at my new school had 45 chairs. My entire staff circled up in an old church building for a professional development session. I brought in an expert from the International Institute for Restorative Practices to train my entire staff on restorative justice. The day started with the facilitator asking teachers to consider their mindsets as related to student discipline. This introduced an underlying theory of restorative work: The Social Discipline Window. This theory, which helps one understand the goal and operational theory behind restorative justice, will be used in this study to help gain an understanding of the alignment of a "restorative mindset." The working theory helped

to frame the inquiry but was provisional in that it established a starting point in understanding the "restorative mindset." Much of my work in launching the implementation of restorative practices required a better understanding of my staff. It was very obvious that day that not everyone was on board with the idea of changing discipline practices.

It is important to note the school principal before me had done an excellent job of keeping order. This was the preferred school in the area, in large part because students were safe and well-behaved. After a long, effective run as a strict, zero-tolerance school, the new guy was changing things. That came with a lot of resistance, including eye rolls and snide comments. However, as with all reform, it first starts with educating everyone on the philosophy, theory, and rationale for the change.

The theory supporting restorative practices can be framed using the Social Discipline Window (Wachtel & McCold, 2001). This concept, which helps one understand the goal and operational philosophy behind restorative justice, may be used to gain an understanding of a "restorative mindset." As one dabbles with the idea of espousing restoration as a means to address safety concerns, it begs the question: Is tolerance essential to the process of developing a truly safe and moral community?

To understand this concept further, it may be beneficial to see the spectrum of educator practices as more than a one-dimensional, single-axis continuum. The Social Discipline Window theory offers a framework for understanding these roles and relationships further. One can frame these roles within the custodial culture of a school by examining two comprehensive continuums: control and support (Wachtel & McCold, 2001).

Control is defined as influencing an individual or situation. The amount of control that an educator has within a situation has a direct relationship to how much the educator restrains the student or influences his/her outcomes. The modern education system might refer to a requirement for uniform, controlled behavior as simply having high expectations for all students (Savory, Goodburn, & Kellas, 2012). The extent to which the expectations for each child are known will help determine where the educator lies on the control spectrum.

Support is defined by the provisions offered to an individual to aid in their ultimate flourishing and fulfillment of potential. Support is the world in which schools situate themselves. Special Education and English language development laws are all constructed around the idea of offering equitable support for students (Salvia, Ysseldyke, & Bolt, 2012). High support on this spectrum would include a significant amount of reactivity to student requirements along with authentic and appropriate responses to students' academic, social, and emotional needs (Wachtel & McCold, 2001).

Situating both axes perpendicular to one another creates a plane by which school workers can frame their custodial relationship with students (see Figure 2).

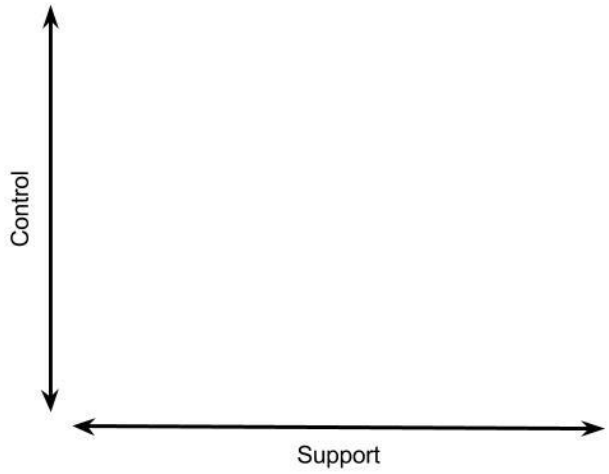

Figure 2: Social Discipline Plane (Wachtel & McCold, 2001)

The Social Discipline Window theory is based on the ability to reflect and define one's practice within these two continuums and plot that position on a plane. A simple version of the model defines each of the continuums as either high or low (Wachtel & McCold, 2001). This results in four basic quadrants of the model (see Figure 3).

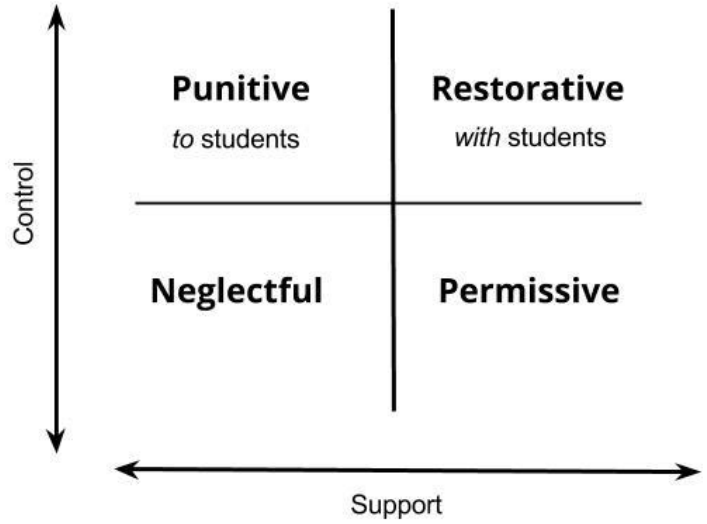

Figure 3: Social Discipline Window (Wachtel & McCold, 2001)

When situated within the top left quadrant (high control, low support), educators are strict and offer little help to students. This is where zero-tolerance policies and other punitive practices can be found. The bottom left quadrant (low control, low support) is defined by educators that have no expectations for students and, because they do not see a reason, they provide no help. This is considered to be a neglectful practice. The bottom right quadrant (low control, high support) is a permissive style. These educators tend to allow for lower quality work and behavior expectations. Finally, the top right quadrant (high control, high support) is given the moniker "restorative" (Wachtel & McCold, 2001).

One of the key theories behind restorative justice and restorative practice is a shift from the punitive quadrant of the Social Discipline Window to the restorative quadrant. To accomplish this shift, one would need to add support to the act of responding with discipline. While punitive discipline responses are being done *to* students from a place of paternalistic power, restorative responses seek to devise discipline *with* students from a place of inclusion (McCluskey, Lloyd, Stead, Kane, Kiddel, & Weedon, 2008). The movement from one quadrant to the other is foundational for those implementing restorative practices (Wachtel & McCold, 2001).

The theory behind restorative practices is in direct opposition to the arguments made earlier in favor of zero-tolerance policies. To make an argument for restorative practices as an ethical discipline policy reform, one could explore how this would be pragmatically lived out in a school.

When teachers are trained to engage in restorative practices, they are asked to be critical of their proclivities within the Social Discipline Window framework. The

message from restorative trainers is that most educators naturally align with either a punitive mindset or a permissive mindset; and it takes a conscious effort for most educators to move into the restorative quadrant (see Fig 3.). While this logic may be congruent to the theory as noted earlier, when studying the cases of restorative justice in practice there is a tendency for some educators to not value the restorative practices (Wearmouth, Mckinney, & Glynn, 2007; Sartain, Allensworth, Porter, Mader, & Steinberg, 2015; Muschert 2014).

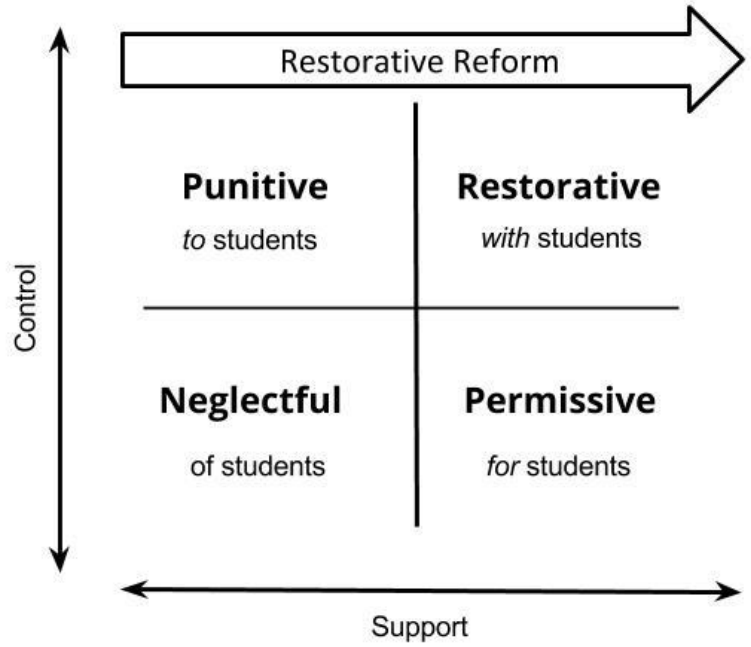

Figure 4: Detailed Social Discipline Window (Wachtel & McCold, 2001)

Though designed for my staff to learn about the philosophy behind restorative practices, this circle also served as a community circle. Community circles are designed to build relationships within a group (Wachtel & McCold, 2001). Later in the story, I will expound upon community circles as a vital aspect of restorative practices. At the end of this circle, my staff knew the theoretical basis for restorative practices, and the

next day they would know the practice, but I can say with certainty that they were not yet believers. They would need to see it.

The Fight Circle

Date: August 28th, 2017

Things seemed to be going just great during my first year as a principal. I had worked hard all summer with my leadership staff to begin the year strong. I had spent two full days with my staff learning about restorative practices. We conducted other professional development sessions in community circles to build comradery. I led a school assembly every day with all students and teachers to set a tone for the day and the year. We started the day by playing positive music and students would help share quotes that reflected the virtue of the week. The first couple of weeks went by with virtually no student discipline issues. I should have known better, but after the first two weeks of school, I remember sitting back in my chair at the end of the day on a Monday very proud of myself. I felt like I had done it. I had created an educational utopia. My leadership team had created such an incredible school culture in which students wanted to do the right thing. We had done it! Then my assistant principal rushes through my door, "We just had our first fight."

I was mad and ashamed. I was mad because now I was put in the tough position of figuring out what to do, what would be best for the school, but also what would be best for the two students. The school district had a history of taking a zero-tolerance stance against fighting. Years ago, at the time of the school's inception, there were few policies but one very important one: if you fight, you are out. Now I had to determine what was best for these two students, but I also did not want the school to appear to be

drifting toward the permissive with serious discipline issues such as fighting. I was ashamed because I thought we were better than this. I thought my expectations were clear. We had established positive school culture and built relationships to create a society as a school that wanted to love and support one another. How could this have happened? My first thought was, "What did I do wrong?"

The first thing I needed to learn to be a restorative leader is that student discipline issues are inevitable. So, what *does* constitute a good school culture? One theory that can help a leader understand a community and its members is affect theory. Understanding affect theory is important to understand how restorative practices work to help students develop socially (Wachtel, 2001). An affect is a response to a stimulus that is involuntary and happens before the opportunity for the human brain to think or develop emotion (Thompkins, 2008). An affect is an innate biological response to an interaction within the community. An affect can be positive, negative, or neutral. Once the brain has time to consider how the affect has made an impact on oneself, it is a feeling. Next, when that feeling is combined with other similar feelings, that is considered an emotion (Thompkins, 2008). Understanding feelings, emotions, and affect is a key piece for a leader to truly understand how restorative justice works to effectively manage moral development (Hansberry et al., 2017). The work of Nathanson (2008) helped me understand the inevitability of student discipline. He states there is a blueprint for mental health and human flourishing.

1) As humans, we are motivated to savor and maximize positive affect. We enjoy what feels good and do what we can to find and maintain more of it.

2) We are inherently biased to minimize negative affect.

3) The system works best when we express all of our affects.

4) Anything that increases our power to accomplish these goals is good for mental health, anything that reduces this power is bad for mental health. (p. 9)

This is an important concept to grasp as it pertains to human motivation and humans' inherent need to be in good standing within their various social surrounds. Understanding affect is important because it is something that we all experience no matter our background or emotional baggage. Even babies experience affect before having the mental capacity to understand emotion. Basch (1976) studied babies' faces to gain insight into affect theory and the correlated biological response. At the core of the concept, it is imperative to consider that it is not immoral to want to maximize positive affects; it is human nature to do so. However, how humans go about it is when morality is in question. Restorative practices teach that when you go about it in a way that hurts those around you, the act then is counterproductive because hurting others causes a negative affect (Wachtel & McCold, 2001). A person's affects (positive or negative) do not happen in isolation. The interaction that one has with others causes affects to change. Nathanson speaks to this kind of interaction and relationship as "intimacy" (2008, p. 9). The blueprint for such relationships is similar.

1) Intimacy requires the mutualization and maximization of positive affect.

2) Intimacy requires the mutualization and minimization of negative affect.

3) Central to intimacy is the requirement that we disclose our affects to each other.

4) Anything that increases our power to accomplish these three goals is good for intimacy, anything that reduces this power is bad for intimacy.

At this point in my journey, I was struggling to understand the ultimate goal of student discipline. My personal goal for school discipline was to stop students from being a distraction to the learning environment. In short, if I did a good job as a leader, all my students should stop acting out. As a teacher, I already knew what happened when your ultimate goal was to have no student discipline issues. I had already experienced the pendulum swing in my professional life, increasing punitive responses, becoming aware of the oppressive nature of the response, and moving back to being permissive. Such shifts are indicated by the blue diagonal line in the Social Discipline Window in Figure 5.

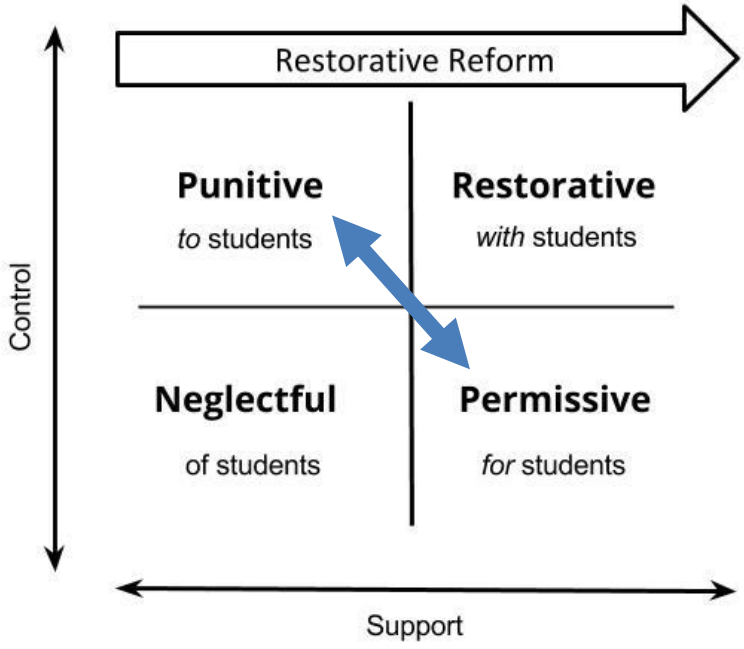

Figure 5: Social Discipline Window with Diagonal (Wachtel & McCold, 2001)

Before I explain my ultimate realization, I would like to skip ahead to the circle with the two boys who got in a fight after school. As I look back on the field notes and the discipline reports, I have tears in my eyes. My initial recommendation was to

suspend the students for a semester. I wanted to send a very clear message to the student body about violence and fighting. Despite all I knew about restorative practices, I felt like I needed the consequence to be severe. I have tears because I quickly made that decision before knowing the students, particularly Gabe. Gabe was new to the school. The other student had been with the school for two years and never had any discipline issues, so instead, I was quick to judge Gabe. After the fight, I made it clear to Gabe that I was upset, and I made him feel like I wanted him out of the school. I have tears because now I know Gabe very well, and he did not deserve to be treated that way.

Restorative circles for addressing a fight are interesting. For restorative practices to work, it is important to establish who has been harmed so the students can make amends. "Making it right" or making amends is a chief principle for restorative justice (Wachtel, 2013, p. 2). So, who is the victim of mutual combat? From my experience, there are cases in which one of the students is a victim, but much more often there is no clear victim. The only true victim is the school community. One realization that happens during the circle is that both students recognize that they worked together to make things less safe and cause their families problems. They have worked together to cause harm, so now they are being asked to work together to make things right.

All restorative circles begin by introducing everyone in the circle then allowing the offender to answer the restorative questions.

- "What happened?"
- "What were you thinking of at the time?"
- "What have you thought about since?"
- "Who has been affected by what you have done?"

- "What do you think you need to do to make things right?" (O'Connell, 2009, p. 2)

As I principal, I have never been more thankful than for these five questions. I never regret taking the time to ask these questions to the offenders. I always learn something about the students during this line of questioning, but more importantly, students learn about themselves as they reflect. I asked Gabe the questions. The first two questions are about understanding exactly what had happened. Gabe very articulately explained what had happened earlier in the day that sparked the fire later. He explained how other students had been involved to create the drama around the situation. After asking him "What were you thinking at the time?" Gabe had the opportunity to share about his home life and background. He expressed how angry he was that he had worked so hard to get out of his situation and how he thought that this school would be the fresh start he needed. Then I asked him what I consider to be the most pivotal question, "What have you thought since?" Then I saw it. He did not have to say anything at all. His face turned red. His eyes moved down and to the left. He was dealing with the most important affect when it comes to restorative practices: shame.

Restorative leaders must take time to understand the use of shame as a necessary affect to foster students' moral development (Covaleskie, 2013). If a school is interested in the important work of helping students develop a conscience, then school leaders need to consider how communal experiences are necessary for this development. A conscience is developed through one's understanding of who they are and their relationship with others (Covaleskie, 2013). It is through the internalization of what one knows to be right that an individual becomes moral, and this happens socially.

However, in traditional educational settings, the process is likely to be interrupted. Restorative practices allow for the difficult yet crucial formation to happen, intentionally creating moments for students to see their actions and the harm their choices have caused. This ultimately fosters shame based on students' own determination of right and wrong. Restorative practices break through the cold, lifeless process of delving out punishment to enter into a world of human connection, deemphasizing broken rules and instead lifting up broken people, broken community, and our collective moral commitment to do what is right.

Shame is important to shift from the punitive quadrant of the social discipline window theory to the restorative quadrant (Wachtel, 2001). To accomplish this shift, one would need to add support to the act of responding to discipline. While punitive responses to discipline are being done *to* students from a place of paternalism and power, restorative responses seek to devise discipline *with* the students from a place of inclusion (McCluskey et al., 2008). The movement from one quadrant to the other is a key theoretical insight for those implementing restorative practices (Wachtel, 2001).

Many times students will not have the capacity to express in the words the feelings they are having, so one key support may be leading them to talk through it until they reflect upon their actions in a way that leads to a shame affect. In the field of criminology, there has been much research to support the concept of social power and the influence of shame (Ahmed, Harris, Braithwaite, & Braithwaite; Braithwaite, 1989). Three important aspects of the shaming affect that must be understood as it relates to restorative justice and restorative practices include:

1) The affective aspect of shaming

2) The response to shaming

3) The “reintegrative” aspect of shaming within restorative justice.

Although shame has many negative connotations, especially when dealing with schools and students, the shame that is referenced in the restorative justice and restorative practice literature deals specifically with the shame affect, and not the shame emotion or sentiment (Van Stokkom, 2002). The shame affect is unlike the emotion in that it is an unconscious human response to situations in which a person’s pleasure affects have been disrupted (Thompkins, 2008). Understanding the natural human response to shame is also an important aspect of the restorative process. The Compass of Shame is a tool that has been developed to assess responses to the shame affect (Elison, 2006). This tool divides up the responses into four categories: attacking other, self-attacking, avoiding, and withdrawing (see figure 6). Understanding these responses is important for those who are implementing a restorative justice discipline policy.

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Figure 6: Compass of Shame (Wachtel, 2005)

The key feature of the shaming affect is that, in practice, the ultimate goal is to reveal to the offender they are responsible for the disturbance of their place within the group, then use that as motivation to reintegrate; such an approach stands in stark contrast to neglecting a person's need to be a part of the group (Bazemore & Walgrave, 1999). Reintegration is paramount to the restorative process; however, it is important to note that for reintegration to take place, there must be a sense of integration in the first place. In other words, for restorative justice to work, there has to be something to restore. Much of the work of restorative practices must happen before a conflict or behavior disruption occurs by engaging students in circles (formal or informal) that are designed to develop community (Utheim, 2014). Shaming, without the intentional practice of reintegration, will likely result in negative effects (see Fig 5). As such, restorative justice not only involves the victim and the offender, but also the

community. Restorative justice is a collective resolution that is designed to reintegrate the offender, restore the victim, and build up the community (Varnham, 2005).

Once the students finished answering the restorative questions, it became clear to me these were great kids that were put in a bad situation. Both students came back to school and contributed to our school by helping us direct traffic at the end of the day. As they were helping me each day, I got to know them well. By the end of the year, I could not believe these students had fought. Gabe ended up coming to the office every day that year to see the office staff and say hello. Sometime in the middle of the year, I had a private conversation with Gabe that was a symbolic interaction in my life. He told me when he first got in the fight, I made him feel like I hated him because he came from another school. At that point, my face turned red, my eyes went down and to the left. It was the biological response that I had spent a year encouraging in other people. I felt shame.

I needed to make it right with Gabe so I did something that is a very important piece of restorative practices: I apologized. After self-reflection, I used Nathanson's (2008) blueprint to redirect my personal goals for what makes for a good school.

1) Students want to maximize positive affect.

2) Students are inherently biased to minimize negative affect.

3) The school works best when students express all of their affects.

4) Anything that increases our power to accomplish these goals is good for the school, and anything that reduces this power is bad for the school.

My reflection at the time, as my personal journal indicates, was that I needed to be open to number three on the blueprint for a good school community. School works

best when students express all of their affects. When we run a school in a way students are too scared to breathe, we may have fewer distractions, but we also do not provide space for important issues to be exposed. A good school is one where students and teachers are allowed to express what is going on within. When we have this kind of free flow of thought and emotion, conflict is going to be inevitable. And so I realized, student discipline issues are not a problem; instead, they are an opportunity.

A Typical Circle

October 13, 2017

There is no such thing as a typical circle. In my three-year journey, we had 78 different restorative conference circles, and none of them were typical. A restorative conference circle is the most formal of all the restorative practices. When considering which action to take when you are addressing a concern, the school leader has a range of options. The choices start as simple, such as making a statement, and run the gamut to a formal conference format in which everyone that has been affected is invited and the facilitator has been trained and sticks to a vetted protocol (See Figure 7). The spectrum of choices is important to understand because they all have different requirements of time and could potentially have different levels of impact on the child.

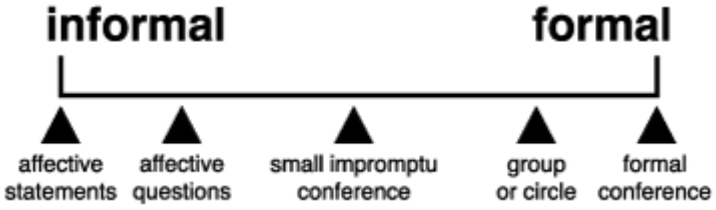

Figure 7: Restorative Practices Continuum (Wachtel, 2005)

Typically, restorative conferencing is reserved for more serious student offenses. Out of the 78 restorative conferences we had in the three years, over half were in the first year, and 37 of them were in the first semester of the first year. The following is an example of a circle that was carried out like all of the other 78 circles. This circle, like most, had supportive parents attending, a serious offense, and a positive result. To share with you the experience of a restorative conference, the following will be a detailed description including all dialogue and response as recalled from memory and detailed in field notes. Some details have been changed to protect the participants' privacy.

Me: *Thank you all for attending. I know this has been difficult for all of you, but your participation today will help us heal the harm that has been caused. My name is Daniel Buckmaster and I'll be facilitating this conference. Let's begin by introducing ourselves.*

I pointed to my left, and my Dean of Students, Mr. Jones, introduced himself. The introductions continued around the circle with Abigail, Abigail's mom, Maria, Maria's mom, Vicky, then finally Vicky's mom. I remember how, like with many circles, things were very tense at the beginning. All three moms were upset with their daughters and the students were not happy to be there, having to confront their actions. The tension in the room was palpable.

Me: *Thank you again for being here today. We are here to talk about a specific incident in which Abigail, Maria, and Vicky were creating graffiti in the bathroom. Everyone has admitted their part of the incident. This is not a trial. We are not to determine who is good or bad or who is more at fault. This is simply a time for everyone to talk about what happened, talk about where we are now, and make a plan to move*

forward in a positive direction. We need all of you to help repair the harm that has been done. Does everyone understand this?

Everyone nods.

Me: *Abigail, Maria, and Vicky, I need you to know that you do not have to participate in the conference. You have the right to have a private hearing in which we will use the code of conduct to determine your consequence. According to our code of conduct for defacing school property with graffiti, you will likely receive a 10-day suspension. Do you understand?*

Abigail: *Yes*

Vicky: *Yes*

Maria: *Yes*

Me: *I would like to start with Abigail. What happened*?

Abigail: *It started in the mornings when we would go to the bathroom before school. We all would get our phones out and make videos being silly. Then things got out of control. It started by us saying bad words. But then things escalated. We decided to put on the bathroom wall the F-word, and then we recorded a video of us laughing about it.*

Abigail's mom*: I just want to say that we never say that word in our house. I am not sure where she is getting this influence in her life to want to use those kinds of words.*

Me: *Let's stay with Abigail for now. I promise everyone will have an opportunity to speak. I will give everyone a chance to answer the questions and then you will also have an opportunity at the end to add anything else.*

Abigail's mom: *Ok*

Me: *Abigail, what were you thinking when you decided to help write graffiti?*

Abigail: *I wasn't thinking*

Me: *I'm sorry but I can't accept that answer. You decided to help write graffiti and before you decided to do that you were thinking about something. I need you to tell the truth about what you were thinking*.

Abigail: *Ok, well to be honest I did not want to write the word, but I felt like if I didn't then Vicky and Maria would think I was a chicken*.

Me: *And what were you thinking when you decided to keep your cell phone and start making videos in the bathroom?*

*Note: students are not allowed to have cell phones. They are to either keep them at home or turn them into the front office.

Abigail: *Well, everyone keeps their cell phone so I just did it.*

Me*: So, what was the thought process behind keeping your cell phone and making videos in the bathroom?*

Abigail sat there for a while, not sure how to respond.

Me: *It is okay. Just tell the truth.*

Abigail: *I thought it would be funny. But it wasn't*.

Me: *What do you think now about what you did?*

Abigail: *It was bad*.

Me: *Say more*.

Abigail: *It was a bad decision. It was dumb. I should not have ever done it and I won't do anything like that again.*

Me: *Who was affected by what you did?*

Abigail: *Just me*.

Me: *Really, just you?*

I point at the people in the circle.

Abigail: *Well ok, my mom is really mad because she had to ask off work today.*

Me: *Who else?*

Abigail: *Well Vicky and Maria may not have done it if I had stepped up and said we shouldn't.*

Me: *Mr. Jones is in charge of school safety and the school building. How do you think he feels?*

Abigail: *He would be mad because it makes our school look trashy*.

Me: *Is our school trashy?*

Abigail: *No*

Me: *Thank you, Abigail. I am going to ask everyone else questions now and your job is to listen. In the end, you will have an opportunity to say anything you'd like to, to anyone in the circle.*

After this, the line of questioning continued to the other two students with similar responses. After the offenders have answered the restorative questions, the victim is asked to respond to restorative questions that are designed for the victim. In this case, the victim was represented by Mr. Jones, our Dean of Students. He often represents the school and how the school was affected by these kinds of actions.

Me: *Mr. Jones, what was your reaction when you first heard about what happened?*

Mr. Jones: *I was mad. I was the one that had to go and clean it all off. These ladies know our expectations and they know that this is unacceptable. I also know that they*

would never do anything like this in their house so I was shocked they would do it to their bathroom here at school.

Me: *How do you feel about what happened?*

Mr. Jones*: I am really disappointed with these ladies. I am also disappointed that they thought it would be funny to put on social media. Parents want their kids to come to school here because it is a safe place with good students, and now we have 6th-grade students walking into the bathroom and seeing a giant cuss word on the wall. And it sends the message that our school is crazy or out of control and it is not. I know that you girls are good, but they don't. Now, I'm in a bad spot because if I don't do something about this then students will think that they can write graffiti and it is okay. I am just really disappointed.*

Me: *What is the hardest* thing *for you about this?*

Mr. Jones: *I don't know how many people saw the Snapchat video, and I am struggling with how something like that will harm our school.*

Me: What is the main issue that needs to be addressed?

Mr. Jones: *First, I think that the issue of phones and social media needs to be addressed. I am not sure what good it does to have these girls on that social media platform. Second, I think we need to address the issue of respecting other's property and respecting the school. If I decided to deface public property, I would have serious consequences to pay.*

Me: *Now I would like to ask the parents some questions. Abigail's mom, let's start with you. This has been hard on you, hasn't it?*

Abigail's mom: *Yes, it has.*

Me: *Tell me about that.*

Abigail's mom starts to cry as she takes a Kleenex and dabs her tears.

Abigail's mom: *I have worked hard for Abigail. I grew up in a bad part of Atlanta, and we had graffiti everywhere. I just thought that this school was not like that, and to find out that my daughter did it. I just can't believe it.*

Me: *What was your reaction when you first heard about the incident?*

Abigail's mom: *I was shocked. I expected this kind of behavior from her older brother, but never from Abby. She knows better. I raised her better than that.*

Me: *How do you feel about what happened?*

Abigail's mom: *I'm pissed. I work so hard for her to have that phone. I work over 60 hours a week cleaning for her to have that phone, and that's what she does with it! I am so upset with her right now.*

Me: *What's the hardest thing for you?*

Abigail's mom: *I feel disrespected. I need to be at work and she knows this. I tell her every day about making the right choices, and I feel like she has put me in a bad light. I know she is a good girl.*

Abigail and Abigail's mom start to cry.

Me: *What do you think are the main issues that need to be addressed?*

Abigail's mom: *I think it is respect. These girls need to respect the bathroom, their school, their families, and most of all themselves. They are better than this.*

After this, all the other moms went through the same questions. One thing I recall being said by another mom was that she did not want the girls to be suspended but to find other ways to have a consequence. The feel of the room is much different at

this point in the conference. Everyone's posture has changed from being defensive to being vulnerable.

Me: *At this point, I would like to give Abigail, Vicky, or Maria one last chance to say anything they would like to say.*

Abigail: *I am sorry for what I did. I think it was really stupid, and I promise to never disrespect the school again.*

Vicky*: I am sorry to my parents and Coach Jones. I wish I hadn't done it.*

Maria: *I am sorry too. I am sorry Mr. Buckmaster*.

Me: *At this time, we are going to pivot from talking about what happened and where we are now to now we are going to talk about what will happen next. We want to get these kids back in school as soon as possible. What can you girls do to make this right?*

The circle sits in silence as people think.

Vicky's mom: *Can they do some kind of community service?*

Mr. Jones: *I think that is a great idea.*

Maria's mom: *What if they cleaned the school?*

Me: *How does everyone feel about that? 10 hours ok?*

Everyone nods in favor.

Abigail's mom: *I think they need to apologize to the school. Could they say something during the school assembly?*

Me: *How does everyone feel about that?*

Mr. Jones: *I don't know. I think that could be not beneficial to bring up the video again. What if they did something like talk about keeping our school clean?*

Everyone nods in favor.

Abigail: *Hey, you know how some people don't have presents for Christmas? What if we did a toy drive for Christmas and donate it to kids in the area that need it.*

Me: *Wow. That's a lot of work. Are you sure you want to do that?*

The girls all nod.

Me: *Anything else?*

Mr. Jones*: I have seen all these moms cry today. I think it would be good for these girls to do something nice for their moms for all the headache this has been.*

Everyone nods.

Me: *Ok, so here is what I have. The girls will do 10 hours of community service to clean up the school. They will also make a presentation at the school assembly about keeping our school clean. The girls will lead a toy drive for Christmas toys including getting toys donated and getting them to a charity or the families in need. Finally, they will get a gift for their mom. Anything else?*

No one says anything.

Me: *Ok, then I will put this in a restorative contract. Mr. Jones will check on you in about a week and see how you are progressing with your commitments. If you all sign the contract today, you can come back to school tomorrow. At this time would anyone else like to say anything.*

Abigail's Mom: *I am so thankful that you all did it this way. I am not used to this kind of thing. I appreciate you all. Thank you.*

Me*: I want to congratulate all of you on how you handled this today. Thank you for helping us make this right. Please stick around and chat while I write up these contracts. Thank you.*

The days following the circle were very encouraging. The girls came to the office and they were excited to work together on their speech and their toy drive. The toy drive ended up being a big success. This was a turning point for Abigail. After the toy drive, she started getting involved in other leadership opportunities. Just like any typical circle, it was well worth the time.

As an educational leader contemplates restorative practices, it is prudent to ponder the pragmatics of a restorative justice approach. Although a school or school district may be compelled to shift its approach based on theoretical arguments alone, it would be beneficial to analyze the outcomes already happening as a result of changing disciplinary policy and practices.

A quasi-experimental study in a large district in Virginia containing 23 high schools looked specifically at the implementation of threat assessment guidelines in the school district (Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011). Threat assessment is a departure from zero tolerance as schools are compelled to consider context and abandon the "one size fits all" approach to discipline. The guidelines required that, in place of exclusionary discipline, schools use restorative practices to help students learn the harmful consequences that their actions had on others. Schools that implemented these guidelines boasted a 52% reduction in long-term suspensions and a 79% reduction in bullying (Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011).

The Minnesota Department of Education (2011) has embraced restorative practices as an alternative to zero-tolerance policies, with 277 principals in the state of Minnesota reporting implementation of the practice in some capacity. Through practices such as restorative conferencing, community circles, and peer mediation, the Minnesota

Department of Education reports that schools that have reduced their suspension rates by 45 to 63 percent. Besides, these schools have seen an increase in academic achievement and a reduction in other discipline infractions resulting in behavior referrals. More recently, restorative practices were also implemented school-wide at Cole Middle School in Oakland, California. The number of exclusionary practices was greatly reduced while permanent exclusionary practices were eliminated from the school's practice (Sumner, Silverman, & Frampton, 2010). Perhaps one of the most impressive supports of restorative practices comes from a study about West Philadelphia High School which is regarded as a school notorious for violent behavior infractions. In a study analyzing two years of implementation of restorative practices, the school saw a 52% decrease in violent acts in 2008 and followed by another 40% the following year (Lewis, 2009).

A study using student surveys from a variety of high schools in two large school districts showed a link between the implementation of restorative practices and narrowing the disciplinary racial gap (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2014). This study looked at outcomes, including students' perception of a positive relationship with their teachers.

Classrooms with a high level of restorative practice implementation had fewer disciplinary issues related to rebelliousness and delinquency, as compared to classrooms with a low level of operationalization. The study concluded that the gap in the average number of misconduct/defiance referrals between Asian/White and Latino/African American students was narrower in high restorative practice classrooms than in low restorative practice classrooms (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2014). Denver

Public Schools also saw results from restorative justice practices helped them maintain an ethical discipline reform movement concerning racial categories and overall fairness (González, 2014). The study showed a 47% decrease in suspensions across the district. Other notable outcomes from this study included a disproportionate decrease in suspensions for Black and Hispanic students, and a significant increase in test scores for each of the racial subgroups in the district (González, 2014). Other notable outcomes from this study include a disproportionate decrease in suspensions for black and Hispanic students and a significant increase in test scores for each of the racial subgroups.

Conclusion

In one year, we had transitioned into a school that used restorative practices for nearly all discipline issues. We had successfully implemented restorative justice in policy and practice. At the end of year one, the administrative team was experiencing a honeymoon period as the new, novel discipline plan gained favor with the school community. In the next chapter, I will explore the second year of implementation in which we addressed legitimate critiques of the practice and our organizational response through cycles of inquiry. At this point in my journey, I had no idea what it would take to continue to successfully operationalize the new discipline philosophy.

Chapter 4: Year Two – Circles of Inquiry

The Circle Outside the Box

Date: 3rd week of August, 2018

I could not believe what had just transpired. My clock was laying at the corner of the wall and the floor, broken into many pieces. I looked down to see the engraving of my name on the clock that was given to me during my time as a teacher. I was angry. But beyond angry, I was concerned. I looked down in my hands and see the restorative script that I had used many times before. "This script always works," I thought to myself. However, this time was much different. Lindsay had already heard these questions before. On this day, she took a stand against restorative justice. She did not need me to look at a script and ask the prescribed questions. She needed more. And my broken clock lay on the floor as proof of this fact.

While restorative justice does have a set of procedures, protocols, and scripts, it is more than simply a program that can be thoughtlessly implemented by following a set standard of rules and regulations (Sartain, Allensworth, Porter, Mader, & Steinberg, 2015; Muschert, 2014; Wachtel, 2014). Restorative justice is first and foremost a philosophy and mindset around how to move forward after an incident in which a member of the community has broken trust (Wachtel & McCold, 2001). Restorative practices are not magical. Restorative practices can, like all things, become stale and stagnant as the years go on. After our initial honeymoon period, our school started to get some pushback from students and parents. We needed to engage in reflective practices around what was happening with restorative justice. If we were going to expect restorative practices to continue to have the desired outcomes, we were going to

need to engage in “improvement science” (Lewis, 2015). Improvement science is the search for effective ways to help an institution reach its goals through cycles of inquiry. This chapter will explore year two of implementing restorative justice; however, it will focus on three stories in which things did not go according to plan. Lindsay’s situation exemplifies the need for restorative practices to be responsive to the particular circumstances of the community. This chapter will examine mistakes made, plus unexpected reactions and outcomes that challenged us as a school to become responsive to help operationalize restorative practices for our unique community and the individual needs of the student and their families.

Lindsay had a tough life. She was raised by a single father. He was timid and quiet and would often cry when we met about Lindsay. He wanted what was best for Lindsay, but he did not feel confident about how to respond to her cries for help. Lindsay was the kind of student that could easily find her way to the front office every single day. She loved to be funny and laugh more than anything. She liked to fit in and would often use humor to gain favor with her peers. She frequently challenged authority in front of others to show off to her friends. She also did not care about getting into trouble. This happens in schools more often than one would think. Students can start to enjoy the process of getting into trouble and getting one-on-one attention that is required after serious discipline offenses (Kennedy-Lewis, 2013). This was the case with Lindsay. She loved being in the office. It was her favorite place to be in school, and she would do anything or everything to get there. Most of the time it was for minor offenses; however, now and then, Lindsay would lose her cool. Our teachers are trained to deal with discipline concerns by demonstrating mutual respect, and without yelling or

screaming. Lindsay was perfectly fine with getting in trouble in this environment of mutual respect, but when the discipline response became more "old school" and the teacher would raise his or her voice or talk harshly toward her, things changed. On this day, Lindsay had had enough. She was being lectured about her behavior in front of the class. As emotions started to build, the teacher started to raise his voice at her. She responded by saying "this is bullshit!" After that, the teacher continued to raise his voice. Lindsay decided to storm out of the class and hide in the bathroom. After things had settled, Lindsay was in my office. I pulled out the restorative questions to begin the healing process. However, Lindsay refused to cooperate. She told me she was mad and did not want to talk about it, but my agenda was more concerned about getting the discipline response out of the way and being able to tell the teacher what actions I took after she had cursed and left the class without permission. So instead of listening to Lindsay, I asked the question.

Me: *What happened?*

Lindsay: *I don't want to talk it*.

Me: *I know, but we are going to have to talk about it*.

Lindsay: *I just hate him. He never listens to me and always blames me for everything.*

Me: *So what happened?*

Lindsay: *I don't want to talk about it.*

Me: *Well, you don't have a choice. You need to tell me what happened.*

Lindsay: *No.*

Me: *You need to talk to me about what happened or I will be forced to call your dad, and I am trying to avoid that because I know how incredibly busy he is trying to work to provide for your family.*

Lindsay: *I don't care.*

Against my better judgment, I had my secretary call Lindsay's dad so that we could conduct a restorative conference. It is important to note that most of the time the questions that are asked during the official restorative conference have already been asked by the person conducting the investigation, as a part of the process. This gives the student time to develop their understanding of the events, the reasons, and the rationale behind them. It also gives the facilitator the chance to vet the student's attitude and mindset. I was not thinking about any of that. I was simply wanting to move forward so I could get to the next thing. My thoughts were that if her dad was in the room, she might start talking about the incident; a crucial step the restorative process can proceed. Later that afternoon, Lindsey's dad arrived.

Me: *Thank you all for attending. I know this is difficult for everyone involved, but your participation will help us move forward and help you make this right with your teacher and classmates. Lindsay, do you understand this?*

Lindsay: *I guess.*

Me: *Lindsay, what happened?*

Lindsay: *The teacher always blames me for everything.*

Me: *I want you to focus on what you did. Just tell us exactly what happened today in class.*

Lindsay: *I cussed at the teacher.*

Dad: (chiming in) *I did not raise you to talk like that.*

Lindsay*: I know! And I don't want to talk about it.* (Looks at me*) I told you I don't want to talk about it.*

Lindsay stands up. She begins to use every curse word in the dictionary and grabs the glass clock from my desk, hurling it against the cement wall and causing the relic to shatter into pieces. I collect my thoughts and we all agree to send Lindsay home for the rest of the day. We needed a new plan.

Improvement science, as it manifests in schools, is determined by the institution's ability to create goals, measure outcomes, and reflect upon its efforts (Argyris, 1995). Schools will evolve through a series of changes to practice and policy, which may or may not be strategically planned or driven by important data. The concept is very simple. When an organization is not receiving the desired results, the organization will either continue to reap undesired results or choose to change its course. How, when, and how often schools respond is determined by the leaders' ability to use the data effectively and efficiently. Leaders of schools may frame this kind of systematic organizational improvement as a series of strategic action research projects (Coghian, 2001; Corey, 1953; Nolan & Hoover, 2001). One strategy for continuous reflective organizational school improvement was developed by the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) at Harvard University. The process follows the following seven steps in a cyclical and continuous loop.

1. Identify and analyze the problem.
2. Develop a theory of action.
3. Design the strategy.

4. Plan for implementation.
5. Implement the strategy.
6. Assess progress.
7. Adapt and modify for continuous improvement. (Childress, Doyle, & Thomas, 2009)

For us, Lindsay's story served as a microcosm for how to approach the unknown and the unexplainable. What worked most of the time was simply not working for Lindsay. We needed to be flexible and humble enough to realize that if we continued to do the same thing, we would continue to get the same results. As such, we began trying new things and being reflective, starting with Lindsay. We tried many different approaches. We identified the problem: she continued to reach out with disruptive behavior. We developed a theory of action around Lindsay and her behavior. We continued to use the restorative philosophy to ask the important questions so we could understand Lindsay and her behavior. We designed a strategy to help Lindsay, planned for implementation, and executed the plan. We tried everything: taking away all social time, providing a mentor, giving Lindsay an alternative learning environment in which she would stay in the office to do all of her academic work, and more. We assessed progress by continuing to analyze her behavior and her place in the community. To our great frustration, we continued to yield poor results as Lindsay continued to have outbursts and be disruptive to the overall school environment. The most important step to the action research process for Lindsay, and our approach to her situation, was our tenacity to adapt and modify for continuous improvement. We never gave up on Lindsay. We just kept trying new things. Then Mr. Jones had an idea that would prove

to be a game-changer. The overall goal of improvement science is to do exactly that, but to create a system so that this kind of improvement happens across all classrooms and all buildings in a school district (Holmes, 2017)

The idea was to show Lindsay that we were not going to give up on her by truly partnering with her dad. Her dad had expressed his frustration with her behavior at home on several occasions. Our theory of action was grounded in the idea that the behavior we were seeing at school was not going to change unless there was some improvement in the behavior at home. We decided to not give up on the restorative process, and instead planned one more circle, except this time, we circled up in the student's living room. We had coordinated with Lindsay's dad to take Lindsay home after school. That afternoon, Mr. Jones, Lindsay's team teacher, Lindsay, and I got into a car and drove to her house. The car ride was quiet and awkward. Lindsay was not a fan of the idea of us all coming into her home. When we arrived, it was clear that Lindsay's dad was anxiously awaiting our arrival. The house was clean, and the living room was set up to have a circle just like the many we had already had in my office.

Me: *Lindsay, what's been going on at school lately?*

Lindsay: *I just get so mad.*

Me: *What are you thinking about when you get mad?*

Lindsay: *I just get easily frustrated. Everything makes me mad.*

Me: *What do you think about that now?*

Lindsay: *I hate it. I need help.*

Dad (chiming in): *What about getting that counseling you talked about?*

This was a very significant moment for the circle. Before this moment, Lindsay's father would skirt the issue of counseling. In our urban Latin community, there is a stigma associated with counseling. Many of our parents feel like it is for the weak or it is a waste of time. But as we were all in his home, trying to help his daughter, he was able to let go of the negative feelings he had about counseling and allow us to try it. It was as if when it was suggested from my office, there was a paternalistic power struggle and Lindsay's father's response was to deny that influence as a way of maintaining some cultural autonomy, as was the custom for his community to devalue counseling. However, this day it was different for Lindsay's father. As he could see that we were not going to give up on his daughter, he knew that it was his turn to try something outside of his comfort zone.

The circle continued with everyone answering the restorative questions. As Lindsay's father answered the questions, he began to sob. He was beside himself as he expressed his love for his daughter. After this, I led the discussion about how to move forward.

Me: *We have talked about what has happened, we now know where we are right now. We want Lindsay to get the help she needs, so now let's talk about how we are going to move forward.*

Lindsay: *Ok.*

Me*: I want us to commit to getting counseling services for Lindsay. Do we all agree?*

Group: *Yes.*

Me: *What else can we do?*

Lindsay's Team Teacher: *I would like to offer to come to this house once a week to help get Lindsay caught up on her grades.*

Me: *That's great. Does everyone agree?*

Group: *Yes.*

Me: *Anything else?*

Mr. Jones: *Yes, I think she needs to be held accountable for her actions. Lindsay, you have continued to disrupt our school. For things to be right, you must have a consequence. What do you love more than anything in this house?*

Lindsay: *I love my shoes.*

Mr. Jones: *Go get your three favorite pairs of shoes.*

Me: *Is everyone okay with this?*

Group: *Yes.*

Mr. Jones: *For you to make this right with me, I need you to give me those shoes. They will be at the school, and if you stay out of trouble this week then I will gladly give you back this pair. Then if you have another good week, I'll give you back this next pair. And if you have a good month, I 'll give you back your favorite pair.*

Me: How does everyone feel about that?

Group: *Sounds good.*

Lindsay: *Ok, let's do it.*

I have never seen a turnaround as I saw in Lindsay. She was not perfect. She still made her fair share of mistakes, but something happened that day and we broke through a wall that she had built. She could see that we would stop at nothing to help her. She started counseling the next week and became a new person before our eyes.

We learned many lessons that day as a school. A “one size fits all” approach to discipline would not have ever worked for Lindsay. She needed us to go through many cycles of inquiry before landing on something that worked. It is also very important to note that it took both being willing to give her the support she needed, as well as the tough love to keep her accountable for her actions. This is an essential piece of any quality restorative response. It took a while, but she did eventually get all her shoes back.

The Circle that Stopped Before it Started

Date: January 23rd, 2018

Gilberto was a very good kid. He was smart and did well in school. He was never in trouble before this incident, and he never had any issues after. However, restorative practices did not ring true to Gilberto or his family. This circle was a complete failure from the start, which may show some important considerations and pitfalls as a school leader implements these practices.

Students were not behaving well for Ms. Hilger on this winter day. The classroom was loud, and students were consistently challenging her authority as the class was beginning their second semester. Students often complained about the classroom culture in this particular classroom, and there were often discipline issues coming from this class. On this day, students were asked to quietly start their bell work assignment (a task posted on the board that is to be completed as soon as the student sits down for the class). The students immediately started talking and making excuses to get up and walk around. Using the advice of the instructional coach from the day before, the teacher was particularly strict this day to ensure engagement on her bell work

assignment. The class was not used to this kind of management style and immediately started to rebel. Ms. Hilger responded swiftly to keep the class on track. Then Gilberto made a mistake. He decided to draw a caricature of Ms. Hilger. The picture was disrespectful and insensitive. As expected, the picture was confiscated and the artwork was sent, along with Gilberto, the principal's office.

Gilberto did what most students do when they know they are about to be in big trouble. He lied. He said that it was not his drawing. This is a very common response to being in trouble and can be framed by one of the responses to shame as explained through the shame compass theory. It is typical to deflect as a means to avoid and withdraw. Through cycles of inquiry, it has become important for us to find ways to appropriately respond to the initial temptation to lie about an incident. When you frame lying as a response to shame, it is much different than treating the transgression as an additional offense.



Figure 6: Compass of Shame (Wachtel, 2005)

It is important to note at this point in the discipline investigation true restorative practices have not begun to be operationalized. For restorative justice to even begin, everyone must be dealing with the truth about what has occurred. This is essential to ensure a quality restorative circle that will yield positive results. In other words, if the circle is going to be disrupted by disputes around what occurred during the incident, there will be major distractions around the purpose of the circle, which is to help the student make things right. When the student is arguing about what occurred, he or she is not in the right mindset to make amends. Through the improvement science cycle, our school has found that it is essential to have a rock-solid understanding of the exact event that took place before moving forward into the restorative practices. It is also important to note the intentions, the extenuating circumstances, and the motivation behind the action, can be discussed during the circle, but the reality of the incident and exactly

what occurred must be agreed upon before entering into restorative questioning or restorative conferencing.

After reflecting on many cycles of inquiry, our teams have discovered that it is worth investing valuable time and energy to investigate fully any incident that needs to be dealt with through restorative conferencing. As an additional side note, many school districts cited the amount of time needed to truly engage in restorative practices as a limiting factor, causing difficulty of implementation (Sartain, Allensworth, Porter, Mader, & Steinberg, 2015; Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2014). Therefore, schools may need to be strategic about how time is allocated to restorative practices. This may include being intentionally discerning with how formal a restorative approach is used for any given incident, along the Restorative Practices Continuum as illustrated in Figure 6 (Wachel, 2005). Further, it may be important to consider there may be some incidences that do not require a restorative response. Therefore, due to the limited capacity of the school to dedicate time and personnel to the purposes of conducting restorative work, it may be beneficial to assign some offenses to a prescribed consequence simply to save time. For example, in our school, when a student is chewing gum, we typically respond with a set consequence rather than respond with restorative work. However, if a student continues to repeat this behavior, the incident is reframed as a defiance issue and merits a response through the restorative framework.

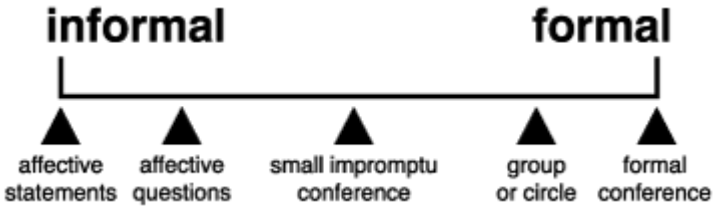

Figure 7: Restorative Practices Continuum (Wachtel, 2005)

Returning to the story of Gilberto, it was particularly important to know exactly what happened and who drew the picture. When a student lies, the natural response is to defend the lie at all costs. Based on reflective improvement science, we found that a situation like this can quickly become contentious, and can work against the underlying values of restorative practices. While it may be tempting to look the student in the face and say, "I know you are lying," this kind of response will only cause the student to dig their heels deeper into their delusion of the incident. Instead, what we found to be an appropriate response is to enlist the student in a fact seeking mission to make sure the student who is responsible for the incident can be allowed to make it right with the victim. This action must be conducted genuinely, regardless of the school leader's assurance of the truth of the events. In other words, instead of looking at Gilberto and saying "I know you did it," it has been more effective to say "Okay, help me find out who did it."

Gilberto initially said that someone else had drawn the picture. Our response when this happens is to be completely transparent by allowing Gilberto to talk to the student that he is accusing. While one may think just the threat of bringing in the other student would elicit a truthful response, this is not the case in many situations. Instead, it takes the deliberate action of sitting both (or sometimes several) students in the room and asking them to speak about what has happened. After this intervention, Gilberto responded by confessing that he just thought this other student drew it but was not sure. Then the question remained, "if you did not draw the picture, how did you end up having the picture?" He explained that it was passed to him. After asking him who passed him the picture, we immediately responded by getting that student so they could

have a similar conversation. Before we went to retrieve that student, Gilberto decided to confess to what he had done. “I drew the picture,” Gilberto said with tears in his eyes. That’s all we needed to move forward with our restorative work.

The next day, we had planned to have a restorative conference with Gilberto, Gilberto’s mother, Mr. Jones, Ms. Hilger, and myself. When Gilberto and his mom arrived, it was obvious that there was something off. Mom sat in the front office with a stern look on her face and her arms crossed. She was making it very obvious that she was unhappy with this situation. After we gathered in my office, Gilberto’s mom refused to sit down. It is important to note that the beginning of many restorative conferences can be very awkward. Most parents that are brought into the office after their child has committed a major offense are naturally defensive. Many parents from my community are concerned that we are going to suspend their child or that we are going to over-react to the incident that took place. However, most of the time this attitude and feeling dissipates after the initial introduction and almost always after their child goes through the restorative questions.

As Gilberto’s mom stood sternly by the door, I asked everyone to introduce themselves. We went around the circle and said our names. When I asked Gilberto’s mother to say her name, she responded by saying, “I am nobody.” I continued, hoping the introduction to the restorative conference would help alleviate the anxiety demonstrated by this concerned parent.

Me*: Thank you all for attending. I know this is difficult for all of you, but your presence will help us deal with the matter that has brought us together. This is an opportunity for all of you to be involved in repairing the harm that has been done.*

This conference will focus on an incident that happened with Gilberto drawing a disrespectful picture. It is important to understand we will focus on what Gilberto did and how that unacceptable behavior has affected others. We are not here to decide whether Gilberto is good or bad. We want to explore in what way people have been affected and hopefully work toward repairing the harm that has resulted. Does everyone understand this?

Group: *Yes.*

Me: *Gilberto has admitted his part in the incident. Gilberto, I must tell you that you do not have to participate in this conference and are free to leave at any time, as is anyone else. If you do leave, the matter will be treated as a disciplinary action and referred to as a suspension hearing.*

This matter, however, may be finalized if you participate positively and comply with the conference agreement. Gilberto, do you understand?

Gilberto: *Yes.*

Me: *I want to start with Gilberto. What happened?*

Gilberto: *Someone else drew the picture. I didn't do it.*

Mom: *See! I knew he didn't do it.*

This was the end of the circle. As mom stood with her hands crossed by the door, I had a mess on my hands. I quickly reverted to the code of conduct and suspended the student for the remainder of the week. As Gilberto and his mom stormed out of my office, we were all left with a sense of disgust. Sending him home made no sense and now we had a parent who thought we were tyrants. This was a massive failure and we needed to learn how to not let something like this happened again.

Restorative justice is by no means flawless or without critics. Both practitioners and scholars have critiqued restorative justice, pointing to the approach as being logistically impossible or fundamentally flawed. These critiques range from the inability of the restorative movement to give practical and measurable action steps for district implementation, to inconsistencies among agreed-upon concepts across cultural divides, to the coercion that can manifest during the process. Understanding the critiques of restorative justice may reveal some truths that need to be addressed by the reform.

Due to its organic nature, restorative practices as a program of practice may lack the structure and guidance necessary for district implementation. Detractors of restorative practices such as Daly (2003) point to the restorative movement's overuse of anecdotal and philosophical arguments that are difficult to study or operationalize as an educational leader. This is an issue, according to Daly, because it gives little direction in the scholarship for how restorative practices can be implemented in different educational settings. In this "Age of Efficiency" educators feel the pressure more than ever to use data to drive decisions and implement reforms that are confirmed by the data and can be implemented promptly to produce results (English, 2004).

Another critique of the restorative justice movement revolves around the concept of cultural mismatch. Restorative justice is founded on the idea that members of the same community can come together with a common language to negotiate an agreement that would have a cooperatively acceptable impact on everyone involved. Opponents of restorative justice point to the inability of restorative justice leaders to address this issue as a point of contention. McCold (2004) points to the reality of the concept and praxis

of the community. The author argues the communities within the settings in which restorative practices are being implemented, including educational settings, are built of a diverse group of individuals. To respect the individuals within the group, there would need to be more sensitivity to the possible conflict that could harm the individuals within the community (McCold, 2004). Another critique is that although the restorative practices are to be led entirely by a member of the community, there may be pressure for the community to agree upon an action. There also may be coercion for the offender to comply, which is in direct opposition to restorative practices. Restorative justice advocates are intentional in pointing out this flaw and train practitioners to refrain from actions that might add pressure to comply, but instead encourage everyone to engage in "voluntary cooperation" (Strang, 2004).

We learned three valuable lessons on the day of the circle that stopped before it started. First, when a student has a truthful confession, it is important to recognize how fragile that can be. After this incident, we created a policy that all students write out their understanding of the events. This is a good reflective tool, and it helps the students stick to their word. Another valuable lesson was about the standards and expectations of what a circle should look like; we now have very high standards about what it means to be a part of a circle. It is important to value everyone in the circle. Therefore, we require that everyone sits in the circle and introduces themselves by name. Finally, we learned that a scripted restorative approach, while often very effective, does not work for all circumstances and all families. Restorative practices do not always work, and a school leader must be prepared for that inevitability. In this case, I reverted to sending the student home. In the next story, I will explore some more creative ways to move

forward with the restorative philosophy when the traditional restorative conferencing is not working.

The Continuous Circle

Date: Most of the first two years of implementation

Krempski was anomalous. He was easily one of the most extraordinary students I have ever worked with. Joel Krempski was known simply by Krempski by his friends and teachers. Krempski won the award for the most trips to the office with teachers, often exasperated, claiming, “I just can’t take it anymore!” Krempski was frequently in the office for what can be best described as driving his teachers crazy, and after a long and creative run, was very familiar with the restorative routine, yet his disruptive behavior persisted. Often, when we see students acting out in this manner, it is almost always rooted in a deeper issue, which must be understood and addressed. When restorative protocols fail to remedy chronic issues, it is very common for our leadership staff to brainstorm what we are not seeing that may be driving this behavior. Mr. Jones was confident he had pegged the purpose of these transgressions. Mr. Jones believed that Krempski was deflecting so no one would pick on his inability to do classwork. Krempski often did not turn in any work at all, which added to the frustration from the teachers. Mr. Jones tested Krempski in reading and math to help us understand the child as a whole. When the test results came in, everyone was shocked. He was advanced in math and reading and could read at the same level as a college student at the age of 12. Krempski was not trying to deflect from not knowing what was expected. He probably already had a healthy understanding of the concepts being taught and was bored and

frustrated by the time it took most students to master the concept. The first thing we knew had to change was that Krempski needed to be challenged.

The most effective tool to mitigate classroom behavior issues is an engaging lesson. For students to be appropriately engaged, the content being taught needs to have the kind of rigor that will be challenging for the student, but not so challenging that it seems insurmountable. This is what is known as the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1987). In an average classroom, for any given concept, there will be some students in which their appropriate zone of proximal development is advanced. This means for the student to stay engaged, he or she needs to interact with coursework that provides a challenge. Additionally, in an average classroom, there will almost always be students are at a beginning level and will need more accessible coursework to remain engaged in the lesson. This creates a problem in the modern-day classroom. There are two approaches that schools can take to address this issue. The first is to group students according to their levels of mastery. This has some inherent negative side effects. First off, there is a fear when students are grouped in classes with less rigor, they will be tracked or stuck in classes with lower expectations. There will be less opportunity for students to move out of their current level of mastery relative to their peer group. Another negative side effect of placing everyone in groups according to the level of mastery is the anxiety associated with being placed in heterogeneous age groups. A litany of research about retention of students has supported the idea that students should stay with their peer group (Hughes, West, Kim, & Bauer, 2018). The social anxiety and distraction from learning that results when students are placed in groups with non-peers, particularly in the face of grade retention, has suggested over and over again to have

negative effects on learning, including the slowing of language development for English learners (Buckmaster, 2019).

As such, many educators have adopted differentiated instruction as a means to reach the needs of their students. Differentiated instruction is the act of diversifying instruction, levels of rigor, and assessment within a lesson to allow the lesson to be in the zone of proximal development for an array of ability levels (Subban, 2006). Using differentiated instruction has obvious benefits to the primary goal of an academic institution; however, after analyzing student infraction data, we found that there was a clear distinction between classes in which students were engaged in high-quality differentiated instruction, versus classrooms with a less refined approach. Our data indicated, for us, the most effective tool against student discipline issues in the classroom was high-quality instruction.

After we met with his teachers, and they were aware of his advanced language, math skills, and general IQ, we started seeing some changes. However, this was not enough to make the kind of change to keep him out of the front office. Even after being challenged academically, Krempski continued to cause many daily disruptions. His teachers were slightly less frustrated, but he was still written up by his teachers frequently. We needed more than appropriate, engaging lessons to fix this. We needed something to keep him accountable.

Krempski had a very high IQ, but that was paired with being very immature socially. This was partly the reason he continued to drive his teachers crazy. He was smart, but the way he liked to have fun resembled a 3rd grader at recess. He likes to run around, poke, throw things, and make funny sounds. This all made him very happy, and

he would giggle in restorative conference circles as he answered the first question, "What happened?" He loved to create chaos. He also did not have any problem with being in trouble. When Krempski was in trouble, he was in his element. Knowing this, we considered the challenge of how to keep a child accountable for his actions when he enjoyed being in trouble.

The case of the two years of various circles with Krempski taught us about the importance of clear, consistent, and curated consequences. Using punitive consequences to adjust behavior is what Skinner refers to as behaviorism (Catania & Harnad, 1988). Using this approach exclusively has proven to be problematic, as described earlier with the punitive to permissive pendulum swing. However, what we have found to be the most pragmatic approach to operationalizing the full potential of restorative work is to espouse the practices with carefully selected consequences. It is important to note that consequences are a part of the restorative process, at the end of a conference, with the circle deciding how the student should make it right. There will almost always be a person in the circle who will want to see some kind of price paid or punitive consequence received. One thing I have noticed over the years is that often, during this portion of the restorative work, some members of the community may find it unnecessary to ensure the guilty party makes amends, and the group may opt for less severe consequences than what the code of conduct would call for. Therefore, a strange side effect of restorative work is that it can become easy to be lackadaisical with enforcing consequences. An example of this would be an administrator requiring a week of lunch detention just to add a consequence, but not taking the time to find out that the student does lunch tutoring almost every day. This is why we have found, for

consequences to be effective, they must be consistent, clear, and tailored to the individual student.

Krempski desperately needed consequences. For this to work for Krempski, it was extremely important for the consequence to be clear. He was the kind of person who would find a loophole in any agreement. If he was told not to talk then he would sing. If he was told not to sing, he would start humming. It was fun for him to find ways to obey the letter of the law, but still, find creative ways to cause havoc. If we wanted to get anywhere with Krempski, we had to get very good at being clear. He also needed consistency. Krempski was an expert at making his teachers wave the white flag. He had learned (through a series of his cycles of inquiry) that if he was stubborn enough, eventually people would give up on holding him accountable. This was the worst lesson Krempski ever learned. The only way to change his mindset was to become more hard-headed than he was. We had to remain consistent so he understood the impact of his actions. Finally, and this was most important for Krempski, the consequences had to be curated for him. Sending some students home is like sending them on vacation. Some students love detention because they would rather sit in a quiet environment during lunch. In Krempski's case, he loved being in the front office. There was nowhere else that he would rather be. When we figured this out, this was a big game-changer. If he wanted to come to the office, then he would have to earn it. Earn it by doing the right thing.

The last thing that helped Krempski, along with more engaging lessons and curated consequences, was that we always continued to do restorative work with him, but it needed to be modified. Krempski knew how to use anything to his advantage,

including restorative practices. He knew how to say the right things to move on and get what he wanted. This kind of manipulation, whether it is coming from the victim or the offender, is a major criticism of restorative practices (McCold, 2004). However, we continued to ask the questions and maintain a sense of mutual respect. One time after he had inappropriately pushed a student down (not violently), he participated in a circle and volunteered to go bowling with that student and pay for the outing. This act proved to be a turning point for Krempski. We needed to continue to work restoratively. Restorative justice reform is dependent on the free will of individuals who are unrestricted from coercion or manipulation. The explicit goal and intrinsic requirement of restorative practices such as conferencing, circles, and restorative questions remain a climate of "voluntary cooperation" (Tyler, 2006). Therefore, restorative justice, by its very nature, is a choice. It is a choice for all parties involved, but for restorative practices to have a fighting chance, it is first the choice of the educator to engage in the hope of a better option for students. To lay the groundwork for understanding the problems of implementation for restorative practices within a school district, a study designed to use cycles of inquiry that focuses on a school transitioning from punitive discipline guidelines to a restorative model can potentially yield important insights for both policy and practice. How can one draw out meaning from this potential evolution or lack thereof?

Conclusion

We learned so much in that second year of implementation. Lindsay, Gilberto, and Krempski all needed more than a restorative script. Through trial and error, we learned more about each student and we were able to respond to their needs. Through

the process of improvement science, we learned about our school and community in a way that helped us adjust our plans to better serve our students.

One approach to improvement science is a cycle called PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Act). Lora Cohen-Vogel describes this approach as "cycles (that) guide educators, clinicians, and other practitioners to set measurable aims and test whether the changes they make result in improvement" (2018). The article goes on to explain how an institution may start with change at a small scale and work to improve the organization by scaling up (Cohen-Vogel, 2018). The overall goal of improvement science is to be consistently and continually improving as an organization (Holmes, 2017). As a school, we would go through mini-versions of this PDSA cycle as we developed innovative solutions for students like Lindsay, Krempski, and Gilberto. As effective as it was for these individuals the more transcendent transformation was how this process infiltrated the system as a whole. We would find ourselves problem solving like this in other areas of academics and school operations with continued improvement being the overall goal. Anyone looking to implement restorative justice needs to consider the deep commitment to reflection and the never-ending work of being continually adaptive.

Chapter 5: Year Three – New to the Circle

The Circle for a New Member

Date: September 2019

I have never been through something more challenging than what happened to us in the fall of 2019. The year before, we got the amazing news that our school was moving. Our district was in the process of renovating an abandoned mall in our neighborhood, transforming it into new and improved facilities for our students. The high school had moved in two years before, and our turn was coming. The architects developed an amazing floor plan to create a learning environment that reflected and enabled the hard work and excellence that our students bring to school every day. This new building was exactly what we needed for our school to reach its full potential. We were all very excited to utilize the amazing space being built for us. However, during the summer of 2019, we received some very disappointing news. There was a special part that needed to be installed for our air conditioner to work properly, and it was going take many months longer than anticipated for these parts to be ready for install. For these reasons, we had to remain at our old facility for the first quarter of the school year. This would not have been a serious issue, except one thing that the new building allowed us to do was accept more students into the school. We expanded by 50 additional students per grade, for a total of 150 students. In previous years, before the 150 extra students were added to the community, the school was already full to the brim. Now we had to find a way to cram another 150 students into an already overfull space. Our staff was amazing that summer as we got creative with classrooms, using virtually every inch of the space, including a church building the district bought to be a

community center. Teachers co-taught so they could fit two classrooms of students into a space designed for one. On the first day of school in the fall of 2019, you would have never known the whirlwind that our staff had to go through to prepare for the makeshift space. Our staff did a wonderful job of making school as normal as possible. It was the proudest I have ever been as a principal.

After the addition of the new members of our community, we experienced a brief spike in serious incidents, including fights, drugs, and bullying. This is not an uncommon thing for new students; school communities often see a negative relationship between the communal aspect of schooling (the intake of new members seen as outsiders) and violent acts (Jagers, Sydnor, Mouttapa, & Flay, 2007). This was exactly what we experienced as a school. Despite this initial spike, in each successive year of implementing restorative practices, there was a continuous decrease in incidents and suspensions. Further, we saw a decrease in the raw number of disciplinary incidents despite having 150 extra students, even after prorating the days of school attended to account for in-person instructional time lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, despite a brief, rocky start, major discipline issues have improved overall in an appreciable way.

One community member found himself in several circles was a new student named Marcus. Marcus was a lovable kid that wore big cowboy boots and even a bigger smile. He was from the school down the road which was historically a rival school. He did not fit in immediately, but after a few months, he had found his group of friends. Around this time, Marcus started doing the same thing that got him kicked out of his last school: he brought drugs to school.

What is the legal responsibility of a school when one of its community engages in illegal behavior? Schools are an interesting entity in there are lots of behaviors that are technically criminal, but schools choose to not press charges with the police or follow the established judicial system process. Many illegal activities are dealt with by the school's administration. This means that for many youths, their first experience with the court system happens in a school in which the administrator is trying to keep them out of the state or federal court system. The obligations and guidelines about how schools must approach illegal behavior (including assault, harassment, possession of drugs, possession of weapons, etc.) is a gray area and schools can interpret their latitude and power in different ways.

What does the law in the United States require schools to do in cases of criminal or civil misconduct? Does a principal as the leader of the school have legal permission to handle certain situations with more grace than might be granted by the judicial system? Can a school choose to do something unorthodox such as allowing the victim and the offender to come together to create a social contract to restore justice and order? Is the restorative approach always following the letter of the law or it is circumventing some legal obligations when it comes to specific transgressions?

One program that might help us understand the link between schools and the legal system is the School Resource Officer program that has expanded vastly over the past 20 years. Many feel the program to bring police officers to work in the school is a major step to criminalizing student discipline (Hirschfield, 2008). This is to say that many incidents who would have been traditionally dealt with by the principal are now being handled through the criminal justice system. One reason for this shift may be

explained through the permissive/punitive pendulum swing (as described earlier) that is common in school discipline. School resource officers are commissioned to engage in two key activities. First, they are to help minimize disruptions by establishing order and justice (Lawrence, 2007). Secondly, they should help educate students on the law and the justice system to create a better school environment through classes or mentorship (Rich & Finn, 2001). Though it is widely accepted for principals to turn to these resource officers to handle criminal behavior, it is still up to the school to decide whether this is something that needs to be handled outside of the school. One way school leaders may create this distinction is how they label infractions. For example, if a student is writing on the desk, it can be labeled as *writing on the desk*, an ideal situation for restorative practices to be operationalized. However, that very same incident may be labeled as *the destruction of federal property* which would compel the principal to press charges through the School Resource Officer (SRO). In this way, the school leader has great latitude in determining when a discipline issue becomes criminalized.

There are some instances where student behavior (or potential behavior) obligates the school leader to involve criminal justice authorities and social services. School officials have the responsibility to evaluate each situation and, when a student has (or plans to) hurt others or themselves, authorities must be contacted so they can aid in protecting the innocent (Willard, 2007). This kind of legal obligation, which had once been narrowed to physical violence, has been expanded in recent years to obligate any abuse, including social-emotional abuse, harassment, and especially bullying and cyber-bullying (Cornell, D., & Limber, 2015). However, as with the aforementioned scenario, the school leader may be able to continue to maintain autonomy by simply defining the

action as something other than abuse, harassment, or bullying. In the case of bullying, there are specific guidelines and criteria (such as a power imbalance) that a school leader must be aware of to accurately identify the behavior (Huang & Cornell, 2015). Another example of an instance in which school officials would need to notify authorities to protect the innocent is when students are in possession of a weapon (Emmert, Hall, & Lizotte, 2018).

In a case like that of Marcus, there is still a legal gray area for many student discipline issues. In the state in which this school resides, medical marijuana is permitted; however, it is illegal to possess or sell tobacco, alcohol, or marijuana on school property. In fact, for decades, the laws of the land have continued to interfere with how schools must define and refer to infractions (Smith, 2019). President Nixon declared a war on drugs in 1971, beginning a campaign of hard, authoritative criminalization of drugs across the United States. In the 1980s, President Reagan was instrumental in congress passing the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, which created minimal sentencing for drug crimes. In 1990, Congress also passed a law called the Gun-Free School Zone Act, which was the beginning of zero-tolerance policies described throughout this manuscript (Smith, 2019). These rules resulted in students being expelled for things such as having over-the-counter headache medicine, and policies that required school leaders to press charges in cases of alcohol, cigarettes, and cannabis. While this may have been (and still is) the letter of the law for drug abuse, many school leaders have pushed back on these zero-tolerance policies to mitigate the disruption and damaging effects of these harsh rules. Further, school policies have been adopted to circumvent the Gun-Free School Zone Act by enacting a “free surrender”

policy in which a student may turn in their firearm or other deadly weapons once on campus. These are especially common in communities where guns are frequently utilized for hunting, or where open carry is allowed in public (Hong & Espelage, 2019).

The amount of latitude and flexibility that a school leader has to involve authorities is significant. This power can be used to help a student avoid the judicial system early in life. Avoiding legal charges is likely to have an impact on a student's propensity for returning to the judicial system as adults (Advancement Project, 2010). This same discretion can be used to over-identify behaviors as criminal, violating due process rights afforded by the US Constitution, such as finding a lighter in a routine backpack check and identifying it as an incendiary equivalent to the possession of a weapon (Smith, 2019). Therefore, school policy and practice continue to play a vital role in how these cases are handled. In my experience with School Resource Officers, they are trained to only get involved in legal matters that specifically occur at school. This limits their ability to do anything that is simply against school policy. Further, in cases of criminal activity, School Resource Officers are still often relying on the discretion of the school administration to label the offense and choose whether or not to press charges. Therefore, school policy and practice influence how the law is reflected and how it will impact students.

Restorative justice is a far cry from a traditional discipline policy rooted in obeying the letter of the law and enforcing judgment and punishment. The shift from a traditional discipline policy to the restorative mindset includes dramatically different concepts such as "moral learning, community participation and caring, respectful dialogue, forgiveness, responsibility, apology, and setting things right or making

amends" (Adams, 2004, p. 3). These ideas are difficult to mandate within policy and organizational procedures. Instead, the heart of restorative justice must be reflected in the hearts and mindsets of the people who are implementing it (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001).

School communities may choose to write restorative justice into their discipline policy for a variety of reasons, including a response to a discipline event (or series of discipline events), a response to the ineffectiveness and harmfulness of exclusionary discipline practices, or perhaps through a visionary leader or community searching for a more virtuous manner to deal with discipline. Columbine High School responded to its tragic shooting by implementing zero-tolerance policies and creating a narrative that implied that a sect of children did not belong in school and needed to be excluded (Artello, Hayes, Muschert & Spencer, 2015). Despite this, after studying the effects of exclusionary discipline within its school setting, Columbine has since turned to restorative practices (Muschert, 2014). This decision was congruent with the needs of the Columbine community and the philosophy of community building that is at the center of restorative practices (Varnham, 2005). Chicago Public Schools has been under the microscope for years due to their disciplinary practices and a perceived lack of safety. Exclusionary discipline, which has disproportionately affected minority groups, has drawn special attention. Chicago's schools have begun the process of integrating restorative practices within their district discipline policy (Sartain, Allensworth, Porter, Mader, & Steinberg, 2015). Additionally, restorative justice is not only an approach for schools within the United States. In New Zealand, many schools are making the effort

to integrate restorative practices, seeing overall positive outcomes; the popularity of the practice is beginning to make headway (Wearmouth, Mckinney, & Glynn, 2007).

Two themes emerge in cases where restorative justice has been implemented as a district-wide policy. First, the implementation of restorative practices does not generally replace a traditional policy or legal responsibility; instead, one supports the other. Either restorative practices supplement the traditional, or the traditional discipline practices supplement the new restorative philosophy. Restorative practices in the examples highlighted previously did not eliminate exclusionary practices (Wearmouth, et al.Mckinney, & Glynn, 2007; Sartain, et al.Allensworth, Porter, Mader, & Steinberg, 2015; Muschert 2014). A second theme is a consistent implementation of restorative practices, which can be challenged by incongruent values and beliefs about students or the worthiness of restorative approaches within schooling (Wearmouth, et al. 2007; Sartain, et al., 2015; Muschert 2014). Understanding these issues could prove to be valuable for leaders considering restorative justice approaches in both policy and practice.

Discipline policies that incorporate restorative practices consistently include many provisions they are intended to eliminate. For instance, in Chicago Public Schools, restorative practices are used as a way to prevent suspensions, but the policy is still written so consequences for offenses can be exclusionary, such as suspension or expulsion (Sartain, et al., 2015). This practice utilizes restorative justice as a supplemental prevention tool. This use of restorative practices is similar to how a discipline policy might invoke parent contact or principal conferences as preventative measures. Another use of restorative practices that have become more commonplace is

a practice called *suspension reduction* or *suspension diversion* (Drewery, 2004). This policy works by sentencing a student with the traditional code of conduct, but then giving the student a chance to reduce the suspension or eliminate it if they choose to engage in restorative conferencing. This practice is incongruent with the philosophy that restorative practices must be engaged voluntarily and the student must feel integrated into the school community before restorative practices can be effective (Bazemore, 1999).

Although restorative justice as a philosophy has been adopted by many local education agencies, one major point of concern for proponents of restorative reform is the issue of implementation fidelity. For instance, tensions manifested due to the restorative justice reform in a school in Australia. Researchers found school administrators at one troubled school site were prone to a control mindset, resulting in direct conflict with the principles of restorative justice. The controlling mindset is the idea that, for schools to operate well, teachers and administrators should be the sole authority of discipline decisions (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). This is a paternal mindset with the underlying belief that educators are more equipped to know what is best for disciplinary actions than the community, the victim, or the offender. Cameron and Thorsborne (2001) concluded that implementation challenges may be attributed to a mindset that must be adjusted before effective enactment can take place. The study also proffered the mindset is manifested in the organization through its structures, such as a decision-making bottleneck that can occur among administrators (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). Other implementation concerns include the ability of implementers to work in collaboration with groups of different mindsets. In the study of the New

Zealand school mentioned previously, it was determined that some school leaders might have difficulty with the restorative justice process if they were not sensitive to cultural mismatch (Wearmouth, et al., 2007). This is another instance where the mindset or worldview of the implementers played a vital role in implementation fidelity. In a different study of Ontario schools, a similar finding indicated it was necessary to consider cultural aspects of the school, which may include the worldview and mindset of teachers to sustain restorative reforms (Reimer, 2011).

Further, and more broadly sociological, understanding honor culture could be paramount in understanding the struggle of shifting discipline practices (Brown, 2016). First, one must understand the influence teachers have on discipline within a school. It is the job of the principal to carry out the most major discipline policy; however, it is also the job of the principal to ensure that the policy is both fair and *perceived* to be fair. This can include consideration of an outward public perception of the decision and the inward staff perception. According to research done by McMahon and Sharpe (2006), school policies around the United States are not aiming to help the student who committed the offense or to deter him or her from committing another offense; instead, the student becomes a message to others. Knowing these policies are ineffective, one must ask who the message is for, and who is listening.

While there needs to be more research done on the topic, one could assume teachers are listening. There may be a specific cultural group in the United States, particularly in southern states, that would be especially concerned with how a situation is handled to maintain the reputation of the administration. Brown (2016) has made a compelling argument that people who align with an honor culture mindset may be prone

to insist on maintaining reputation during times of turmoil. It would be important to know whether there is a connection between an honor culture mindset and a resistance to implement restorative practices.

Upon analysis, a major gap in the current restorative justice literature is the lack of depth regarding problematic issues of implementation. Although many studies noted concerns and speculated on their origins, none have deeply investigated the experience of individuals struggling with using restorative practices. This significant deficiency in the scholarship needs to be addressed to build an appropriate theory of action for understanding and improving reform policy and corresponding practice.

The story of Marcus reminds me of one important truth: those who implement restorative practices have more power and responsibility than simply following policy. In the court system, a district attorney must be careful to label the infraction precisely so that when it is explained to the jury they will likely decide that the charges are appropriate given the legal definition of the crime. Vertical overcharging is the act of asking for a punishment that is beyond the spirit of the law, but is a risky move for prosecutors, as juries will be compelled to acquit such cases. In schools, there is no jury. The school leader can label an infraction as he or she chooses, and then also acts as the jury in determining whether or not the punishment is appropriate. Those implementing zero-tolerance policies, therefore, can continually enforce laws to the fullest extent and, as such, wash their hands of any ethical decision making. In contrast, those who are implementing restorative practice must make the ethical call and are held accountable by the community.

With Marcus, the most important thing that had to be decided was whether or not to have a circle at all. Two things had to be carefully considered in making this decision. First, this was a new student in our community. There were many people, including adults, who were looking to see how this situation would be handled as it was one of the first major incidents of the new school year with the new students. It was tempting to "set a tone" or to "send a message" to the community, especially knowing we had so many new students. One way to send this unspoken message is to have students see their peers walk out in handcuffs. This kind of response is often intended to create a display of law and order. The other significant consideration was the long-term effects of placing Marcus into the judicial system at a young age. Would we be helping him by turning him over to the police, or would this cause more damage than good? In the three years of implementing restorative justice, there were some instances where we chose to engage the School Resource Officer due to the nature of the incident.

Ultimately with Marcus, we decided to not press charges and conduct a very significant restorative conference instead. The conference ended with a reduced suspension (as agreed by the committee), and a list of other community service activities. As a part of his contract, Marcus joined a class that helped him create flyers to promote positivity and encourage healthy life habits. His creations were very thoughtful, and it garnered him favor with the community. Considering the best interests of Marcus, we made the right call.

The Circle to Prevent a Circle

Date: Years 2 and 3 of Implementation

These kinds of circles did not happen in the first year. One of my favorite things that came out of implementing restorative practices was a side effect that I never expected. First, students started to circle up and resolve conflict on their own. This is not to say they would borrow a restorative script and reserve a room to have a circle. *As a side note, we do have plans to train students to be certified peer leaders to conduct restorative conferences.* However, what happened organically was much less formal. Students began to use language such as "we need to circle up" or "what can I do to make this right?" This was something that happened as a subtle grassroots movement, but it has not been formally counted or studied, as it was a surprise to all of us.

Every year, we saw a decrease in restorative conferencing. In our first year, we conducted 48 restorative conferences. The following year we only did 36, and the final year we only did nine. It is important to note the last year of implementation ended with distance learning at home for the last quarter of the year. Even with this in mind, the need for restorative conferencing decreased with every year of implementation. From my observations, I do not believe we had less conflict or fewer incidents. I believe students started to become self-sufficient and began advocating healthy conflict resolution in their community during times of struggle. I am perplexed about how to study this kind of phenomenon, as I am being intentionally left out of the conversation, but unequivocally delighted to see students affecting their resolution.

Another amazing thing that happened was that students started requesting circles before an incident even occurred. Students would wait in my office and beg us to get a group together so they could "talk it out". Sometimes they were able to discuss by themselves, but most of the time the administrative team would help facilitate the

conference. This was not something we encouraged or planned for. It was something that happened naturally as students started to become familiar with the restorative mindset. Because these circles were informal and there was no incident to report in the student logs, there were no official records for these meetings. Starting next year, we will start collecting data on these “preventative circles”, but the information about these specific circles is given strictly from memory.

All other stories within this dissertation have been based on real data and official documents. Every story has been crafted to accurately reflect the restorative process as it truly manifested during these first years of implementation. Before I would write each story, I would first review the initial referral that was written on the incident. Many times this document would contain some raw emotion about the event as it was most often written right after the incident occurred. After reviewing the initial referral, I would then look at the restorative contract. This is the document that was created during the conference by everyone in the circle. This document is signed by the student and their parent indicating they agree to its terms. The contract contains the list of things that the student has agreed to do to make things right with the school. If a specific person is in charge of certain aspects of the contract, then it would be noted in the contract.

Next, I would look at my journal. After restorative conferences, I would write down my reflective thoughts. The journal served two purposes. The initial reason for my journaling was to help me remember key things about the student we were helping. I learned something new about my students every time we carried out a restorative conference. It was important to me that I took the time to remember these important

aspects of the student. Next, I wanted to be reflective of the restorative process. I would note things I wish I had done differently or wished had turned out differently. This journal played a very important role as we engaged in cycles of inquiry on the restorative process. Finally, I would take all the artifacts and I would review them with any other person on the admin team who was involved in the circle. This would help me bring to life the story and help corroborate the artifacts and my memories with someone who experienced it as well.

When it comes to preventative circles, there were no such artifacts to create an accurate story such as the ones related so far in this study. However, I would be remiss to leave out something so important to the implementation process. I would highly encourage leaders who are looking to make data-based decisions to find an efficient way to document all incidences of restorative work, especially the incidences that occur which are less formal.

The following circle story is fictional but represents the kind of circle that happened many times at our school. During this last year of implementation, we would spend most of our time doing circles like this. We were not able to use the restorative questions or the restorative conferencing script because there was no offense, no offender, no victim. We used professional discretion to employ the restorative framework and mindset to allow students to talk through their issues with one another. It is also important to note the majority of these kinds of circles were requested by the students instead of initiated by the admin team.

Caroline: *Mister, I need a circle with Mayra.*

Me: *Why, what's going on?*

Caroline: *She keeps throwing shade on Snapchat, and I'm about to lose it.*

Me: *Okay, can you tell me what she is doing on Snapchat?*

Caroline: *She keeps calling me out. If this goes on, I'm going to have to fight her. And I really don't want to be suspended.*

Me: *Why do you think she is calling you out?*

Caroline: *I have no idea!*

Me: *Okay, what I want to do is go get Mayra so we can ask her why she is doing that. Are you calm and ready to work toward a positive resolution?*

Caroline: *Yes, but can I have a few minutes to go to the bathroom and collect myself?*

Me: *Yes.*

After getting Mayra, the three of us sit down in a circle in my office.

Me: *Okay, first things first… no one is in trouble. This is not that kind of trip to the principal's office. We are here to simply stop something that could end up bringing you back into the office for a much more serious meeting with your parents.* (Note: While students do see the benefits of a restorative conference after a major incident, they do not enjoy the circle. Most students will do whatever it takes to prevent having to do a restorative conference. It is extremely uncomfortable to explain to the victim of your actions exactly what you did and what you were thinking during the incident. Not to mention that you have to do all that as your parents are watching). *Are both of you prepared to have a civil conversation about what is going on so we can move forward in a positive way?*

Caroline: *Yes*

Mayra: *Yes*

Me: *Mayra, what's going on?*

Mayra: *Caroline knows what did.*

Me: *Maybe she does, maybe she doesn't. But I know one thing for sure. I don't know what's going here and I would like to know. Will you tell me?*

Mayra: *She said I have a big nose.*

Caroline: *What! I never said that.*

Me: *Caroline, you will get a chance to talk in a bit.*

Mayra: *Oh, she is lying.*

Me: *How do you know she is lying? Did you hear her say it?*

Mayra: *No.*

Me: *Then how do you know she is lying?*

Mayra: *Bryan told me.*

Caroline: *Bryan! I cannot…*

Me: *Caroline, I promise you will have a chance to talk. Mayra, what did Bryan say to you.*

Mayra: *She said that Caroline started messaging her about getting back with him and making fun of my nose.*

Me: *Did you see any of the messages?*

Mayra: *No.*

Me: *Do you believe that she said those things about you?*

Mayra: *I know she did.*

Me: *Then let's find out just to make sure. Okay?*

Mayra: *Okay*

Me: *Caroline, did you at any point maybe say something less than kind about Mayra's nose?*

Caroline: *No, and I haven't messaged Bryan since we broke up.*

Mayra: *Whatever!*

Me: *Mayra, you need to allow Caroline to talk.*

Me: *Caroline, what would Bryan say if he were in this room right now?*

Caroline: *He would say exactly what I am saying.*

Me: *Is everyone comfortable with me bringing in Bryan to the circle?*

Caroline: *Yes*

Mayra: *I guess.*

After Bryan arrived, we adjusted the circle to allow Bryan a spot.

Me: *Bryan, thank you for being here. We have been discussing a matter and these two ladies would like some clarification on something.*

Bryan: *Okay.*

Me: *Bryan, did you tell Mayra that Caroline had a big nose?*

Bryan: *Yes, I did.*

Mayra: *See! Told ya.*

Me: *Bryan, when did Caroline say that?*

Bryan: *She didn't. I was just trying to make Mayra jealous*.

Mayra: *Gasp.*

Me: *Bryan, what were you thinking when you decided to tell that lie?*

Bryan: *I just wanted Mayra to like me more.*

Me: *What do you think now?*

Bryan: *That it was really dumb.*

Me: *What do you think you should do about what you have done to make it right?*

Bryan: *Mayra, I'm really sorry I lied to you.*

Me: *What about Caroline?*

Bryan: *Caroline, I'm sorry I lied about you.*

Me: *Bryan, do you realize that these two ladies almost got into a fight over this? How would you have felt if they were both being suspended today for being in a fight?*

Bryan: *I would feel terrible.*

Me: *Does anyone have anything they'd like to say to Bryan?*

Mayra: *Thank you for your apology, but it is over. I deserve better.*

Me: *Anything else?*

Bryan: *I am really sorry.*

Me: *Bryan, thank you for your honesty. Please go ahead and head back to class.*

Bryan leaves and the circle is back to its original participants.

Me: *Anything you would like to say to one another?*

Mayra: *I'm so sorry I believed him. I should have just talked to you about it.*

Caroline: *It's okay. And you are right. You do deserve to do better.*

Me: *Anything else that needs to be said?*

Mayra: *No, we are good mister.*

The two girls stand up, hug, and exit the office.

During my first year of implementation, these kinds of circles were not happening. Only after students got used to using circles and using their words did preventative circles start occurring. These kinds of circles are extremely beneficial to

the overall mission of the school. After these circles, we would very rarely have an incident of distraction afterward. It would not be uncommon for a group to need a follow-up circle, but these circles consistently resulted in a peaceful compromise. Students would not be distracted by a fight or a screaming argument in the hall. Students would avoid needing to be placed in detention or any kind of suspension that would keep them out of the classroom. But possibly the most beneficial aspect of these kinds of circles was that students could let it go and get the distraction off their minds. Without these circles, students would think about the dispute all day. Most early adolescent students do not have the emotional capacity to compartmentalize things that are bothering them so they can focus on the task at hand. This, therefore, leads to students missing entire days of instruction due to issues that could be resolved in a 30-minute circle.

Preventative circles are a phenomenon that happened by student request. There are two reasons why I believe this occurred. The first is students had the vocabulary and the structure to talk to one another in a civilized way. Building emotional vocabulary is an intentional outcome of a complete restorative justice program (Snow, 2013). One way to keep a child from getting physical and violent when they are emotional is by helping teach them how to talk about what is bothering them. This explains why some very young children have a hard time staying calm when they are experiencing distress (Galtung, 1969). Talking through emotion is what would be helpful, but when a child does not have the ability, structure, or vocabulary to do so then it can be common to turn physical (Dionne, Tremblay, Boivin, Laplante, & Pérusse, 2003). In the next

section, I will explore the ways that emotional vocabulary is intentionally developed with all students throughout the year.

The other reason I believe these circles manifested organically is that students were empowered to take ownership of their discipline development. Students initiate a preventative circle are often students who have experience in a restorative conference, in many cases as the offender in a previous incident. One of the most shocking aspects of the experience is the choice they have in the circle. They have the option to not do the restorative circle and instead have a hearing with the principal. They have the choice to say exactly what they were thinking when they committed the act. They have the option to say anything to anyone in the circle at end of the restorative conference. And finally, they have the option to approve or not approve a fair contract. Many students thrive when they feel like they have the autonomy to make choices (Jolivette, Stichter, & McCormick, 2002). Once students start to see options and choices within their discipline progression, they can see the options and choices to avoid engaging in hurtful or harmful activities in other situations. Restorative justice teaches them when they use their words they can have control over the trajectory of an event.

Like all restorative justice, preventative circles happen naturally when educational leaders are listening, providing structures for discourse, and being sensitive to the needs of the community. However, with restorative practices, some frameworks and scripts help leaders stay on track with proven methods of question-asking and circle protocol. However, this does not seem to exist with preventative circles. A natural next step for practitioners and scholars alike might include the expansion of restorative frameworks and protocols to make these circles consistent and effective. Leaders

implementing restorative practices should treat preventative circles as an official practice of restorative work, keeping notes and documentation on every formal and informal preventative circle.

The Circle to Build a Circle

Date: Years 1, 2, and 3 of Implementation

Restorative justice only works when you have something to restore. The circle needs to be formed first so that when it is broken, the members of the circle will know what the community needs to be restored to. The single most important aspect of implementing restorative practices is the intentional building of community and culture within the school. School culture is built in many different ways. Culture is formed through a series of formal and informal rituals and interactions that shape the mood and atmosphere of the school. Some frame a positive school culture to be a separate goal of schools, distinguished from the academic and achievement goals that are at the core of most schools. However, these two aspects of schooling are very interrelated, as schools that are high achieving often display indicators of having a strong culture (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). One informal practice we have at our school which promotes positive school culture is adults greeting students. When students walk into the school they are met with a smile. Every time a student walks into a class they are greeted as they arrive. Greeting students is an easy way to promote a positive school environment that gives dignity and worth to all students (Daniels, 2011). There are also formal ways a school will decide to promote a positive school culture. Our school does a class every morning called TEAMS. This is a structure that is in place to be a non-academic time to focus on promoting community and relationships. During these times, students will

engage in discussion, watch current events, engage in community service, play games, and do other activities that promote building strong relationships. In many schools, these kinds of activities are going to the wayside as school leaders prioritize academic instruction and intervention over such endeavors creating an all work and no play environment (Dills, Morgan, & Rotthoff, 2011). However, other school leaders, such as the leadership team at my school, see the benefit of taking precious school time to promote a positive, whimsical and affirming school culture.

One of the formal practices we implemented was to conduct one community circle every week during TEAMS class. Community circles are a restorative practice that helps all students learn how to speak in a circle, and are designed to ensure that students feel valued and listened to. Community circles are a series of questions that are posed to the group in a variety of different ways. The first way is to ask a question and then allow every student to respond. Normally, this would be done by selecting a student to answer the question then having that student determine whether the students will take turns going clockwise or counter-clockwise to answer the prompt. Another way to ask a question is by asking for a popcorn response. This resembles more of an open discussion. Students will respond as they wish and not everyone in the circle has to respond to these questions. Scales can also be used to ask students to respond with a number that indicates an answer. For example, “How are you feeling today on a scale of 1 – 5?”. Circles integrate the use of different question-asking strategies, as well as a variety of different topics. One important type of community circle is the “Check-in” which allows students to talk about their day, their worries, and their frustrations. These kinds of circles are incredible for building emotional vocabulary. Other circles could be

humorous, nostalgic, contemporaneous (responding to current events), or philosophical. For example, at our school, we celebrate one virtue every week. Many times the community circles will be a philosophical deep-dive into the week's virtue. All teachers are trained in how to write a community circle and I will often send one out that I wrote that teachers can elect to use if they choose.

To make this crucial part of the story come alive, I would like to share an example of how a community circle might look, feel, and sound. As in the previous section, I did not collect specific artifacts with this restorative practice. However, I did conduct several community circles as a guest facilitator during TEAMS time. I would like to share one of my favorite community circles I remember facilitating. This fictional circle will serve as an example of what students at my school do every week as a part of this vital practice. To save time, I am going to pretend this circle only has 5 students, however, most of these circles will contain 20 to 25 students.

Me: *Good morning class! Thank you for having me here today. I want to conduct a community circle this morning. Let's take time and make sure that our circle is in good shape. Can we scoot around and make sure everyone is properly in the circle?*

Students adjust the circle. This is an example of having high expectations for the restorative practice. It is also important to note the circle itself is very important and might require classes to move furniture or even go outside depending on the limitations of the classroom space.

Me: *Thank you. Now, I want to go over some of our norms in the circle. First, it is important to tell your truth. Be honest. There is no need to try to give an answer that you think we will like. Next, be present in how we listen to others. As others are talking,*

let's give them the respect that you would like when you talk. You don't have to prepare your answer in your head. Just wait for it to be your turn and then answer with what comes naturally. Okay, let's get started.

When I say the word "hero", what is the first word that comes to mind? Just one word. Who would like to go first?

Johnny: *Me!*

Me*: Okay, Johnny after you answer do you want to circle to go left or right?*

Johnny: *Right.*

Me: *What word comes to mind?*

Johnny: *Strong*

Mary: *Powerful*

Juan: *Courageous*

Mindy: *Strong*

Jesus: *Brave*

Me: *Great answers. The word that comes to mind for me is selfless.*

It is important to recognize the importance of everyone in the circle. One mistake that some teachers make is to leave themselves out of the circle and not participate themselves. To build a relationship it takes both sides to be vulnerable and students need to see that happening with adults before they will become comfortable. For those who are implementing community circles, I highly recommend that all people in the room, including paraprofessionals, custodial staff, assistant teachers, students with disabilities that limit communication skills, and especially the leader of the circle should participate in answering the questions.

Me: *If you could have any superpower which one would you choose? Who would like to go first?*

Mary: *Me*

Me: *Which way would you like to go?*

Mary: *Right. And I would like to be invisible.*

Johnny: *I would want to fly.*

Jesus: *I would want immortality.*

Mindy: *Fly*

Juan*: I would be one of those cool shapeshifters.*

Me: *Why did you pick that superpower? What does that say about you? Anyone can respond.*

Mindy: *I hate waiting in the car. I get so impatient. I wish I could just fly to where I was going so I don't have to wait in traffic.*

Mary: *I want to be invisible because I like being left alone.*

Me: *I would pick being able to read minds so I can make sure all of you are focusing during class!*

Juan: *I would like to be a shapeshifter so I can spy and make see who my real friends are.*

Me: *Okay, this next question will be a thumbs up or thumbs down response. If you had the choice to have an incredible superpower and be in the spotlight or to not have a superpower and feel normal and fit in, which would you pick? Thumbs up if you would pick having a superpower.*

I have done this circle with these questions many times. I am always shocked by the response that I get. Every single time, middle school students will overwhelmingly choose to NOT have a superpower in exchange for fitting in. As the leaders of the circle and a leader of the school, I always gain crucial insight into my students during community circles.

Me*: Last question. Who is your hero in your life? You can say why you picked that person if you'd like. Who would like to go first?*

Juan: *Me! My mom is my hero because she is awesome. To the right.*

Me: *My hero was my grandma. She was an amazing woman.*

Mindy: *I pick my parents because they always take care of me.*

Jesus: *My uncle because he just joined the army.*

Johnny: *My sister. She always takes me to school and helps me.*

Mary: *I pick my grandpa. He works hard so I can have a good life.*

Me: *Thank you so much for this amazing circle. Let's all get the room put back together and get ready for release.*

Building a community is paramount to ensuring restorative justice becomes an effective practice. This was especially important during this most current academic year as we expanded our student population. Community circles teach students three very essential skills that help shape the community and culture: discourse, emotional vocabulary, and membership. To study discourse means to study human communication, or more specifically, human conversation (Schourup, 2016). According to Reisigl and Wodak (2016), discourse must have the following components:

- a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of social action
- socially constituted and socially constitutive
- related to a macro-topic
- linked to the argumentation about validity claims such as truth and normative validity involving several social actors who have different points of view.

While English is taught in school (particularly with English Language Learners), it can be argued that discourse is acquired through opportunities to hear and engage in conversation rather than being explicitly taught. However, one important aspect of discourse involves the sharing of different ideas and points of view (Reisigl & Wodak (2016; Tuwe, 2016), which can be hard to create in an academic setting, and especially for young students who are still developing their understanding of the concepts being discussed. The beautiful thing about community circles is that the subject being debated is accessible to all in the circle and, as such, students are less likely to be focused on understanding the concept and more likely to focus on how to engage in quality discourse.

Because allowing students to acquire discourse skills will likely have the most significant impact on a student's ability to engage in discourse independently, community circle leaders invest in students by taking the time to explicitly teach conversation skills. One key skill is about listening; students are taught to listen to the person who is talking instead of preparing their answer. Another common practice that is explicitly taught during community circles is about being true to your own beliefs and story. A community circle leader will often say, "speak your truth" indicating

permission to be different and introduce new perspectives. Finally, students are taught to "practice lean expression" and the need to be succinct with answers to allow everyone in the circle time to participate.

Emotional vocabulary is also taught and acquired during community circles. If you have ever asked a group of teenagers the question, "How are you feeling today?" you will likely hear a response that lacks robust vocabulary. In my experience, when you ask that question you will get one of two responses: "I'm good" or "not that good." When a child can only categorize their feelings into a dichotomous system, then it limits their capacity to truly process and thus deal with their emotional distress (Westrupp, Reilly, McKean, Mensah, & Nicholson, 2020). During community circles, students are asked in many different ways to share their emotions and feelings. Community circle leaders will sometimes pass out or display vocabulary lists that help students use other words than just *good* or *not good*. Most likely the most significant piece of community circles that help develop emotional vocabulary comes through modeling. Community circle leaders always participate in the circle and are encouraged to use robust emotional language.

Finally, membership may be realized during community circles. School leaders can choose to assume students will find a place to belong. However, we all have been or know someone who did not find a place to belong during their middle school or other years of public education. A sense of membership (or a sense of belonging) is essential for moral formation and serves as a key aspect for all restorative work (Covaleskie, 2013; DeNicolo, Yu, Crowley, & Gabel, 2017, Berkovich & Eyal, 2020). One aspect of community circles that helps create membership is that everyone is in the circle, and

everyone has a voice in the circle. If a student is not ready to answer a question, they can have the opportunity to pass and allow the discourse to continue without them for some time. However, circle leaders are trained to always return to that student later to allow them to participate. In a circle, there is no dominance or position of power. All members of the circle have equal value and all members belong.

Conclusion

The third year of implementing restorative practices was the wildest year I have had a principal. It started with fitting 150 extra students in an already crowded school; and it ended with sending all students home to do distance learning because of a worldwide pandemic. The reason we were able to have a great year despite these conditions was that we maintained our culture. We continued to engage in important practices that built community, we allowed for students to have their voice heard as they created preventative circles, and we resisted the temptation to "send a message" by overzealously applying harsh punishment for behaviors that were outcries for help. Restorative practices helped us to maintain and continue to strengthen our culture and community.

Chapter 6: The Final Circle

After the 3-Year Implementation

So far you have walked with me through my journey as my team implemented restorative practices in a school that used strict zero-tolerance protocols for many years before my arrival. This manuscript has included recollections of real circles that happened throughout the implementation process. I used data that were collected to recount the stories, taking special care to articulate the exact process that was undertaken for each situation. This collection of circle stories shows the diverse uses and outcomes of a restorative response. During a narrative inquiry study, the author (in this case, myself) is compelled to give an accurate account and stay mindful of one's proclivities, prejudices, and mindset (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004; Clandinin & Connelly; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1994). Even so, a narrative inquiry study is, by definition, the author's story. As such, by following the traditions of this particular qualitative research, this manuscript thus far only contains the implementation story as I experienced it. Every circle that has been analyzed so far was a circle that I participated in or led. This has limited what can be brought to light to only things that I have personally observed. While I played a major role in the introduction and training for restorative circles, there were many circles I never experienced, undertaken without my direct participation, as part of our daily journey. Just like any phenomenon, multiple perspectives are needed to paint a more accurate and comprehensive picture. What was the lived experience of those, other than myself, who also went through the journey? As with most restorative circles, we want to rely on the wisdom of the group to better understand the situation.

This chapter is a departure from the narrative inquiry approach and seeks to capture a greater understanding of the lived experience of this transition beyond the author's limited perspective. This chapter explores a reflective community circle that took place after the completion of the third year of restorative practices. Practitioners who were at the school before and after restorative justice was implemented were invited to participate. This circle serves two purposes. First, it is another example of a kind of circle that can be done as part of implementing restorative circles. This occasion showcases a community circle, which is designed to reflect upon a particular event or series of events. For this reason, the circle will be paraphrased and discussed through my reflection. This will simulate the group, including myself, reflecting together. As discussed in the next section, due to my positionality, it was necessary to keep all responses anonymous. However, this will simulate a circle as if I were in the room. Second, this circle will help me and readers to gain perspective on others' lived experience. I conducted a line by line two-part coding and theming protocol to glean important truths from the interview through qualitative analysis (Yin, 2016). The chapter will then conclude with personal reflections on the final circle.

Circle Interview Method

Group interviews and focus groups can be an effective approach to gaining data about a community's experience. The design of this interview needed to be informed by three particular considerations:

1. The purpose of the interview: The lived experience individually and collectively.
2. The positionality of the researcher.

3. The diversity of those involved.

The purpose of this interview was to explore the lived experience of the transition from a school that had implemented a zero-tolerance policy for years, to a school that fully embraced restorative practices. This kind of exploration is designed to be hermeneutical in nature, and similar to restorative justice, values the subjective way that different people may experience the same series of events. For this reason, the group interview subjects (or focus group) were all given questions to process individually, but answers also built on one another. The interview ended with an open question to allow for the individual and the group to finish their thoughts and ideas about the transition.

The selection of participants for this study was not random such as the case of a more positivistic study. Instead, the sample was selected purposefully to provide a better chance for deeper and richer evidence to investigate the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). Participants were not only be selected based on their experience with the phenomenon, but also their ability and willingness to share their lived experience. The focus case selection that will be made was based on a small group of individuals who were in a position on the staff during its time as a zero-tolerance school and through the entire three-year transition.

The word sample is loosely used within the phenomenological framework. It can be better understood by looking at the etymology of the word, which means example (van Manen, 2014). Van man (2014) expresses the need for purposeful sampling to include diversity within the group of participants:

> However, it may indeed be wise to gather and explore experiential descriptions from individuals who are capable of putting their own experiences in oral or written words. If it is necessary to use the notion of "sample" or "sampling", then it is best to do so with reference to attempt to gain "examples" of experientially rich descriptions (p.353)

My research assistant was given a list of twelve individuals but asked to select only six to participate: two administrative assistants, two administrators, and two teachers. These names were selected randomly out of a hat. However, even though six individuals were selected, at the time of the interview two of the participants had last minute emergencies so the interview was conducted with a group of four. The selection of participants began with the consideration of the entire staff and all those interested in adding to the body of knowledge regarding the implementation of restorative practices. This sample selection is comparable to other studies examining restorative justice (Meagher, 2009; Mateer, 2010; Dedinsky, 2010).

Being that I am in the role of administration, protecting the participants' rights was of particular concern. Ensuring that staff members could speak openly and honestly was paramount for this study to be successful. It was my role as the researcher to establish an inquiry culture around the interview and journaling process. It was also important the established trust about the importance of understanding the participants' experiences free of judgment or my perceived personal preference as the researcher and their supervisor.

Positionality is of particular interest in the design of this interview. I am the leader of the school, and therefore hold a position of power for those involved in the

interview. Therefore, it was reasonable to think if I were in the circle the answers could be invalid due to the pressure to give answers that are motivated by making the person of power satisfied rather than their true experience. For this reason, it was decided to not place participants in a situation where they would be worried about a reaction to any statements they might make. For this reason, everyone who participated in the interview did so anonymously. Selection from the pool of potential participants, the gathering of consent, and the interview itself were done without my involvement. It is important to note the interview began by assigning each person a pseudonym that was not gender-specific to protect their identity. When you read the interview, the names were randomly selected for each individual. The interview was recorded, and I was only given a transcript with the pseudonyms associated with each response. Therefore, I do not know who participated in the study and I have no knowledge of who gave any of the responses.

Restorative practices compel individuals to work toward doing things *with* those in which they are experiencing life. This is also the spirit in which this study will take place. There will be a concerted and continual effort made to protect the individuals participating in the study, with their best interests at heart.

One safeguard that was operationalized to maintain ethical conduct was compliance permission from the University of Oklahoma's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Before interviews were conducted, I received permission through the IRB to conduct the research. As a part of this process I engaged in ethical considerations such as the security of participants from maltreatment, procurement of informed consent, the right to privacy, and the problem of deception and dishonesty (Merriam, 1998). All

participants in the interview signed consent forms. IRB approval letter and the interview protocol can be found in Appendix 1-A and 1-B.

Finally, it was important for all interview participants to freely speak their minds about their experience. Due to the nature of the study, it made logical sense to use the restorative questions to develop the interview questions. The following format was used to facilitate the group circle interview.

1. What happened?
2. What was your first reaction to what happened?
3. How do you feel now about what happened?
4. What needs to be still be addressed?
5. Time for free response.

Gaining insight into the lived experience of a phenomenon through interviews and journaling is the lifeblood of a phenomenological study, and for the purposes of this investigation, serves to supplement the narrative inquiry approach taken in the previous chapters. The interview process for a hermeneutic phenomenological study is nuanced and should be strategic and intentional to gain rich and insightful evidence (van Manen, 2014). The purpose of an interview in this framework is either 1) a way of discovering stories about the participant's experience to serve as a piece of evidence to understand deeply the phenomenon that is being studied or 2) a way to gain further insight about the perceived meaning of the phenomenon through conversation (van Manen, 1990). While these interviews may be conversational to allow the researcher to probe into areas as they reveal themselves organically, guiding questions will be operationalized to help the researcher to meet the objective of that particular interview. Therefore, the best

method to collect data in a way that would gain the thoughts and feelings of the individuals and the group collectively was to have the group participate in a community restorative circle.

The Final Circle

Before using qualitative analysis to break down participant responses, it was important to look at the circle as an event in itself. Just as this dissertation has rendered the story of many circles the school has participated in, it makes logical sense to do the same for this final circle. It is important to note that circles can be operationalized for students as well as for adults. This particular circle was not only designed to gain information, but also to allow practitioners to reflect upon their participation in school policy and practice. This kind of circling is an important piece of professional development and growth for schools that adopt a restorative mindset. Therefore, it is important for those who are considering the implementation of restorative practices to see how adults in the school can also utilize the protocols as a professional growth tool. This kind of circle is important before, during, and after the implementation process. One caveat that needs to be considered is that if this circle was only for reflection and professional growth, then all members of this group would have participated, including me. But because I carried out research on the group meeting transcript, I needed to exclude myself for the ethical considerations described in the last section. However, I can simulate being in the circle by responding in writing after the participant responses. These responses reflect a restorative circle in that they were not rehearsed, and I was simply responding in a way to speak my truth. To aid with readability, some responses have been paraphrased. It is also important to note the circle facilitator in nearly all

circles would normally also participate in the discussion, however, the circle facilitator in this circle was a university researcher and not a part of the school community.

Circle Facilitator: *So, let's start with Taylor. Taylor, what's happened with discipline policy and practices at your school? Feel free to talk about the changes around restorative practices or anything else that you've noticed.*

Taylor: *I think the best way to answer that would be that we went from a school before restorative practices, a school that focused on discipline by running stairs, push-ups so it was a physical reaction to a disciplinary issue. Now when Mr. Buckmaster came in, it went from a kind of a school that was run by not fear, but the fear that you're going to get in trouble to hey, we want to be a part of a community. We want to be a part of this community, as opposed to walking around in fear.*

Circle Facilitator: *Thank you. Charlie, what has happened with discipline policy and practice at your school and feel free to talk about the changes around restorative practices and anything else you have noticed?*

Charlie: *Taylor was correct when Taylor said as far as from the difference from before to now. Now it is much more student-centered. The students are empowered to correct what they've done wrong. To identify it, give it a name, to explain what they were thinking and why they chose their actions. Then from that step on they can fix what they've done wrong.*

Circle Facilitator: *Robin?*

Robin: *I think the changes have allowed the kids themselves and their families to come up with ways to restore their justice, to restore their character after getting in trouble or doing something they are not supposed to. Instead of just being given just a*

discipline, a consequence. They get to come up with ways on their own, with their parents, with the principal and try to restore themselves in the eyes of their teachers and administrators.

Circle Facilitator: *Jordan?*

Jordan: *Ah yes, I agree with everything that has been said so far. I also like that, as Taylor mentioned, it was led more towards fear or fear of getting in trouble, and instead of explaining why you got in trouble, you were just told you're in trouble, and here is your consequence. I like that now you are going much deeper into it and you're actually talking about why it's a bigger issue, why it needs to stop, here are your consequences, and you help set up the consequences yourself for the cause of your actions*

My personal written response*:* I agree with the group's sentiments. I am convinced the protocols and questions that are used during the restorative process allow for students to process through who they have harmed instead of what rule they have broken. The emphasis on using words and conversations to talk through conflict and misbehavior is something that happens now without it being forced. It has become a cultural part of our school now. I am pleased to know those who were here before the transition think positively about what has occurred.

Circle Facilitator: *Thank you. This is the second set of questions. What is your first reaction to restorative practices? Taylor, what was your first reaction to restorative justice, restorative practices in your school?*

Taylor: *I need to clarify the question first. Is it what did I think the first time I heard about it or what did I think the first time I experienced it?*

Circle Facilitator: *Well, yeah, and so I would say what was your first reaction to Mr. Buckmaster's introduction of restorative practices in your school?*

Taylor: *I was skeptical, highly skeptical. I just thought we were going to talk about feelings. I was skeptical.*

Circle Facilitator: *Charlie?*

Charlie: *I would say that when I first heard it, I was hopeful that it would do what he said it would do. However, I had my doubts that it would be almost as simple as it sounded. Kids are not little adults so sometimes when we try to think about what we would want, how we would want it explained, and how we would want to deal with it ourselves it can be translated wrong for the kid, and then they're not quite sure how to handle that. So, in that regard, I thought we'd have to be really careful. But as we got into it, and we were practicing it I could see how it would work in the classroom. I was worried about time. I was worried about the pushback from some of the teachers with having to do the circles in the classroom. I was worried that our students were very used to, again to that hard-line drawn and if you messed up, this is what your consequences were and that was the end of it, instead of actually having to sit down and discuss with their peers and the people that they wronged and having to face them.*

Circle Facilitator: *Ok thank you. Robin?*

Robin: *When I first heard about it, I thought it made sense and I thought it was a good idea. I just didn't know if it was going to work. So, I guess that was my first reaction at the time. I didn't know if it was the right thing or not.*

Circle Facilitator: *Jordan?*

Jordan: *I also was skeptical. In my experience, I always thought middle schoolers are smart. They are going to find a way to find a loophole and kind of go around it. I really thought that at first, they were just going to be able to play a part of the circle and really just go with the flow and figure out how to get out of the office and to get out with the least amount of consequences possible. But yeah, I was hopeful but skeptical at first.*

My personal written response*:* One thing I would want this group to know is that I admired the school before I was given the responsibility of becoming the principal. I knew in a real way that students were well-behaved and thoughtful when they came to the high school where I was the assistant principal at the time. I was scared to death to change something that was already achieving many desired outcomes. But I knew I could not lead that way. I completely understand the skepticism of those who were there before restorative justice. I would have to say I was also skeptical about whether it would work or not. My only experience was with high school students, and I feared that younger students would have a hard time engaging their shame, empathy, and emotional vocabulary.

Circle Facilitator: *Thank you. We have two more questions. Taylor, after the three-year implementation of using restorative practices for student discipline, how do you feel about what has happened over those three years?*

Taylor: *I feel really positive about what has happened over the last few years. I've seen it has been extremely effective with conflict resolution, extremely effective. Kids have tools now after sitting through some of these circles. Now, they kind of go out and do their own and they don't even know they're doing it and then if they need some help*

from an adult they'll come and get one. So that's been really, really nice. I think bullying goes way down because other kids put a stop to that and they have an avenue to come talk to us and know that we're not just going to jump all over them. They know we are going to get everybody together that is involved, parents and everybody and we are going to figure this out. I'm happy Mr. Buckmaster brought this system to our school.

Circle Facilitator: *Thank you. Charlie, after three years, impressions, insights?*

Charlie: *I was very impressed by the entire process. I thought, the first time I sat in one and saw a kid have to face who they had hurt, with their parents next to them and have to truly explain what was going on and really search in themselves to figure out what that was and to realize that this process of going through there, like Taylor, had said they have the tools to do it. So, the first time we got to see it and go through it they were learning but then as they kind of went through and stared an understanding of what we were asking them as far as questions go they realize that we were there for them and wanted to help them through this process. Not just give them a punishment for doing something wrong. It was really an eye-opener and I think it helped not just in teacher-to- student or principal-to-student, but also teacher-to-teacher when there was a conflict between teachers. There was an opportunity to use restorative justice and really restore the relationship and the working environment for them, not just make them uncomfortable. That was a big bonus to using this system.*

Circle Facilitator: *Okay, good, good thank you, that's good. Robin, your impressions?*

Robin: *I really liked the changes we've had these three years. I like how there's a lot of questions for the kids involved. Like instead of telling them what they should do it asks*

them what they should do and it helps restore their image and character. It gets the kids thinking about what they did, how they hurt people, how they hurt themselves, how they hurt their parents. Then it also gets them thinking, how can I fix this in the future and try to avoid coming back to this situation again? I've sat in a few circles and it's been really good, you go into the circle and the kid is just mad, angry, upset about something and may not even recognize they are in the wrong but at the end of the circle they end up apologizing recognizing they've hurt their teachers and classmates. It's nice to see that change of heart and it's nice for them to have the opportunity to help fix the situation, to come up with ways to make it better for themselves and the rest of the school.

Circle Facilitator: *Jordan?*

Jordan: *Yeah, I've been very surprised. I've seen a lot of change, a lot of growth in each student's feelings, thoughts, and expressions as far as after they leave the office and go about the rest of the day or even how they conduct themselves the rest of the year. I notice the first year the eighth graders were very skeptical with it not really buying into it but now comparing that group to our now eight graders [who] were sixth-graders two years ago. You can see how the process has improved and how the student's perspective about resolving issues has also improved.*

My personal written response*:* I am very excited about how those in the circle have experienced the transition. I love that Taylor said students are using restorative practices without even realizing it. I think that is fantastic. I was also surprised that people in the circle saw that it worked better as students started to get used to the process and buy

into the culture of restorative practices. One aspect I did not consider is how the process has helped us deal with adult conflict as well as student conflict.

Circle Facilitator: *Great thank you. Here is an opportunity to, this is the last question for the entire group. Then I'll just open it up for more of a traditional focus group opportunity for us. But this last question is your opportunity to really be frank and be honest about where you've been the last three years and what's going to happen here. The question is, Taylor what are the issues around student discipline that need to be discussed or addressed?*

Taylor: *I think one of the issues we have is that restorative practice takes a lot of time. So, when you're in a large scale of 750 kids, you've got to be really careful and make sure and carry out the full process of this practice. So, taking each case, each kid and working that process, taking the time to do it. I know it gets busy but it's really critical.*

Circle Facilitator: *Thank you. Charlie?*

Charlie: *So, time is the big issue because it's not just the initial meeting. Right? So, the initial meeting takes time, but then there's also the follow up for that and making sure that the consequences that the kids came up with or that you guys decided on are followed through with. On a regular week, it doesn't seem to be a big deal but if it's the week before Thanksgiving break the kids seem to be a little hyped up and the numbers go up it becomes a little bit harder to follow through. I think we would cut down on some of the repeating if we implemented a system that would help us keep up with that a little bit better.*

Circle Facilitator: *Robin?*

Robin: *I can't really think of any issues with it but listening to the first two answers, it seems like time is probably the big issue because we have gotten a lot bigger, the school has gotten a lot bigger over the last three years. So, it's probably more difficult to handle the caseload, the issues that arise between student behavior so just handling that timewise and like another person said just making sure you put the same importance on every issue even if it's a small issue compared to a big. Give it time and give it your full effort to help that child and their family figure out what they need to do for the future.*

Circle Facilitator: *Thank you, Robin. Jordan?*

Jordan: *Yeah, I think time is an issue. I also think that students [who] are new to our particular district do not fully understand this practice. The students [who] come from our elementary schools practice restorative justice so they are used to it. But the new students from other districts that have no idea what restorative justice is, it feels tricky to get them to buy into this practice. They might feel weirded out and it makes it difficult for them to fully understand this practice. We need to take the time to explain what restorative justice is, why we do this, why it works, and how it helps us as a school.*

My personal written response*:* People's time is the most important consideration for restorative practices. If a place does not commit to allowing the administration to give large amounts of time to restorative practices, it will not work. I also agree with Jordan about the concern for students that come from different school communities and how the transition would be difficult for them. I would add I think both concerns could be mitigated by involving more student leaders to help with the facilitation of restorative practices. This is something I would like to address soon as we evolve with our restorative approach.

Circle Facilitator: *Great. This is more of an open question. This concludes our session and it's just for anyone out of the four of you who would like to add anything to the discussion of restorative justice? Please state your name before you answer if you would like to contribute.*

Robin: *Can I go? All right. So, this is Robin. One thing that Jordan reminded me of is when kids come in from other schools. There's an example of this kid that came in and I thought he was one of the most difficult students I've ever dealt with and after sending him to the office to talk to the principal and after them going through the restorative justice practices. I saw him change as a person and I know that's a result of restorative justice so instead of him just getting in big-time trouble and just things happening. He was dealt with in a very, you know, justice-driven way, and he was given the chance to figure things out for himself and his situation at our school as a new student.*

Circle Facilitator: *Thank you.*

Charlie: *This is Charlie. I just wanted to piggyback off what Jordan said with the new students. One of the hurdles I think that the system can improve is that when we get new teachers they also need to be trained in that mindset and understand what it is, what we are trying to do, the objectives, and the goals. What we are trying to accomplish in that. We talk a lot about building that community with them but then we need to make sure we built in that time to train them in the actual steps and processes of restorative justice.*

Circle Facilitator: *Good. Can I just quickly interject on this?*

I'm taking personal liberty here, hopefully, it'll professionally support Mr. Buckmaster as well. But my question is that Charlie, you brought up this issue or notion of mindset and I'm just kind of curious over the last three years through implementation. Have you seen within you colleagues in your professional practice a change in mindset from viewing discipline and student conduct and pupil personnel issues as something that they responded to in a punitive exclusionary way to a different kind of mindset to a different kind of way to view students and how to respond to behavior that needs to be changed?

Charlie: *I would say for sure. Definitely. There has been a shift from being able to see it before to now. I think that just comes with having more tools themselves to deal with kids, teachers, you know, before they only had that one avenue to take to do the discipline. They knew that it worked there, or for them, because that's what they were told even if they sought advice from admin, that was the advice they were given and that's what they were told to do. So, they had just that one avenue to work on. This practice puts a whole new set of tools into the hands of teachers just like it did with the students and admin and all of us that are dealing with them. When I came into the position I'm in I thought you know, this is a new area of weakness for me. I'm not even really sure what the process should be. I know that the process I saw was one that I was uncomfortable with and thought there has to be something different. I've always been a proponent of natural consequences. You make a mess, you clean it up, that kind of a thing but what does it look like on a bigger scale when somebody is threatened or hurt or that kind of a thing. Through the whole process, I have grown and learned so much about it, I would never want to go and unlearn it. So it'll be a tool I would use from*

here on out and it's one I recommend when people from other schools talk to and we do that or if we're in discussions through teacher groups or Facebook groups about discipline if I bring up restorative justice, they've heard of it but are not sure. I always tell them it will change the entire culture of the school and it changes the entire way that you deal with students and parents and even the teachers benefit. That's why I brought that up before conflicts between teachers, it makes a difference.

Circle Facilitator: *Thank you, Charlie. Anyone else has any final comments or thoughts about restorative justice, student discipline, what's been taking place the last three years at the middle school?*

Taylor: *I just wanted to hit on what the last speaker said about the environment. Just that the kids seem happier walking down the hallways again, [and] seems happier in the classrooms. I don't know if the restorative practices are 100% responsible for that. But I know it's played a big part in our culture.*

Circle Facilitator: *Thank you, Taylor. Thanks a lot, really appreciate it and I know Mr. Buckmaster is going to appreciate your frank and honest responses to the group interview. So, I know your time is precious so appreciate it on behalf of him. Thank you.*

My personal written response*:* I am humbled and honored to hear the words from those who participated. I believe there has been a cultural shift in the school due to the implementation of restorative practices. I want to point out something very important. I did not implement restorative practices alone. I have seen anecdotally and understand from the research that many schools never implement it with fidelity. I would like to give credit to these individuals who took on the challenge of trying student discipline in

a completely new way. It was truly a group effort to make this happen. For this to happen we needed a mindset shift as staff. The phenomenological stretch occurred over three years of implementation to disrupt the staff belief systems. I am convinced the staff's mindset shift took place due to the intimate experience of progressively experiencing tangible positive results with students in order to realize implementation over three years.

General/Generic Inductive Qualitative Model

GIQM (General/Generic Inductive Qualitative Model) was operationalized as a tool to help better understand the responses of the individuals who participated in the interview. It is important to understand this study is a phenomenological narrative study which is much different than a qualitative research design that is represented in the methods used in this chapter. To understand the rationale of adding an interview with the GIQM model to a narrative inquiry, it may be best to think of this part of the study as my personal study of how others perceived and lived out the transition. The GIQM model differs from grounded theory in that one can generalize to cases similar to the ones the researcher has studied and that GIQM allows the researcher to analytically generalize about the setting at hand, but not propose general over-arching theories beyond that setting (Hood, 2007). This is congruent with the overall study because it aims to understand this particular transition.

Phenomenology as a lens for interpretation

To interpret the collective responses of the group it is important to have a framework by how to make meaning of the thought and idea. Due to the nature of the exploration, it makes sense to frame the responses through their lived experience.

Therefore, the interpretation will be examined through a hermeneutic lens. Merleau-Ponty (1968) eloquently expressed the importance of depth to meaning-making "Depth is the means the things have to remain distinct, to remain things, while not being what I look at, at present. It is because of depth that the things have a resistance, which is precisely their reality" (p 219). Restorative practices and all they offer can no longer afford to wallow in the shallow understanding of poor implementation. It is by understanding the experience of the hearts and minds of those with the power to make the changes set by the restorative philosophy that we may find clues to school discipline transformation.

The choice of the hermeneutic lens is guided by the goal of the research and the search for a congruent philosophy with the stated objectives of the research (Merriam, 1998). When considering the need to connect restorative justice practices with the depth of the experience of those implementing them, as well as considering my role and personal experience, aligning with the heuristic philosophy to a narrative study is prudent for this endeavor (van Manen, 2014).

Although one could argue for the need to expose global and national concerns of power and equities involved in school discipline, this study will serve as a precursor to such unveiling with the lens of an educator's experience. The role of an interpretivist is also not to bring about the answer to questions of cause, but instead to bring forth the truth about experiential depth (van Manen, 2014). The phenomenological lens has gained acceptance among social science researchers as a movement against using incongruent hard science methods to bring meaning to a complex social phenomenon (Seidman, 2006). Beyond explanation, the hermeneutic phenomenology requires the use

of self-reflection, acute analysis, contemplative description, and critical interpretation to invoke the understanding. The objective of this hermeneutical study will be to seek an understanding of the lived experience of educators transitioning from a punitive discipline policy to the operationalization of restorative practices.

Edmund Husserl, who studied philosophical approaches to research at the turn of the twentieth century, is considered by many to be the father of phenomenology (Moran, 2005). Husserl introduced an alternative vantage to see social and societal occurrences. He argued for subjectivity as a necessary and positive element of a study, with the idea of "human subjectivity as a 'poietic being', a being that creates, transforms, and renews its existence" (Miettinen, 2015, p. 1). Husserl valued reality as it manifested through consciousness. Husserl viewed consciousness as the created dialogue between a person and the world (Giorgi, 2012).

Husserl is credited for the departure of a positivist approach to research; however, his take on phenomenology was not a complete retreat from some of the values of experimental design. Transcendental phenomenology, the roots of which can be traced back to Husserl, recognizes the subjectivity of the phenomenon while working toward the objectiveness of the researcher to illuminate the consciousness (Osborne 1994). This objectivity is done through bracketing, in which the researcher is collecting and analyzing the data to separate his or her feelings and beliefs from the people involved in the study. This kind of control, which seeks to find an objective reality, while much different than a positivist approach, finds some resemblance in the objective epistemology and truth-seeking ontology.

Differing from Husserl, Martin Heidegger maintained the interpretation of unadulterated consciousness was restricted in its capacity to divulge meaning. Heidegger and Husserl both studied together in Germany and were instrumental in moving phenomenology as a means to conduct research and gain perspective and insight. However, Heidegger intentionally separated his work from Husserl to bring forth the salient argument for the inability of a researcher to completely remove himself or herself from the study (Laverty, 2003). For Heidegger, description and interpretation are the same. Heidegger also emphasized language as being paramount in expressing the meaning of the lived experience. It is essential for the researcher who is engaged in this research to be cognizant of the power of contemplative, rich, and insightful text (van Manen, 2014).

Building on Heidegger's work, Hans-Georg Gadamer focused on the power of questioning as integral to the phenomenological process. According to Gadamer, it is by the dialogue that we share that phenomenology including rhetorical, pedagogical, and genuine questions one can find praxis (Gadamer, 1960). These particular interview data contain all of the necessary information to make such a connection.

This approach aligns with the interpretivist framework. This framework stands on the idea that understanding the effort of being informed about the phenomenon is not necessary to be right about the phenomenon. This mindset constitutes the idea of multiple realities that can be equally valued through the interaction of the researcher and the participants being studied (Laverty, 2003).

For a study to be congruent with the phenomenological lens, the researcher must begin by assessing the question that is being asked. Gadamer saw a distinct potentiality

from asking the right questions. New vantages, which give light to a new perspective, and which in turn better inform the phenomenon, are possible through questioning. The kinds of questions that are being asked by and through the study are paramount for the valid interpretation.

Van Manen (2014) gives guidelines to consider when developing questions. Is the study based on a valid phenomenological question? In other words, does the study ask, "What is the human experience like?" "How is this or that phenomenon or event experienced?" A phonological question should not be confused with empirical studies of a particular population, person, or group of people at a particular time and location. Also, phenomenology cannot deal with casual questions or theoretical explanations. However, a particular individual or group may be studied for the understanding of a phenomenological theme. (p. 350)

During this study, the phenomenon that will be considered is the transition of discipline policy, namely the transition from a retributive (or exclusionary) justice mindset to the restorative justice attitude. The question being asked explores the lived experience of the educators at the school, namely: *Based on his/her lived experiences as an educator that has transitioned discipline policies, what is his/her vision and reflections of restorative justice?*

This interpretation does not attempt to yield results that are generalizable in the sense that more positivistic studies do. In fact, "the only generalization allowed in phenomenological inquiry is: never generalize" (van Manen, 2014 p. 352). However, there exist two kinds of phenomenological pseudo-generalizations within the field. Existential generalizations are the recognition of a recurring phenomenon, such as a

teacher's experience of reintegrating a student after an exclusionary discipline consequence. And singular generalizations that deal with the universality of the phenomenon, also known as analytical generalizability (van Manen, 2014).

Within hermeneutic phenomenology, an accepted method to reflect on the data collection is the existential method of inquiry. These include universal themes of life that may help to frame the collected data to make sense of the meaning being represented and perspectives being illuminated. These themes include ideas of relationships, body, space, time, and things that belong to everyone and supersede notions of culture and individual differences. There are five methods of existential inquiry that are found within the phenomenological literature:

1) Lived relation (relationality),

2) Lived body (corporeality),

3) Lived space (spatiality),

4) Lived time (temporality), and

5) Lived things and technology. (materiality) (van Manen, 2014, p #)

According to van Manen (2014), everyone lives life through these five existentials, and these existentials, therefore, may be a helpful universal theme to aid the hermeneutic phenomenological researcher to explore meaning. These themes are operationalized as tools of analysis to interpret this kind of data.

Findings

To make connections to substantive research, the data from the group interview transcript must be clearly understood in light of such research (Yin, 2016). After compiling the data from the group interview, the next step was to disassemble the

responses to begin the process of coding, categorization and finding themes. The process meant that I took every line of response and carefully analyzed it for concrete and conceptual meaning. The disassembling process is meant to give meaning to segments of the data to see it later as a piece of overall concepts (Yin, 2016). The first step that was used to analyze the data was to become familiar with the transcript as a whole. By reading the transcript in its entirety, I gained an appreciation for the overall messages being represented by each participant's response. The first step entailed reading the transcript several times to gain a picture of the interview. The next step of the process was to dissect every line of response. Breaking down each line gives new insight into exactly the thoughts and ideas that were being brought to light at that moment in the interview. When a line did not have substantial value, I labeled it as not applicable and did not consider it for either level of classification. Codes from concrete statements were linked together with secondary conceptual codes that intimated clear idea categories. This was done by using a two-step process. First all concrete statements were grouped into general categories. While these categories were responses that were given to explain or give value to the restorative practices, it was necessary to go further than that simple of a discernment between statements. The statements about explaining restorative practices were read in their plain language and placed in the following groupings: the departure from zero tolerance, empowering students, making it right, using language. The statements that were about critiques or praises of the practices were also read in their plain language and placed in the following groups: policy considerations, issues around time, statements about students new to the community, and positive changes to the school.

The first step was to carry out a level 1 coding of the transcript text and then move to level 2 coding where collections of statements organized into more obvious classification groupings. This was done through careful analysis of every word in each line and then making determinations about how text fit together conceptually across participants. A spreadsheet was utilized to help categorize each statement and then sort according to each category developed through the analysis of the meaning of each line. The following categories were developed (See Appendix 2.A). Within the level 1 codes that were constructed from the data, there were a wide variety of notation including eight clear different kinds of concrete statements. Under each of these categories, the codes break down as follows.

Level 1 codes (concrete statements):

1. The departure from zero tolerance
2. Empowering students
3. Making it right
4. Using language
5. Policy considerations
6. Time
7. New to Community
8. Positive change

When the purpose of a participant's response was to help explain their experience with the transition, there were four different types of answers. One way that participants would explain restorative justice was to juxtapose the practice over their experience with zero-tolerance practices. Another response was to talk about the way

that students are growing and being empowered to take ownership of their moral development. Many times, this empowerment was discussed by using the concept of students developing the tools that they can use independently. Conflict resolution and the students making amends was another code that was used to explain restorative practices. Finally, there were many times that several participants would talk about how language was used.

When speaking about restorative justice as a way of judging its effectiveness and value, the codes were about policy, time, community, and positivity. The policy was mentioned as a way of talking about the structures that restorative practices provide and how school policy can enhance its fidelity. Time was the code that was the most predominant critique of restorative practices. The community was mentioned mostly as it pertained to how new students and teachers react to the unique set of practices. Finally, there were many positive comments about the general outcomes that the participants experienced.

After these categories were framed, the concepts were analyzed to look for broader conceptual connections. These kinds of codes create themes that can be brought to a substantive plane during the interpretive process. This kind of code is called a category code. The following category codes were found.

Level 2 categorization (Themes):

1. Growth through relationship
2. Mindset and presence
3. Institutional structures
4. Community, climate, and culture

These categories were determined after examining the level one codes along with the whole script analysis and looking back at the line by line responses. These four themes will be explored further and parsed out in the next section.

Interpretation

The first theme that was found in the two-part analysis was regarding how students were empowered and developed through relationships. Relationships are an important aspect of the data that should be parsed apart when considering the phenomenological data. Some phenomenological researchers consider relationships to be the quintessential keynote for understanding the human experience (James, 2006). The existential theme is concerned with how people connect and the idea of community. The issue of uniting and reuniting is explored within this theme, as well as the morality around being together and staying together (van Manen, 2014). How relationships are manifested and changed as a result of lived experience is universal and important in this style of the researcher. Further, in dealing with restorative justice, which is inherently interested in and predicated on the ethics of the community may be particularly dependent on the prerequisite to unite. The need to reunite and reintegrate based on the basic human need for relationships is a particular theme that may prove to be essential for much implementing restorative justice. How the practitioner views relationships will play a major role in how restorative justice will manifest in the school environment. If those who are commissioned to implement restorative justice see the power structure of a school to be paternalistic in nature, then this will be incongruent with the philosophy of the practice (Bazemore & Walgrave, 1999).

The next theme that emerged from the data was to say that mindset and presence plays a role in the individuals' and the group's experience. Restorative practices and the limits of which can be understood through the presence that practitioners give to their students and families. According to this theme, the body is engaged in the world that may give insight into the whole lived experience. According to van Manen (2014), the following questions may be explored:

> How do our desires, fears, cheerfulness, anxieties incarnate themselves in the world in which we dwell? How is the phenomenon we study perceived, sensed, touched by the body?... So, how are the body of self and other perceived differently? Similarly, how do we experience being touched by some thing or by a person? (p. 304)

Having a restorative mindset along with being present with the students is a theme to explore with those implementing restorative justice. One major question that one must ask is what is the purpose of discipline in school? One question that may be important to consider is what makes for a restorative mindset. Based on the data from the interview it would include the proclivity to empower students, value language, and the ethic of making things right.

When considering the idea of corporeality within a school discipline study, it may be prudent to look for fear affects as educators consider notions of safety and security. It may also be important to explore touch as an avenue of community building such as hugs and high fives that happen as a part of the family-like nature of the school being studied. Another very important mindset is about the value of time and how time should be spent by school staff. Temporality endeavors to explore how time is

experienced with phenomena being studied, such as the transition of a retributive system of discipline to a restorative system. Time is experienced differently according to the activity the person is doing during that time. Sometimes the length of time is subjective according to the lived experience of what was happening during that time. Also, one's identity may be wrapped in ideas of the classification of time; i.e., childhood. The data from the interview transcript emphasizes what other research has already depicted: restorative practices take more time than other methods, such as suspension through zero-tolerance (Wearmouth, Mckinney, & Glynn, 2007; Sartain, Allensworth, Porter, Mader, & Steinberg, 2015; Muschert 2014).

The institutional structure is another theme found in this study. The participants all relied on the structure of the practices to make concrete connections to it as a phenomenon. In some cases, the participants would refer to restorative justice as a mindset or as a philosophy; however, it was also referred to as a set of procedures and practices. In this way, participants of the interview were able to think of structures around restorative practices as a concrete set of structures. Structures also have significance in our lived experience. This is explored further with the materiality existential theme. Within this existential theme, the questions of how things are experienced, and how the experience of these items plays a role in the experience, are explored.

Finally, the idea of community, culture, and the climate was shared by the participants. One participant stated,

> I just wanted to hit on what the last speaker said about the environment. Just that the kids seem happier walking down the hallways again seems happier in the

> classrooms. I don't know if the restorative practices are 100% responsible for that. But I know it's played a big part in our culture.

This may play an important role in this study as the study takes place in a particular setting that has subjective and diverse emotional responses: a school. How does one perceive a student differently in the classroom, outside the classroom, and the school? How does one perceive behavior inside or outside? What are the emotions that are involved in being in the spaces and places of the school? These are important aspects that may be addressed as a result of the phenomenological data. The data suggest that changing student discipline has a perceived impact by educators on the school community, culture, and climate.

Conclusion

To end our three-year journey, we needed to do some reflection as a staff. I am grateful to have data from a group of educators lived through the transition. It was also necessary for this narrative inquiry to expand beyond my story allowing for the collective lived experience to be told. The experience these individuals had may prove to be important to those seeking an understanding of restorative justice and implementing its practices. Growth through relationships, mindset and presence, policy, and culture all play an important role in the process. Playing special care to these aspects, and how each experience them differently, will be paramount to a successful transition.

Chapter 7: Full Circle

A Reflection

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the implementation of restorative practices and offer insight into the overall story. This chapter will review the transition of the school, its goals, policies, and its impact on exclusionary practices, and the influence it has had on the lives of students. This chapter will be my reflections after carefully selecting circles to formulate the school's implementation story along with the analysis of the final circle interview. As a leader who is implemented, it is necessary to take a holistic approach to reflection.

Reflection is necessary to grow and learn from your experiences. Educators are used to the idea of reflection as an important and ongoing professional practice. Teachers use reflection all the time as a tool for improving their practice. Teachers in my building are trained to think critically about their lesson, their day, and their unit of study. This practice is embedded in the work of our school and has been one of the most effective approaches to professional development. Administrators use reflection constantly to improve policy and practice in a school. As the administrator, I am constantly asking reflective questions about the desired outcome of a particular decision.

Reflective journaling has played a major role in my professional journey. Before I started to think like a scholar, I engaged in reflective journaling for the sole purpose of intentionally reviewing and analyzing any initiative, and well before I thought to study a change within a school. Reflective journaling for me started after my first year of

teaching. I think one of the big eye-openers for me was when I realized how things that I thought I would remember forever would fade in my memory. When I started my second year of teaching, I reviewed my lessons from my first year and I could vaguely remember what the purpose or the specifics of the lesson was, but I could recall thinking I would always remember that particular event. So, the next year I pledged to write down everything I did. This was time-consuming, but I realized taking the time to journal helped recall memories, but it was also therapeutic and led to more effective practical decision making. The reflective journaling was crucial to my growth as a professional and as a leader. When I started to journal about restorative practices it was to want to give the idea the best opportunity to succeed. I knew it was going to take time and patience to make a change. It was going to take starting a personal inner-dialogue that would guide me along the journey. The final chapter of this manuscript is to turn this inner-dialogue into a conversation with practitioners around the ideas and practices of restorative justice.

Where to begin? As I reflect on the beginning of this journey, I am compelled to start with the story of when I first heard the words restorative justice. I was on the University campus, and I was fulfilling a requirement for one of my graduate-level classes. I was attending a conference that was to promote ethical practices in education. I was already aware of the school to prison pipeline, however, I never started to consider my role in it. During this conference, I started to see that maybe some of the practices that I was complicit in was potentially causing harm to the students I loved. During this state of mind, I went to a workshop about restorative justice. During the workshop, my mind would automatically go to all the reasons I would not be able to

implement restorative practices in my setting. For one, I was a teacher at the time, yet I was still compelled by this notion. Once I knew there was an alternative to suspension, along with the knowledge of the negative outcomes of exclusionary practices, I could not ignore the problem anymore. Shortly after this realization, I accepted my first administrative job as an assistant principal. During the first few suspensions, I can remember feeling trapped by the common practices of student discipline. My first attempt to combat this conviction was to simply try to not suspend students at all. This was an attempt to carry out the intention of restorative practices, but without the tools to do it successfully. I can remember a teacher quitting my first year and stating my inability to properly deal with student behavior as her main grievance. This shocked my system, as I began to recognize the need to have a safe environment for teachers and students to create a place for quality learning and social development. Therefore, I did a natural swing to become more punitive in nature. This prompted me to start engaging in zero-tolerance principles.

I would guess all leaders are at some parts of their day struggling with whether the decisions being made, even under the most careful consideration, is right or wrong. Even though I knew suspensions were harmful, I justified it through the need to add structure to the school. I was able to suppress the conviction. This is, in my mind, a very slippery slope. When you begin to justify harmful activities for the sake of this or that, when does it end? And in turn, wherein my current practice have I done this and suppressed the need to put ethical practices ahead of perceived success?

My internal struggle between maintaining a safe and structured environment and my understanding of the need to mitigate exclusionary practices began to boil. I

remember walking into my boss's office with the idea that I wanted to be trained in restorative justice. At the time I felt desperate. I had decided I loved everything about administrative work except that I loathed being a disciplinarian. I knew I would not be able to continue in the work if I did not grow in this area. As I presented the idea to my boss, I felt as if I were being ridiculous about the need to adjust or to overhaul the current system.

There is a lot of pressure in schools to do things the way they have always been done. We have an education system in the United States that is connected and compulsory. We are products of the very system that we are working to improve. The education system is meant to serve the community and its family units. In my experience, all families, institutions, and businesses within the community ultimately want schools to be as effective as possible for the children of the community. However, they all also have a certain idea of what school is, and how it should look. Before I began to study restorative practices, I was interested in changing the current traditional grading practices. As a teacher leader, I created a movement to begin changing the grading system. Through that process, I learned there is always pressure to keep things the same in schools. Teachers hated the idea of not using letter grades. The only reason I could ever imagine for why teachers were so attached to the letter grades was because of their familiarity and comfort. This is sometimes negatively framed as teachers being lazy or closed-minded. It can also be seen more positively, that teachers are making connections to their experience and wanting a system that everyone is comfortable with to unite the community in understanding one another. Nonetheless, I deeply understood

the need to resist the natural opposition if I was going to initiate this change in any school.

As I reflect on the overall change, I would have to say the first step was recognizing the problem. This happened over a series of symbolic interactions. I wonder how things would be different if someone had forced me to do restorative practices or if it was required as a part of becoming a certified teacher. I had the experience of seeing what happened to my brother. I had the experience of hearing about an alternative. I had the experience of working in a zero-tolerance environment. I was hungry for a solution. I needed an alternative. When I went to be trained in restorative practices, I deeply wanted it to work. I think this may be something crucial to its success. As I have outlined earlier, there are so many places where restorative practices have been mandated, and it continues to show that not everyone is implementing the practices with fidelity. As I reflect on what I consider to be a successful implementation of restorative practices, I cannot help but feel privileged in experiencing authentic moments that spurred to me to be a proponent of restorative justice. For this reason, I believe this first step would be crucial for any leader wanting to make a similar transition. The need for change needs to be made clear to give the initiative a chance to work. I hope this manuscript can serve, along with many others like it, as a resource that helps practitioners.

Another symbolic interaction I think aided in the likelihood that I was able to sustain this kind of change, was that I saw it work early in the implementation process. Beyond having a positive experience with my training when first learning about restorative justice, I also had a very positive experience when first trying it out. The first

time I tried using restorative practices was as an assistant principal and even though I was not skilled in the practice, I received positive feedback immediately. I that having an experience where you see the process work properly was another reason I was able to stay on track with implementation. For school leaders implementing restorative practices at the school or district level, I would advise them to implement a mentorship model and gradual release of responsibilities around the practices. You should have those who have experience with circles partner with those who will be leading restorative circles in the future. This way those who are not familiar with the process can see it work properly before becoming a circle leader. Sometimes you have to see it to believe it. I would strongly suggest creating positive and effective circles for those who are training and learning it for the first time.

The next piece to our implementation I found to be an important key to success was goal setting. When I began the journey to implement restorative justice, I had one simple goal: I wanted to eliminate suspensions. Did I reach that goal? Unfortunately, I did not. One thing I learned I did not anticipate was the need to give some time between an offense and the restorative circle. I learned early on in the restorative implementation that having the restorative conference the same day as a heated situation will likely fail. When someone has been through the trauma of conflicting with their community, they are not instantly ready to make amends. There needs to be a time to allow for the emotions of the situation to dissipate and the offender can begin to think clearly. This can sometimes take more than a day or two even. As such, there can be a time in which students are waiting for their restorative conference and are not in school. This is technically considered a time of suspension when looking at student attendance.

Further, there were times in which the individuals of the circle (including the offender and the parents of the offender) agreed that even after the circle the student did need to have more time to separate themselves from the experience at school and remain home for some time. Even with these two exceptions, suspensions decreased dramatically. During the three-years of implementing restorative justice, we dropped the number of suspensions by 50%, but even more importantly, those that were suspended understood the rationale for needing time to be ready to make amends. While I reflect on my original goal for restorative practices, I would say I was slightly misguided in how I framed my objective. Reducing exclusionary practices will be an outcome of restorative practices, but I am not sure it is a healthy goal. From my experiences, the goals you set will dictate what ends up affecting policy. Therefore, if I had stuck to my goal of eliminating suspensions, then my school could have done so, but at the cost of a less successful implementation of the practices. For this reason, I would advise when you do goal-setting for school discipline, that you focus less on outputs and more on through-puts of the practices.

A major temptation when it comes to measuring success for student discipline is to frame success as the elimination of undesirable student behavior. This was my mindset when I began in administration. I would work to create structures and supports that would eventually eliminate student discipline issues. Then every time there was a student discipline event, I would question my structures and try to come up with a new plan that would have prevented the last incident. This is why you often see in schools the pendulum swing in punitive to permissive reforms. However, the goal should not be to eliminate conflict. What we know about flourishing communities does not have

anything to do with the elimination of offenses, but instead promotes the free-flowing of affects and emotions which will ultimately lead to natural conflict. Therefore, as a leader of school discipline, I would advise against trying to measure success by eliminating student misbehavior.

When your goal is to eliminate suspensions, then one might be compelled to do so at all costs, even when it might be best for everyone involved to wait a day to do a restorative conference. When your goal is to reduce or eliminate student misbehavior, you might be compelled to create situations in which students are scared or shamed into not having any conflict at all. It is important to note while these were not our driving goals for most of the implementation process that both of the outcomes were as expected: a dramatic drop in suspension and major discipline issues. So then, if these should not be the goal, what should be? After this experience, I would advise any school to create goals around having the most ethical discipline process and how well you can carry out the process. Are students being empowered? Are we listening to the voice of everyone in the circle? Are students carrying out the contract agreement to make things right? Are we as school embodying the principles of restorative practices? Are students developing morally? These are the questions I think someone that is implementing restorative practices should be asking.

One of the most important things to consider when implementing restorative practices is how to craft policies and mandates. One thing I was trying to avoid during our implementation was to fall into the trap of thinking that strict rules and guidelines would lead to better implementation. This very much parallels the same reasons for why zero tolerance does not work as a discipline plan. From my experience, forcing

someone to do something with the threat of some consequence only compels them to create an air of compliance instead of giving their best effort. If restorative justice is going to work, it has to be facilitated by people who believe it can work. For this reason, I did not spend my time creating rules or policies, but instead, I would spend time teaching the principles. This is also another reason why I believe the best form of training is through mentorship. The way it worked for us was that I brought the practice to the school. I then worked with others who would be facilitating restorative circles by doing the facilitation with the future restorative leaders. We would consistently work together and when we could not work together, we would meet to discuss the fidelity of the circles. I would strongly suggest this kind of rabbi and disciple approach to teaching the skills of restorative work in lieu of policies and mandates.

As I reflect on how restorative practices have had an impact on the life of the school, I would like to think about it in terms of what it has done for my students as well as my teachers. The thing I am most proud of is how the practice has changed the general temperament of the students as they normally go about their day. An observation I have noticed, and which was also pointed out by some in the group interview, is that students are generally happier. When you rule with fear, it has a palpable impact on those that you are leading. Students are free to be themselves knowing if they make a mistake they would be allowed to recover from that mistake. We have also seen an increase in academic achievement coinciding with the implementation of restorative practices. While there are so many variables to consider, I think it is prudent to consider the importance of having an environment free of fear for not only a healthy community but also for academic achievement.

One of the biggest surprises of restorative practices was the impact it had on staff conflict. I did not originally consider this to have a major impact on our school, but after further reflection after the group interview, I have seen many cases in which we were able to move forward in a positive way due to restorative practices. Something that is not always talked about in principal training is navigating conflicts and arguments between teachers. This can be difficult for a principal who is used to settling most arguments paternalistically. Restorative practices give opportunities for compromise and discourse that can be hard to facilitate sometimes. Following restorative justice protocols, a school leader can be confident in addressing concerns without needing to take a side or be the sole decision-maker. I found it natural to use restorative work in all aspects of schooling including with the adults. We would meet many times in PD in circles to discuss matters as a community. I would use affective statements with staff when necessary. But some of the most fruitful restorative conferences were ones in which the offender and the victim were both members of the staff. This I believe made the restorative philosophy gain legitimacy with the staff. If we truly believe in talking through conflict, working on understanding ourselves, and making things right with our community then it makes sense we would operationalize it beyond student issues.

The final reflection I would like to share is about mindset. When I first started learning about restorative practices, I was convinced it would take a certain type of person to be able to facilitate restorative work with fidelity. Early on as I started to become curious about studying the implementation of restorative practices, I was convinced that there was a certain mindset or a "restorative mindset" that one would

need to be able to implement restorative work. This included such things as believing that fear-based tactics are harmful, an understanding of the school to prison pipeline, and the belief that people need to talk through their personal and community conflicts. I believed you needed to profile a candidate before placing them in a situation to facilitate circles. However, upon reflection, I believe I may have been wrong. What led me to this conclusion was the work that I did with my dean of students, Jeff. Jeff and I are opposites in many ways. It was very much an odd couple situation as we started to work together. Jeff was old school and was in charge of discipline before I arrived. He believed in hard rules and steep consequences. He was a hard nose disciplinarian. If my theory was correct, then Jeff would have never been able to be successful in implementing restorative practices. I was completely wrong. He was able to remain himself and still do an excellent job implementing the program. I believe he made me a better leader of restorative practices and found his way to implement restorative practices with true fidelity. For this reason, I would suggest leaders look for individuals who are likely to have a growth mindset rather than those that have a "restorative mindset."

Change can be a difficult thing to facilitate. There are pressures to maintain the status quo in American schooling. As I reflect on the past three years, I am humbled by the great opportunity I was given to make a difference in the lives of students and staff. Restorative justice has given me a framework to help create a school culture of inclusiveness, hard work, accountability, community, and love. As my last reflection, I would have to say that restorative justice has been a catalyst to restore my passion for the work of helping students live full, moral, and wonderful lives.

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Appendix 1.A. IRB Letter

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Expedited Review – AP01

Date: June 16, 2020

IRB#: 12039

Principal Investigator: Daniel James Buckmaster

Approval Date: 06/16/2020

Status Report Due: 05/31/2021

Study Title: FROM ZERO-TOLERANCE TO RESTORATIVE PRACTICES: A STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF EDUCATORS WHO HAVE MADE THE TRANSITION IN POLICY AND PRACTICE

Expedited Category: 5, 6, & 7

Collection/Use of PHI: No

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and granted expedited approval of the above-referenced research study. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

Requirements under the Common Rule have changed. The above-referenced research meets one or more of the circumstances for which continuing review is not required. However, as Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit an annual status report to the IRB.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorization using the currently approved, stamped forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- **Submit an annual status report to the IRB to provide the study/recruitment status and report all harms and deviations that may have occurred.**
- **Submit a final closure report at the completion of the project.**

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,



Appendix 1.B. Interview Protocol

Restorative Circle Group Interview Protocol

Participant Instructions:

Daniel Buckmaster is conducting a study to investigate the implementation of restorative justice at your school. Your participation is in no way mandated, but instead is completely voluntary. The choice to not participate is understandable and participants that choose to not participate will not be known to Mr. Buckmaster.

Please begin by reviewing a copy of the consent form that you have already read and signed. Please note that just because you have signed the consent form, you are not obligated to participate in the interview. If you do choose to not participate, Mr. Buckmaster will not be given any information on who chose to not participate.

Please remove all identifiable information before starting the interview such as name tags. If the interview is conducted over Zoom, please replace your name with “Person” so the proctor will have no way to know your name. Please do not give answers that would allow Daniel Buckmaster to identify you. If you do so on accident, you may ask that the transcriber omits that portion of your answer.

Please follow the instructions of the proctor and answer all questions openly and honestly. Restorative Circle Group Interview Protocol

Proctor Instructions:

Script: Welcome, thank you all for being here.

Before we begin, I would like to confirm that everyone here free on coercion and can exit this group interview at any time. Please begin by saying that you have signed the consent form and you are choosing to participate in this group interview. Please, do not now or at any time during this process use your real name.

Proctor ensures that all participants gives affirmation of signed consent.

At this time, I will give you an alias that will be how I will identify you for this interview process.

Proctor randomly assigns the following names in no particular order.

1. ***Taylor***
2. ***Pat***
3. ***Robin***
4. ***Jordan***
5. ***Riley***
6. ***Angel***

Thank you all for being here today. It is important to note that your answers today will help as Mr. Buckmaster studies the 3-year implementation of restorative practices. Answers that are open and honest will give trustworthy data that can be used with the study. Remember there will be no link between you and your answers. Your answers are private and anonymous. Let's start with Taylor.

Taylor, what has happened with discipline policy and practice at your school? Feel free to talk about the changes around restorative practices and anything else you have noticed.

Charlie, what has happened with discipline policy and practice at your school? Feel free to talk about the changes around restorative practices and anything else you have noticed.

Robin, what has happened with discipline policy and practice at your school? Feel free to talk about the changes around restorative practices and anything else you have noticed.

Jordon, what has happened with discipline policy and practice at your school? Feel free to talk about the changes around restorative practices and anything else you have noticed.

Riley, what has happened with discipline policy and practice at your school? Feel free to talk about the changes around restorative practices and anything else you have noticed.

Angel, what has happened with discipline policy and practice at your school? Feel free to talk about the changes around restorative practices and anything else you have noticed.

Taylor, what was your first reaction to restorative practices?
Charlie, what was your first reaction to restorative practices?
Robin, what was your first reaction to restorative practices?
Jordon, what was your first reaction to restorative practices?
Riley, what was your first reaction to restorative practices?
Angel, what was your first reaction to restorative practices?

Taylor, after the 3-year implementation of using restorative practices for student discipline, how do you feel about what has happened?
Charlie, after the 3-year implementation of using restorative practices for student discipline, how do you feel about what has happened?
Robin, after the 3-year implementation of using restorative practices for student discipline, how do you feel about what has happened?
Jordon, after the 3-year implementation of using restorative practices for student discipline, how do you feel about what has happened?
Riley, after the 3-year implementation of using restorative practices for student discipline, how do you feel about what has happened?
Angel, after the 3-year implementation of using restorative practices for student discipline, how do you feel about what has happened?

Taylor, what are issues around student discipline that need to be discussed or addressed?

Charlie, what are issues around student discipline that need to be discussed or addressed?

Robin, what are issues around student discipline that need to be discussed or addressed?

Jordon, what are issues around student discipline that need to be discussed or addressed?

Riley, what are issues around student discipline that need to be discussed or addressed?

Angel, what are issues around student discipline that need to be discussed or addressed?

At this time would anyone like to add anything to the discussion about restorative practices? Please state your name before answering.

Thank you for your time today. Immediately following this interview, we will begin the process of transcribing your answers then the video/audio recording will be deleted. Thank you so much for your participation.

Appendix 2.A. Coding Structure Illustration

	Response	Person	Question	First level theme (concrete)	Second level theme (abstract)
2	I think the best way to answer that would be that we went from a school before restorative practices, a school that focused on discipline by running stairs, push- ups so it was a physical reaction to a disciplinary issue.	Taylor	What happened	Departure from Zero Tolera	Mindset shift
3	Now when Mr. Buckmaster came in it went from a kind of a school that was ran by not fear but the fear that you're going to get in trouble to hey we want to be a part of a community.	Taylor	What happened	Departure from Zero Tolera	Personal Growth
4	We want to be a part of this community as opposed to walking around in fear.	Taylor	What happened	Departure from Zero Tolera	Cutlure
5	Taylor was correct when Taylor said as far as from the difference from before to now.	Charlie	What happened	Departure from Zero Tolerance	
6	Now it is much more student center.	Charlie	What happened	policy	Instituional Structures: Time and Training
7	The students are empowered to correct what they've done wrong.	Charlie	What happened	Empowering students	
8	To identify it, give it a name, to explain what they were thinking and why they chose their actions.	Charlie	What happened	Using language	
9	Then from that step on they are able to fix what they've done wrong.	Charlie	What happened	Making it right	
10	I think the changes have allowed the kids themselves and their families to come up with ways to restore their own justice, to restore their character after getting in trouble or doing something they are not supposed to.	Robin	What happened	Empowering students	
11	Instead of just being given just a discipline, a consequence.	Robin	What happened	Departure from Zero Tolerance	
12	They get to come up with ways on their own, with their parents, with the principle and try to restore themselves in the eyes of their teachers and administrators.	Robin	What happened	making it right	
13	Ah yes, I agree with everything that has been said so far.	Jordan	What happened	n/a	
14	I also like that previously as Taylor mentioned it was led more towards fear or fear of getting in trouble and instead of explaining why you got in trouble, you were just told you're in trouble and here is your consequence.	Jordan	What happened	Departure from Zero Tolerance	
15	I like that now you are going much deeper into it and you're actually talking about why it's a bigger issue, why it needs to stop, here are your consequences, and you help set up the consequences yourself for the cause of your actions	Jordan	What happened	Using language	
16	I was skeptical, highly skeptical. I just thought we were going to talk about feelings.	Taylor	First Reaction	Using language	
17	I was skeptical.	Taylor	First Reaction	n/a	
18	I would say that when I first heard it, I was hopeful that it would do what he said it would do.	Charlie	First Reaction	Using language	
19	However I had my doubts that it would be almost as simple as it sounded.	Charlie	First Reaction	Using language	
20	Kids are not little adults so sometimes when we try to think about what we would want, how we would want it explained, and how we would want to deal with it ourselves it can be translated wrong for the kid and then they're not quite sure how to handle that.	Charlie	First Reaction	Using language	
21	So on that regard, I thought we'd have to be really careful.	Charlie	First Reaction	n/a	
22	But as we got into it, and we were practicing it I could see how it would work in the classroom. I was worried about time. I was worried about the pushback from some of the teachers with having to do the circles in the classroom.	Charlie	First Reaction	Time	
23	I was worried that our students were very used to, again to that hard- line drawn and if you messed up this is what your consequences were and that was the end of it instead of actually having to sit down and discuss with their peers and the people that they wronged and having to face them.	Charlie	First Reaction	departure from Zero Tolerance	
24	When I first heard about it, I thought it made sense and I thought it was a good idea.	Robin	First Reaction	n/a	
25	I just didn't know if it was going to work. So I guess that was my first reaction at the time	Robin	First Reaction	n/a	
26	. I didn't know if it was the right thing or not.	Robin	First Reaction	making it right	
27	I also was skeptical. In my experience I always thought middle schoolers are smart.	Jordan	First Reaction	n/a	
28	They are going to find a way to find a loophole and kind of go around it.	Jordan	First Reaction	departure from Zero Tolerance	
29	I really thought that at first they were just going to be able to play a part of the circle and really just go with the flow and figure out how to get out of the office and to get out with the least amount of consequences possible.	Jordan	First Reaction	departure from Zero Tolerance	
30	But yeah I was hopeful but skeptical at first.	Jordan	First Reaction	n/a	

31	I feel real positive about what has happened over the last few years.	Taylor	Feeling about transition	Positive about change	
32	I've seen it has been extremely effective with conflict resolution, extremely effective.	Taylor	Feeling about transition	using language	
33	Kids have tools now after sitting through some of these circles.	Taylor	Feeling about transition	Empowering students	
34	Now, they kind of go out and do their own and they don't even know they're doing it and then if they need some help from an adult they'll come and get one.	Taylor	Feeling about transition	Empowering students	
35	So that's been really really nice.	Taylor	Feeling about transition	Positive about change	
36	I think bullying goes way down because other kids put a stop to that and they have an avenue to come talk to us and know that we're not just going to jump all over them.	Taylor	Feeling about transition	Empowering students	
37	They know we are going to get everybody together that is involved, parents and everybody and we are going to figure this out. I'm happy Mr. Buckmaster brought this system to our school.	Taylor	Feeling about transition	Positive about change	
38	I was very impressed by the entire process.	Charlie	Feeling about transition	Positive about change	
39	I thought, the first time I sat in one and saw a kid have to face who they had hurt, with their parents next to them and have to truly explain what was going on and really search in themselves to figure out what that was and to realize that this process of going through there, like Taylor had said they have the tools to do it.	Charlie	Feeling about transition	using language	
40	So the first time we got to see it and go through it they were learning but then as they kind of went through and stared an understanding of what we were asking them as far as questions go they realize that we were there for them and wanted to help them through this process not just give them a punishment for doing something wrong.	Charlie	Feeling about transition	making it right	
41	It was really an eye opener and I think it helped not just in teacher- to - student or principle to student, but also teacher-to-teacher when there was conflict between teachers.	Charlie	Feeling about transition	using language	
42	There was an opportunity to use restorative justice and really restore the relationship and the working environment for them not just make them uncomfortable.	Charlie	Feeling about transition	making it right	
43	That was a big bonus to using this system.	Charlie	Feeling about transition	Positive about change	
44	I really liked the changes we've had these three years. I like how there's a lot of questions for the kids involved.	Robin	Feeling about transition	Positive about change	
45	Like instead of telling them what they should do it ask them what they should do and it helps restore their image and character.	Robin	Feeling about transition	Empowering students	
46	It gets the kids thinking about what they did, how they hurt people, how they hurt themselves, how they hurt their parents.	Robin	Feeling about transition	making it right	
47	Then also gets them thinking how can I fix this in the future and try to avoid coming back to this situation again.	Robin	Feeling about transition	making it right	
48	I've sat in a few circles and it's been really good, you go into the circle and the kid is just mad, angry, upset about something and may not even recognize they are in the wrong but at the end of the circle they end up apologizing recognizing they've hurt their teachers and classmates.	Robin	Feeling about transition	Empowering students	
49	It's nice to see that change of heart and it's nice for them to have the opportunity to help fix the situation, to come up with ways to make it better for themselves and for the rest of the school.	Robin	Feeling about transition	making it right	
50	Yeah, I've been very surprised. I've seen a lot of change, a lot of growth in each individual student's feelings, thoughts, and expressions as far as after they leave the office and go about the rest of the day or even how they conduct themselves the rest of the year.	Jordan	Feeling about transition	Empowering students	
51	I notice the first year the eighth graders were very skeptical with it not really buying into it but now comparing that group to our now eight graders that were sixth graders two years ago.	Jordan	Feeling about transition	n/a	
52	You can see how the process has improved and how the students perspective about resolving issues has also improved.	Jordan	Feeling about transition	making it right	
53	I think one of the issues we have is that restorative practice takes a lot of time.	Taylor	Critiques	Time	
54	So when you're in a large scale of 750 kids, you got to be real careful and make sure and carry out the full process of this practice.	Taylor	Critiques	New to community	
55	So taking each case each kid and working that process, taking the time to do it. I know it gets busy but it's really critical.	Taylor	Critiques	Time	
56	So time is the big issue because it's not just the initial meeting. Right?	Charlie	Critiques	Time	

57	So the initial meeting takes time, but then there's also the follow up for that and making sure that the consequences that the kids came up with or that you guys decided on are followed through with..	Charlie	Critiques	Time		
58	On a regular week it doesn't seem to be a big deal but if it's the week before thanksgiving break the kids seem to be a little hyped up and the numbers go up it becomes a little bit harder to follow through.	Charlie	Critiques	Time		
59	I think we would cut down on some of the repeating if we implemented a system that would help us keep up with that a little bit better.	Charlie	Critiques	Policy		
60	I can't really think of any issues with it but listening to the first two answers, it seems like time is probably the big issue because we have gotten a lot bigger, the school has gotten a lot bigger over the last three years.	Robin	Critiques	Time		
61	So it's probably more difficult to handle the caseload, the issues that arise between student behavior so just handling that time wise and like another person said just making sure you put the same importance on every issue even if it's a small issue compared to a big.	Robin	Critiques	Policy		
62	Give it time and give it your full effort to help that child and their family figure out what they need to do for the future.	Robin	Critiques	Time		
63	Yeah, I think time is definitely an issue. I also think that students that are new to our particular district do not fully understand this practice.	Jordan	Critiques	Time		
64	The students that come from our elementary schools practice restorative justice so they are used to it.	Jordan	Critiques	New to community		
65	But the new students from other districts that have no idea what restorative justice is, it feels tricky to get them to buy into this practice.	Jordan	Critiques	new to community		
66	They might feel weirded out and it makes it difficult for them to fully understand this practice. .	Jordan	Critiques	new to community		
67	We need to take the time to explain what restorative justice is, why we do this, why it works, and how it helps us as a school	Jordan	Critiques	Policy		
68	Can I go. All right. So this is Robin. One thing that Jordan reminded me of is when kids come in from other schools.	Robin	Free response	new to community		
69	There's an example of this kid that came in and I thought he was one of the most difficult students I've ever dealt with and after sending him to the office to talk to the principal and after them going through the restorative justice practices.	Robin	Free response	new to community		
70	I saw him change as a person and I know that's a result of restorative justice so instead of him just getting in big time trouble and just things happening. .	Robin	Free response	Empowering students		
71	He was dealt with in a very you know justice driven way and he was given the chance to figure things out for himself and his situation at our school as a new student	Robin	Free response	Empowering students		
72	This is Charlie. I just wanted to piggyback off of what Jordan said with the new students.	Charlie	Free response	new to community		
73	One of the hurdles I think that the system can improve is that when we get new teachers they also need to be trained in that mindset and understand what it is, what we are trying to do, the objectives, and the goals. What we are trying to accomplish in that.	Charlie	Free response	Policy		
74	We talk a lot about building that community with them but then we need to make sure we built in that time to train them in the actual steps and processes of restorative justice.	Charlie	Free response	policy		
75	I would say for sure. Definitely. There has been a shift from being able to see it before to now.	Charlie	Free response	n/a		
76	I think that just comes with having more tools themselves to deal with kids, teachers, you know before they only had that one avenue to take to do the discipline.	Charlie	Free response	Empowering students		
77	They knew that it worked there or for them because that's what they were told even if they sought advice from admin, that was the advice they were given and that's what they were told to do.	Charlie	Free response	Empowering students		
78	So they had just that one avenue to work on.	Charlie	Free response	n/a		
79	This practice puts a whole new set of tools into the hands of teachers just like it did with the students and admin and all of us that are dealing with them.	Charlie	Free response	policy		
80	When I came into the position I'm in I thought you know, this is a new area of weakness for me. I'm not even really sure what the process should be.	Charlie	Free response	policy		
81	I know that the process I saw was one that I was uncomfortable with and thought there has to be something different.	Charlie	Free response	policy		
82	I've always been a proponent of natural consequences.	Charlie	Free response	policy		
83	You make a mess you clean it up that kind of a thing but what does it look like on a bigger scale when somebody is threatened or hurt or that kind of a thing.	Charlie	Free response	policy		
84	Through the whole process I have grown and learned so much about it, I would never want to go and unlearn it.	Charlie	Free response	Positive about change		
85	So it'll be a tool I would use from here on out and it's one I recommend when people from other schools talk to me and they'll know either I'm from *redacted* and we do that or if we're in discussions through teacher groups or Facebook groups about discipline if I bring up restorative justice, they've heard of it but are not sure I always tell them it will change the entire culture of the school and it changes the entire way that you deal with students and parents and even the teachers benefit.	Charlie	Free response	Positive about change		
86	That's why I brought that up before conflicts between teachers, it really makes a difference.	Charlie	Free response	Empowering students		
87	I just wanted to hit on what the last speaker said about the environment.	Taylor	Free response	Positive about change		
88	Just that the kids seem happier walking down the hallways again seem happier in the classrooms.	Taylor	Free response	Positive about change		
89	I don't know if the restorative practices are 100% responsible for that.	Taylor	Free response	Positive about change		
90	But I know it's played a big part in our culture.	Taylor	Free response	positive about change		