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Nicole Raffenbeul
rani1102@stcloudstate.edu

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The Impact of Restorative Practices on Discipline Data and Procedures in Schools

by

Nicole Raffenbeul

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Starred Paper Committee:
Bradley Kaffar, Chairperson
Jennifer Christensen
James Johnson

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Chapter I: Introduction

Introduction

Humans are social beings. We all strive for connections and a sense of belonging. This need for social connectedness is the foundation for all civilizations. How we connect is defined by our behaviors. We communicate with and relate to one another through behavioral interactions. Whether maladaptive or prosocial, these behaviors create and impact our place within our social systems. One social system common to modern societies is the construct of school. For many children, school is where behavior is the most impacted. Educational institutions create procedures and protocols that dictate prescribed behavior. This behavior resembles a normative ideology of the values of the surrounding community. The protocols developed indicate what is considered right and wrong within the school system. Traditional discipline procedures are derived from these institutional protocols of perceived correctness. It is an all or nothing approach that takes little consideration of the individual child. Furthermore, these procedures fail to look at the needs of students being communicated through their behaviors.

As schools saw an increase in maladaptive behaviors among its population, policy makers increased efforts to curb violence in schools. With the passage of the Gun Free Schools Act in 1994, educational institutions adopted zero-tolerance policies as a reaction to growing behavioral issues (DeMitchell & Hambacher, 2016). Zero-tolerance policies provide school administrators clear and defined procedures to handle discipline problems which include prescribed disciplinary consequences to specified infractions of school guidelines. Zero-tolerance policies are exclusionary as a means to “get tough on crime,” requiring mandatory

suspensions and expulsions for a vast number of behaviors (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Initially, zero-tolerance encompassed only dangerous behaviors involving a weapon or severe bodily harm to another. As fear of violence in schools increased, zero-tolerance policies grew to include verbal threats, physical violence, dress code violations, as well as minor behavioral infractions (Daniel & Bondy, 2008). Unfortunately, these traditional measures have had unintended consequences. Due to their exclusionary nature, students have been taken out of the learning environment and lost academic instruction, increasing the achievement gap. Moreover, disparities in discipline data due to traditional policies have contributed to the creation of the school to prison pipeline (Stewart-Kline, 2016). The school to prison pipeline revolves around the idea that students who engage in maladaptive behaviors in schools are more likely to be referred to juvenile justice systems. These students are often the most vulnerable within the education system and lack the skills necessary to navigate the prescribed policies and protocols present (McCarter, 2016). The retributive approach to discipline was intended to remove the “problems” from the school environment. However, evidence has shown zero-tolerance to have dire consequences and be in direct opposition to best practices in education (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Students are less likely to engage in prosocial activities and are not taught the appropriate skills to follow expectations in structured environments through zero-tolerance policies. The need for reform to meet the needs of youth in a proactive and skill-centered way has led officials to look at alternative methods for discipline. One such approach that has gained momentum in juvenile justice as well as in education is restorative practices. The purpose of this paper is to examine restorative practices and its impact on discipline data and procedures within the educational system.

Restorative Practices

Restorative practices look at repairing harm and transforming conflict within social structures (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Founded on the three principles of respect, dignity, and mutual concern, procedures are implemented as a means by which teaching and shared learning are paramount. The goal of restorative practices is a less punitive way of addressing harm while creating a safe and caring climate for all individuals involved. Processes in restorative practices focus on the victim, the offender, and the community as a whole to rebuild connectedness and repair damage done to all parties. The victim and the community are given a voice and the offender is given an opportunity to understand the impact of behavioral actions. Furthermore, the offender is allowed to express needs, actions, and remorse as a way to heal and rebuild relationships that may have been severed (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

Historical Background

While restorative practices are a relatively new phenomenon in modern application, they are steeped in history. Practitioners contend restorative practices have existed for as long as human beings have interacted (Riestenberg, 2012). Used as a way to resolve conflict, humans have engaged in restorative means in an informal, undocumented way. Current practices are founded on ancient and indigenous practices from all aspects of the world. For example, the Navajo people have long viewed harm and conflict as disconnection from community and seek justice through reconnection and healing (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Spiritual traditions across disciplines have elements of restorative practices used to address harm and conflict as well (Hadley, 2001). As a movement, restorative practices originated in 1974 in Ontario, Canada. Known as the “Kitchener Experiment,” probation officer Mark Yantzi facilitated a

restorative meeting between two vandals and their victims (Wachtel, 2016). Rather than implementing a strictly punitive sentence, the meeting resulted in restitution and reconciliation. With support from numerous community institutions, the concept of restorative practices in juvenile justice systems spread throughout North America and Europe (Wachtel, 2016).

Transitioning restorative practices to the educational environment is very new. One of the earliest entries into education comes from the Maori tribes in New Zealand in 1989. As a response to concerns by tribe members of the court system intervening due to school issues, restorative practices were introduced in the form of family group conferencing (Wachtel, 2016). While the 1990s and 2000s saw an increased implementation of restorative practices in juvenile justice arenas, educational systems have been slower to adopt such procedures. The state of Minnesota has attempted to implement restorative practices in schools and has become a model for procedures. Under the leadership of Nancy Riestenberg, the Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning worked to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions through restorative measures with positive results (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). As researchers find that zero-tolerance and punitive measures of discipline in schools are not effective, more educational institutions are turning to restorative practices. In 2014, in collaboration with the United States Department of Justice, the United States Department of Education declared that exclusionary practices were discriminatory and suggested the implementation of restorative practices as an alternative (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Restorative practices are becoming a more popular tool within schools as a means to deal with discipline issues.

Research Question

One research question guides this review of literature: What is the impact of restorative practices on procedures, behaviors, and discipline data in schools?

Importance of Topic

Behavior concerns in schools have increased in recent years. Teachers are facing demoralization as the need to intervene with behaviors and teach social skills is becoming more prevalent. With the increased pressure of academic achievement and global-readiness for students, educators are faced with impossible circumstances. Moreover, students are faced with continuous stress as expectations are at an all-time high. Unfortunately, students are coming to school lacking skills to handle that stress. Additionally, schools are faced with more trauma-infused populations who require a different approach to instruction and discipline. Traditional discipline policies are not effective in altering behavioral patterns or providing an environment that promotes learning. Exclusionary practices serve to widen not only the academic achievement gap, but also reinforce the disconnect from the educational environment. Students are not learning new skills to impact behavioral patterns, nor are they learning academic skills to succeed when removed from school. Restorative practices provide an alternative to disruptive discipline procedures. They are skill-based procedures that connect the victim, offender, and community in a way that allows empowerment and ownership. As student needs are the foundation of these practices, educators facilitate and create a learning environment that encompasses all individuals.

Focus of Paper

The focus of this paper surrounds the impact of restorative practices in the educational setting. As the student population grows and changes, policies and procedures that were once deemed effective and appropriate to change behavior, are no longer proving to work. As the pressure to perform academically increases, educators are feeling incredible stress to produce globally-intelligent students. However, many institutions are confronted with an inability to engage in high level instruction due to intense interruptions caused by behavior. This paper looks at varied forms of restorative practices implemented in the school setting including family-group conferencing and victim-offender mediation, and whether these strategies have an impact on changing behavioral patterns, reducing behavioral referrals, and altering the overall climate within a school community. If these practices can change the educational environment, all parties invested in the community will be better served academically as well as emotionally.

Categories of Restorative Practices

Restorative practices embrace a myriad of strategies that are founded on principles of communication, understanding, and fostering relationships. Numerous programs have emerged as restorative; however, many are not well defined or practiced with fidelity. Four types of restorative practices have been utilized within education and have shown positive results.

Family Group Conferencing

Juveniles and their families are brought together in a structured environment to engage in restorative procedures. Family group conferencing is used in situations that involved child welfare issues, such as neglect, or juvenile justice issues where the family is the victim. It allows

support networks composed of family members to come together to make decisions and process events (Wachtel, 2016).

Circles

Restorative circles are the most common form of practice. They can be used both proactively and reactively to confront challenging issues and situations. “The circle has a wide variety of purposes: conflict resolution, healing, support, decision making, information exchange, and relationship development” (Wachtel, 2016, p. 8). Circles allow individuals the opportunity to speak and listen in a structured space of safety. Many schools implement circles as a way for students and teachers to build community and positive relationships. Additionally, restorative circles are used as a way to problem solve when harm has been done and relationships need to be repaired.

Restorative Conference

Similar to family group conferencing, a restorative conference is a semi-structured meeting following some form of harm where the victim, the offender, and their support networks come together to problem solve. Conferences allow the victim to confront the offender, engage in healing, and assist in determining consequences. The offender is given the opportunity to face the impact of the behavior and engage in repairing harm. A restorative conference is used as an alternative to traditional disciplinary procedures for minor offenses (Wachtel, 2016).

Victim Offender Mediation

Expanding on the process of a restorative conference, victim offender mediation is a more structured procedure. A trained professional versed in restorative practices facilitates the meeting between the victim, the offender, and the community. “Victim-offender mediation is

primarily dialogue driven, with the emphasis on victim healing, offender accountability, and restoration of losses” (Umbreit, Coates, & Vos, 2004). This process is used when the offense is more intense or harmful and a neutral facilitator is needed to maintain a safe and respectful environment.

While these four practices are most commonly utilized, programs throughout the educational system are developing to meet the needs of students. As researchers and educational practitioners continue to find traditional procedures ineffective, more are turning to alternative methods of discipline and skills streaming.

Definitions

Expulsion: Removal from an educational institution for a year or more (Daniel & Bondy, 2008).

Juvenile justice: Persons under the age of 18 involved in the court system (Mallet, 2016).

Maladaptive: Dysfunctional or inappropriate behaviors within a specific context (Cassiers et al., 2018).

Prosocial: behaviors that allow an individual the ability to adapt to a specific context (Cassiers et al., 2018).

Punitive: Discipline practices that provide punishment or inflict a penalty. Common practices include suspension, expulsion, corporal punishment, and seclusion (Daniel & Bondy, 2008).

Restorative practices: Skill-based procedures that connect the victim, offender, and community in a way that allows empowerment and ownership (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

Retributive approach: An approach to discipline procedures that include punitive measures. This approach encompasses traditional discipline and zero-tolerance policies. The purpose is to provide a punishment to a violation of a school policy or rule without including skills training to alter behavioral patterns (Gagnon, Gurel, & Barber, 2006).

Suspension: the short-term removal of a student from the regular education setting due to a violation of a school rule or procedure (Gagnon et al., 2017).

Traditional discipline: Long standing approach to discipline procedures that involve retribution. The idea behind these policies is that students will conform out of fear of consequences. An authority figure makes a determination as to the punishment of the offense and students learn to change behavior based on the punishment (Macready, 2009).

Trauma-infused: Prolonged exposure to any stressor during childhood has an impact on the brain often making children more sensitive to situations. Stressors can include emotional/physical abuse, emotional/physical neglect, maltreatment, divorce, incarceration of a parent, and death (Cassiers et al., 2018).

Zero-tolerance: “Policies . . . used to deliver a predetermined set of consequences, often punitive, without consideration of offense severity, mitigating circumstances, or context” (McCarter, 2017, p. 53).

Chapter II: Review of Literature

The purpose of this review of literature is to examine restorative practices utilized in educational systems and the impact of these practices within the school setting. The focus will be on whether these strategies have an effect on changing behavioral patterns, reducing behavioral referrals, and altering the overall climate within a school community. It has been well documented that punitive measures are no longer effective in altering behavioral patterns and promoting the ideology of learning (Mansfield, Fowler, & Rainbolt, 2018). When looking at the implementation of new discipline procedures within an entire school system, the educational community must consider a plethora of concepts as well as their implications. As the shift from exclusionary practices to positive behavioral interventions occur, restorative practices have shown progressive results. The following seven studies explore the use of general restorative practices in school environments and the impacts of those practices on school discipline. The subsequent two studies examine the use of the specific practices of family-group conferencing and victim-offender mediation in altering challenging behavior in youth.

Restorative practices are based on the idea of restoring harm. Its implication is that by creating a system of procedures and protocols that promote positive community interactions and relationships, maladaptive behavioral patterns will change. Restorative practices fall within a continuum of application, from simple affective (I feel) statements to more structured victim-offender mediation (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016). Examining literature across time and arenas has shown that each environment implementing restorative practices has created their own set of procedures reflective of the rudimentary principles established in the restorative ideology; “harm as a violation of people and relationships, rather than of rules or laws” (Reimer,

2011, p. 2). Although this allows for school systems to develop programs specific to their specialized needs, it is difficult to generalize findings across institutions due to inconsistent implementation.

Restorative Practices in Scotland

Implementation of restorative practices have reached across numerous countries. McCluskey et al. (2008) surveyed a pilot project carried out over two years in Scotland. The intent of this study was to determine if restorative practices are a viable option when confronted with challenging behaviors. In 2004, the Scottish Executive provided funding to three Scottish Local Authorities to learn more about restorative practices in the school setting. Eighteen schools were selected in this evaluation, ten secondary schools, seven primary schools, and one school who serviced students with disabilities. Interviews were conducted with school staff, students, and caregivers along with a school staff/student survey. Surveys were completed on 627 staff and 1163 students for a large sized population set. Additionally, observations and analysis were completed on day-to-day operations within the school setting looking at implementation of restorative practices as well.

Previous studies have implied that restorative programs have had “little impact on some outcome measures such as exclusion and [shown] no significant improvement in pupils’ attitudes except in the small number of schools where a whole school approach has been adopted” (McCluskey et al., 08, p. 407). Due to the range in implementation on the continuum, it is difficult to determine with certainty what procedures are effective. In the Scottish pilot program, schools were given freedom to develop processes related to their own needs and priorities. Table 1 defines the practices involved in the continuum.

Table 1

Restorative Practices Implemented in Scotland

Restorative Practices Implemented in 18 Schools in Scotland
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restorative culture building • Curriculum focus on relationships and conflict prevention • Restorative language • Restorative enquiry • Restorative conversations • Mediation: peer and staff • Circles: Check ins, problem-solving • Restorative meetings, informal conferences, classroom conferences • Formal restorative conferences

Successful implementation included a whole school approach to restorative practices. Schools that developed a common language across the system centered on the values of community, empathy, and culture, acknowledged improvements. “The atmosphere in most schools became identifiably calmer and pupils [were] generally more positive about their whole school experience” (McCluskey et al., 2008, p. 410). Furthermore, staff were more likely to utilize reactive restorative practices when confronted with challenging behaviors due to feeling confident in already established restorative routines and protocols. Researchers assert, “a small number of schools had raised attainment and in several, there was a decrease in exclusions, in-school discipline referrals, and out-of-school referrals” (McCluskey et al., 2008, p. 410).

As in other studies, primary schools were shown to be more successful with implementation versus secondary schools. With the difference in structure of a secondary environment, as well as less time to model and set up consistent procedures within one class, restorative practices were utilized as a framework for reactive interventions in response to

challenging behaviors. Therefore, some practices were less developed, and few staff engaged in processes with fidelity.

Through this study, as well as the pilot program as a whole, some necessary concepts emerged for successful implementation in all school environments. One element consistent throughout the study was the willingness of the staff to accept the values of restorative programs and use them throughout their day. Additionally, the commitment of all stakeholders to model and immerse themselves in these values, while providing support and training, elevated the success rate of implementation. McCluskey et al. (2008) suggested that “restorative practices seemed more effective when ‘behavior’ was seen as an issue to be addressed through restorative strategies that involved active learning for all children and for staff across the school” (p. 415). Applying proactive, human-centered, strategies to every moment within a school day and reflecting on these community building values, allow for restorative practices to flourish.

The following demonstrates the principles to the pilot project in Scotland:

- Importance of foster social relationships
- Responsibility/Accountability for own actions and impact on others
- Respect for people, their views/feelings
- Empathy
- Fairness
- Commitment to equitable process
- Active involvement of everyone in school with decisions
- Issues of conflict returned to participants
- Willingness to create reflective change

One issue that came from this study looked at sustainability. Once funding from the Scottish Executive ceases, schools will have to find alternative means by which to support training and utilization of restorative programming. Furthermore, as staff and administration turn over, commitment by the district to continue promoting restorative practices as the culture within the school needs to be addressed. Another issue confronting sustainability revolves around the ideology of the punitive paradigm that continues to have significant support in educational arenas. As maladaptive and violent behaviors increase in schools, proponents for zero-tolerance are in stark conflict with restorative foundations. Depending upon who dictates policies and procedures, programs such as this pilot will fall to the wayside.

Restorative Practices in Ontario

Reimer (2011) examined the implementation of restorative practices within a Canadian public school in Ontario. She conducted a qualitative study focusing on how restorative practices were being experienced by staff and administration during the 2008-2009 school year. This idea of “experience” centered around the understanding of restorative programming, the practices implemented within the classroom/school, and the overall cohesive perception across the environment. Questionnaires were sent to 36 individuals at one school to explore the ideologies present within one educational environment. With a 39% response rate, only five respondents were contacted for further interview. One individual was an administrator who had been working with restorative practices for numerous years. The remaining four were educators with diverse views on restorative programs. In addition, a school board administrator was interviewed in order to provide information across stakeholders within this center of study.

Data collected was based on two separate methods of examination. Initial questionnaires were divided into categories of educators with training on restorative practices and educators without training on restorative practices to determine if perceptions of these practices were training dependent. Secondly, analysis focused on data gained from interviews. This data was divided into specific themes and constructs related to the underlying theories and implementation of restorative practices. Table 2 highlights the four themes identified.

Table 2

Themes/Constructs in Implementation in Ontario

Themes/Constructs	Underlying ideas within the themes
Constructing personal understandings of restorative programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition • Enactment • Inappropriate use • Transmission
Facilitating adoption of new personal practical theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits for students • Benefits for school community • Positively fits with past ideas
Complicating contextual factors of structure and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obstacles • RJE requires strong community • Working against mainstream culture • Collegial collaboration • Community connections
Inconsistent support from gatekeepers of change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top-down support • Feeling out of the loop • Lack of sustainability

While numerous studies have indicated restorative practices create school environments that promote a change in climate, thus a change in behavior, this study focused on how that climate is created as well as how it may fail.

Data explored suggests positive results with commitment to change and implementation of restorative programming within this school. When this idea initially came to Ontario's public schools, the School Board received outside funding for the implementation of restorative programs. With this funding, the program was able to "curb exclusionary practices for 55 students" (Reimer, 2011, p. 14). Suspension rates dropped and engagement in restorative practices increased across all educational environments. However, once funding ceased, investment in restorative programs diminished along with training, staff, and alternatives to punitive discipline. While restorative practices and its values were disseminated throughout the building, application of protocols dissipated. Those who had been trained continued to engage in restorative practices to handle harmful incidents. However, staff felt less confident in managing significant issues which were then passed on to administration. Furthermore, those who lacked the training were unlikely to use restorative practices in dealing with behavior concerns, even though the system was steeped in those values. All stakeholders were willing to implement practices in daily routines, but these were far less effective due to the lack of consistent training and principles. "The use of restorative justice differed greatly depending on what role the speaker filled, teacher, school administrator, or Board Administrator" (Reimer, 2011, p. 21). This study concluded that all participants felt that restorative programs provided benefits to students and to the learning environment. The increase in community, mutual respect, and empathy created a safe and nurturing environment for all members of the school.

A prime concern for all stakeholders in this examination was the lack of time and funding available for sustainability. Moreover, the lack of understanding of the purpose of restorative practices as a school system rather than as just a reactive tool, limited use in the mainstream

environment. Reimer (2011) found that “restorative processes are viewed as the responsibility of administration” (p. 30). Thus, teachers lose ownership in the processes, which erodes the utilization within the whole system. The effectiveness of these programs is centered in the roles of each member of the community. Without staff owning those roles, the system deteriorates.

This study looked at the perceptions, implementation, and practices of one school in Ontario. Positive results centered on the commitment of staff and administration as a whole to provide an alternative to retributive discipline and teach in a climate of care and concern. However, due to lack of funding, lack of training, and lack of consistent structures and protocols, restorative practices became ineffective. Even with support across all stakeholders, the entire climate for change needed to be present for sustainability. There are a few limitations to this study that impact generalization. This study was completed in a single educational environment focusing on a set of systems cultivated through a small number of individuals. The lack of representation of students, parents, and additional staff does not allow for a larger structure from which to dissect and interpret information and ideologies (Reimer, 2011).

Restorative Practices in London

Focusing on the evaluative process of restorative practices and its implementation, Bevington (2015) examined one inner-London elementary school and its programming. The goal of this study was to collect a broader understanding of the implementation and impact of restorative practices along with identifying barriers impeding its use in education. Researchers conducted an appreciative evaluation with six staff members over a four-month period of time. Participants comprised of two teaching assistants, two teachers, and two administrators in order to encompass the varied roles within the school system. This site was chosen due to its diverse

student population as well as its application of restorative strategies. Consisting of 355 students, 30% of the population were eligible for free/reduced school lunch and 66% of the population were English learners. Additionally, this school placed among the top five percent of primary schools nationally for its academic proficiency as well as its value in social emotional learning (Bevington, 2015, p. 107). The school was steeped in restorative language, values, and circle communities in daily activities.

Researchers employed the six participants in a four-stage process to determine the implication of individual perceptions and knowledge in restorative practices. These stages included inquiry, imagining, innovation, and implementation (Bevington, 2015, p. 107). Table 3 illustrates the four-phases in this process.

Table 3

Four-Stage Process in Implementation in London

Phase	Description
Inquire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • individual interviews • focus on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ peak experience (involvement in restorative practices) ○ Values (connections between self and practices) ○ Wishes (what would the best look like)
Imagine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • characteristics of an award-winning program
Innovate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop provocative propositions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ outcome indicators/affirmation statements
Implement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formulate a plan to act on what was developed during innovate phase • presentation to staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ discussions ○ recommendations

The Inquire Phase allowed staff to ask questions and create a concrete understanding of the purpose of restorative strategies. The focus of inquiry centered on three core components. First, peak experience was examined, which looked at how staff engaged with and contributed to restorative programming. Second, values or the connections between the individual's personal mores and that of restorative practices were explored. Finally, a consideration of transforming programming into the ideal was analyzed through wishes. Researchers interviewed participants based the three core components to gather information as the structure for the evaluation.

The Imagine Phase had staff create ideas for future application of strategies. The participants met for discussion and analysis of the data collected in Phase I. Moreover, staff were asked to identify procedures and protocols that would develop a strong foundation for excellence in restorative programming.

Phase III invited participants to develop outside-the-box ideas of expectations for the learning environment. The intent of the Innovate phase was to generate "affirmative sentences written in the present tense to bridge the best of what is with what could be" (Bevington, 2015, p. 109). These statements were similar to outcome indicators, identifying specific characteristics or needs to increase the effectiveness of restorative programming.

The final phase focused on implementation. During this phase, staff devised a plan as to how to move forward in applying and sharing learning to the community. Participants presented to the staff their findings and recommendations for further application and alterations to current practices to make the system more effective as a whole.

Following this process, a central theme emerged through discussion and analysis – congruence within practices. Researchers expressed that when creating a system enrap in

restorative practices, the school and staff values must converge, as must expectations and outcomes, with the ideologies of the program (Bevington, 2015). When there are inconsistencies within the system, implementation and use of restorative practices will be less effective and eventually dissolve any progress made in developing a community infused in empathetic care. In addition, this study stressed the appreciation of creating a learning environment that is rife with opportunities to problem-solve. “Restorative work . . . opens up alternative and more constructive ways of dealing with emotions, with conflict, and with life more generally” (Bevington, 2015, p. 109). Staff and students are given the tools to approach conflict situations with calm strategies. However, there are some elements present in human nature that make restorative practices ineffective. These issues such as emotional well-being of the victim/offender/keeper, self-esteem, competence of practitioners, and lack of time, influence the appropriateness of this programming.

Limitations to this study are similar to other studies in that the selection of the population of participants is small. Therefore, generalization of findings is impossible. Furthermore, researchers studied an environment with well-established systems in place. It is unknown how much of an impact previous training and engagement in programming had on participant perspectives. Furthermore, much of the information was subjective in nature which impacts the ability to compare across programs, across educational environments, and across stakeholders. Overall, findings suggest that when creating a system of restorative practices, all members of the community must find common values from which to develop a foundation of social/emotional learning.

Restorative Practices in California

Ingraham et al. (2016) investigated implementation of restorative practices in an elementary school in San Diego, California. Due to the at-risk nature of the student body and the increased need for community outreach, school personnel invested in a three-year initiative surrounding the restructuring of practices already in place. The intent of this study was to develop procedures within the framework of restorative practices to use with the community in an effort to decrease discipline referrals and increase student/family involvement. This elementary school was selected due to its unique characteristics and demographics. The population of the school studied consisted of ethnically and linguistically diverse learners in kindergarten through grade five within a community wrought with high levels of violence, poverty, and trauma. “Out of the 520 students enrolled in 2011, 80% were Hispanic or Latino, 10% were Black or African American, 4% were Asian, and 3% were white with 68% qualifying as English Language Learners” (Ingraham et al., 2016, p. 359). Results of standardized academic testing placed students in the improvement status, meaning less than half of the population were meeting grade level standards in California.

A single case study design was used to illustrate development and implementation of restorative practices specific to the diversity in this elementary school. Through the use of participatory culture—specific intervention model and multicultural consultee-centered consultation, this school developed procedures to engage stakeholders within the education community and enhance family-school collaboration in creating restorative programming. Questionnaires and interviews were used to gather data addressing queries surrounding how stakeholders responded to the system of restorative practices and how participants were impacted

by the roles generated in programming. An 11-phase process (see Table 4) was implemented to evaluate and define specific practices.

Table 4

Eleven-Phase Process in the Evaluation and Implementation in California

Phase	Years 1-2: Defining Activities	Years 1-2: Defining Activities
Formative – Research Phases		
Phase 1: Existing theory, research, and practice	Learned perspectives of parents, shared resources	Workshops, consultation, literature reviews
Phase 2: Learning the culture	Worked with cultural brokers to learn about local norms, culture, values	Increased collaboration with teachers, continued meetings with staff, community, and parents
Phase 3: Forming Partnerships	Establishing visibility and collaboration with school and community meetings	Continued visibility through proximity, increased collaboration
Phase 4: Goal/problem identification	Asking questions to define problem and topics	Collaboration with students, teachers, parents about continuing needs
Phase 5: Formative research	Surveys of stakeholders	Conducted needs assessments
Phase 6: Culture-specific theory or model	Whole-child and community-school theory	Trauma-informed care and principles
Program – Intervention Phases		
Phase 7: Program design	Development of workshops, provided counseling groups, consultation with community	School-climate focus groups, community meetings looking at tiered interventions
Phase 8: Program implementation	Counseling groups with feedback, modification/adaptations	Progress monitoring, multiple feedback methods
Phase 9: Program evaluation	Progress monitoring and ongoing feedback through parents, participant interviews, surveys	Extensive progress monitoring and ongoing feedback through parents, participant interviews, surveys
Program Continuation – Extension		
Phase 10: Capacity building	Share-out at community meetings, trainees	Trained parents to lead workshops, trained students in peer mediation
Phase 11: Translation (dissemination/deployment)	Presentations to community at large	Presentations at professional/academic conferences

The phases were divided into Research, Intervention, and Extension steps in order to consider varied perspectives and develop partnerships across groups. Through these methods, “the specific cultures, perspectives and practices of the community and school were recognized and embedded within the interventions and practices” (Ingraham et al., 2016, p. 365). This allowed for restorative programming to envelop the community and be more reflective of the distinctive needs present, increasing effectiveness.

Adaptations to prescribed methods of restorative practices were made to meet the requests of all stakeholders. Educators were provided consultation, lesson instruction, and extension to professional learning communities centered in restorative principles. Additionally, students were given extensive opportunities to engage in restorative practices lessons, celebrations, and peer mediation training. Moreover, parents engaged in community meetings, parent workshops, and Principal Chats (meetings with the principal) to extend programming into the home. In addition to this community outreach, school psychologist trainees were recruited to provide consultation with parents and families to assist with mental health concerns and needs. Within this three-year plan, individual teams of interventionists were created to concentrate on parent engagement, peer mediation, and classroom/teacher interventions. This process allowed for specific identification, support, and feedback to ensure fidelity and implementation integrity. The system as a whole developed and designed preventative school-wide restorative practices using culturally-appropriate methods which increased participant engagement.

After creating, implementing, and studying this delivery of restorative programming, researchers found positive results. For instance, there was a significant decrease in office discipline referrals. From year one to year three, the number decreased from 133 referrals to 20.

“There were 100% reductions in referrals for battery, physical injury, possession of knife/inappropriate items, and property damage, and there was a 33% reduction in referrals for annoying others” (Ingraham et al., 2016, p. 370). Furthermore, there was an increase in parent involvement in school collaboration. One issue that arose through the study was parental concerns about student graduation rates, which was at 66%. This concern drove family-school conflict and played a major role in the disconnection of school to the community. Following the initiative, parent concerns for graduation dropped 20%, which was accredited to providing support across perspectives.

Educators welcomed the new restorative programming design following the initiative as well. The mindset of the environment changed from one of punishment to one of conflict resolution and care. Teachers were surveyed concerning solutions to behavioral issues within the classroom environment. When given the choice, educators selected restorative means over more punitive methods 97% of the time. This was an increase from the prior initiative when restorative procedures were selected less than 85% of the time (Ingraham et al., 2016). Students also embraced the design as well. The use of student-led peer mediation grew and student engagement in resolving conflict, creating community, and modeling proactive regulation skills increased as well.

The development of a school-wide program steeped in cultural values and perspective relevant to the surrounding community showed promise in this study. Relationships were fostered and skills were taught, but there was also a reframing of the ideological foundations present in the system. This community was already utilizing and encompassing the theories behind restorative practices. All stakeholders seemed inclined to build on and adapt those ideas

to meet the needs of their population. Success in this initiative was founded on buy-in from its community. Limitations to this study include the single study design. It is not known whether other programs or services outside of this initiative were employed simultaneously within the community which may have impacted success. Furthermore, the system itself was unique in design. Educators, parents, and students were willing to embark on exploring and developing programming. Additionally, resources were available to sustain the project as well. It is unknown if results would be replicated within a different educational setting or sustained for the length of the project. However, Ingraham et al. (2016) demonstrated that by applying programming relevant to the community, positive results were acquired.

Restorative Practices in the Eastern United States

Gregory et al. (2016) found similar results in their examination of the implementation of restorative practices in two large high schools on the East Coast of the United States. In this study, researchers investigated the impact of employment of restorative programming on student-teacher relationships as well as the issuance of discipline referrals. The team looked specifically at the levels at which practices were utilized throughout the school day and the resulting impact on student and teacher perceptions of positive relationships. Additionally, the team investigated whether this connection was consistent across varying racial and ethnic groups. The racial discipline gap has been documented through time with students of diverse backgrounds disproportionately overrepresented in school discipline, specifically through exclusionary practices (McCarter, 2017). Examination of practices within these two schools were used to determine if there is a consistent perception of positive relationships and student experience across all racial and ethnic groups.

A qualitative analysis was completed through the use of questionnaires with teachers and students in two large high schools. Educators within the buildings averaged 13 years of experience in education. Of the staff population, 75% were women and 99% identified as white. The population of students comprised of approximately 4,552 individuals with 54% identifying as white, 31% identifying as Latino, 11% identifying as African American, 3% identifying as Asian, and less than 1% identifying as American Indian. When looking at discipline data, the most common offense between the two buildings was related to misconduct/defiance, comprising of roughly 30% of referrals. In the year prior to the introduction of restorative practices, “greater percentages of Latino and African American students were issued misconduct/defiance referrals than Asian and White students” (Gregory et al., 2016 p. 332). This gap in discipline led to concerns among stakeholders who were looking for alternatives to punitive measures.

Beginning in 2011, both educational institutions carried out a transformation of procedures within their teachings. Educators participated in trainings and consultation with experts in restorative practices in an effort to implement programming within the school day. Targeted planning, modeling, and observations took place over a two-year period in order to apply procedures with fidelity. Methods of practice executed included building community, conducting classroom circles, facilitating meetings with students and families, as well as engaging students and staff in restorative leadership skills. Following application of these procedures, 412 students and 31 teachers participated in completing surveys to gather data. Students were coded into two groups for reflection, group one consisting of students identifying as Latino, African American, and American Indian (54% of the sample) and group two consisting of students identifying as Asian and White (46% of the sample). Part 1 of the analysis

examined the degree of execution of restorative programming within the classroom setting. This required students to respond to questions using a 5-point rating scale. Students were asked questions based on their perceptions of teacher engagement in specific restorative programming elements. See Table 5 for categories and question examples.

Table 5

Five-Point Rating Scale Concerning Perceptions of Restorative Practices

Scale	Statements – example
The Affective Statements Scale	My teacher is respectful when talking about feelings
The Restorative Questions Scale	When someone misbehaves, my teacher responds to negative behaviors by asking questions concerning harm
The Proactive Circles Scale	My teacher uses circles to provide opportunities for students to share feelings, ideas...
The Fair Process Scale	Asks students their thoughts and ideas when decisions need to be made that affect the community
The Management of Shame Scale	My teacher acknowledges feelings of students when they have misbehaved

Additionally, teachers completed similar survey questions about their implementation of restorative programming within their classroom. Part 2 of the analysis measured the quality of teacher-student relationships. This was completed through the use of an additional survey along with examination of school discipline records. The second survey invited students to reflect on a four item Teacher Respect scale which included queries on perceptions of if a teacher “liked” the student, listened to the student, or enjoyed having them in class. Researchers reviewed student

discipline referrals looking for reasons that could influence student-teacher conflict and negative perceptions as well. In a study completed by Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, and Vincent (as cited in Gregory et al., 2016), it was established that “higher levels of schoolwide use of office discipline referrals were associated . . . student and teacher perceptions of unsafe school conditions” (p. 337). The degree in which teachers dispense behavioral referrals to administration plays a role in creating community in the classroom.

Through analysis, Gregory et al. (2016) found that the implementation of restorative practices within a classroom is associated with the level of respect generated between teachers and students. The higher a student rated engagement in restorative programming, the more respectful was the teacher-student relationship. Additionally, students reported that with higher rates of utilization, fewer referrals were issued to both groups of students. Researchers also found that “student-reported RP implementation . . . but not teacher-reported RP implementation . . . was associated with teacher respect. Students reporting greater implementation of the RP elements tended to perceive those teachers as more respectful” (Gregory et al., 2016, p. 340). Moreover, student race/ethnicity had no bearing on the connection between employment of programming and teacher respect. When examining the influence of implementation on discipline data, greater utilization of practices was linked to lower use of defiance referrals as indicated by students. Furthermore, teachers with low rates of employment of practices were more likely to refer students for misconduct. When scrutinizing the data as a whole, the team found a significant difference remained between discipline referrals for group one versus group two. While the disparity was smaller, this suggests that use of restorative programming may narrow the racial discipline gap but does not serve to eliminate it.

While some positive results were identified in this study, some concerns were discovered as well. This study was conducted in two separate high schools in similar locations in the eastern United States. Researchers attempted to gather data from both institutions but found that samples from the schools were uneven. One institution provided 87% of the student responses. This is reflective of a singular set of programming and implementation which may not be replicated in other establishments. Furthermore, this study highlights the needs for high levels of instruction in restorative principles by all members of school staff. If looking at creating a system of community with students and teachers founded in respect, the need for on-going instruction, feedback, and extension is required. Due to budgetary demands and the need for schools to increase academic rigor rather than social/emotional skills, investment into programming is limited. Gregory et al. (2016) demonstrated that restorative practices may be culturally appropriate due to the connection between student perspectives and lower discipline referrals. However, more research needs to be completed to determine whether this was based in the ideology of restorative practices or in the community searching to lower rates of discipline.

Restorative Practices in Maine

Acosta et al. (2016) also set out to assess the effects of restorative practices interventions. The purpose behind their study was to determine if engagement in whole-school interventions through restorative programming affects positive developmental outcomes and maladaptive behaviors. Additionally, attention was given to whether these changes would persist. Given the complexity of youth development and the interaction of systems within communities on youth behavior, the team hypothesized that a comprehensive and consistent approach to teaching and learning founded in restorative practices would have positive results. The team utilized a cluster-

randomized controlled trial assessing the implementation of restorative practices as well as the impact of these practices on students in 14 middle schools in Maine. The schools were matched and delineated by receiving outside support for implementation of programming, seven of which received such support and seven did not. The 14 middle schools spanned throughout Maine in rural and suburban areas. Each school averaged approximately 250 students per site in Grades 6-8. The racial/ethnic backgrounds were fairly similar as well with about 95% of the population identifying as white, 2% identifying as black, and 1% identifying as mixed race or other.

Similar to the previous study by Gregory et al. (2016), each of the seven educational institutions carried out a transformation of procedures within their teachings. Staff were provided with extensive training concerning restorative programming with targeted planning, modeling, and continued observational feedback and supports over a two-year period in order to apply procedures with fidelity (Acosta et al., 2016). The process was intended to implement a whole school change in which 11 essential elements of restorative practices would be integrated in daily routines, protocols, and procedures. Staff and students were expected to utilize these strategies to build relationships, resolve conflict, and when interacting with members outside of the learning environment. The goal was for restorative practices to become an innate process when collaborating with others. It must be noted that this study is currently in year four of research and data collection. While ideological principles and outcomes have been mentioned, the results of the study are still pending.

Through this five-year study, Acosta et al. (2016) will look at numerous outcomes from the data collected. Staff will be asked to provide information on the degree of implementation of practices utilized within their classroom. Furthermore, students will receive a similar survey

inquiring about the range of access to restorative programming they received throughout their day. Trained observers will utilize random trial observation checklists to assess the rate of implementation as well as fidelity within classrooms. The school climate will be assessed similarly through observations and surveys of staff and students. Additionally, students will be asked to reflect on six sets of youth specific outcomes following every year of implementation to determine effects of programming. These six items include the following:

- School Connectedness
- Peer Relationships
- Social Competency
- Bullying
- Academic Achievement
- Disciplinary Referrals

The team will compare the data collected from the seven sites implementing restorative practices to the alternative seven sites serving as the control group to determine if the use of these principles have impacted student outcomes and problem behaviors. Researchers suggest that with high implementation of restorative protocols across all school environments, there will be greater improvements on developmental outcomes for youths, fewer problem behaviors disrupting learning, and stronger social competencies compared to students in schools without such programming. Again, it must be noted that this study began in the fall of 2014 and data collection will conclude following the 2018-2019 school year.

Limitations to this study include the clustering of schools within the context of rural and suburban environments. Students within these settings tend to be rather cohesive with little

diversity. It would be difficult to generalize findings across other environments due to this clustering. Additionally, due to the length of the trial, subjects examined in year one will be different than those who are surveyed in year four or five. Likewise, staff migration may impact results as well. Acosta et al. (2016) also were concerned about the lack of time available to staff for professional development. When attempting to implement procedures with fidelity, consistent instruction across time is necessary. As teachers are bombarded with a myriad of topics in which to become experts, there is concern that these intervention strategies will be overlooked. However, stakeholders in this study are committed to determining if this whole-school approach will result in the hypothesized positive outcomes.

Restorative Practices in Virginia

Mansfield et al. (2018) examined restorative practices in response to the increasing trend of specific groups of students facing harsher punishments to behaviors in schools. Research has indicated that males, especially African Americans and students with disabilities, are given exclusionary punishments at a rate that is two to three times that of their peers (Daniel & Bondy, 2008). Furthermore, such exclusion is associated with placing students at a greater risk of involvement in the juvenile justice system. In Central Virginia, the increased usage of punitive measures created a cause for concern for school administration, and other stakeholders, as reports of the damaging effects of these practices on the student population was brought to light. Lower achievement levels, lack of graduation results, and inhibited social/emotional skills in students, initiated officials to seek alternative methods of discipline. Mansfield et al., (2018) studied a large high school in Central Virginia to explore these issues concerning the community. The intent of this study was to evaluate the use of restorative practices as a replacement for

traditional methods of discipline in an effort to diminish the negative impact of punishment as well as to decrease the discipline gap.

Algonquin High School in Central Virginia consists of a diverse student body with approximately 1,400 students in Grades 9 through 12. Faced with pressure to perform and meet state standards for graduation, the school psychologist in this school, Dr. Riesling, along with his administration, realized that the discipline practices employed in the school were likely having negative effects on student achievement. After much research, Dr. Riesling proposed that the school implement restorative practices in an effort to change their institution. It was perceived by Dr. Riesling and his administration team that a system of alternative practices steeped in building relationships and community would increase student engagement and decrease reliance on ineffective punitive discipline procedures. Subsequently, the team applied for and received funding to engage and support the SafeSanerSchools Whole School Change Program. Created by the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, this program required a two-year commitment towards the implementation of a specific system of restorative programming and training. School staff would be fully trained in 11 essential elements of restorative practices and would receive continued support and feedback in utilization and effectiveness. The 11 elements are broken into two sections of execution, with one focusing on preventative elements or activities performed prior to any incident of harm, and another focusing on responsive elements or activities completed following any incident of harm. Additionally, these elements are divided into tiers of engagement. The primary level allows for school-wide implementation. These activities would be found most often and employed during all aspects of learning. The secondary level allows for implementation with targeted groups in

particular settings. These are more broad-based interventions involving members within the school community who have experienced or engaged in some form of specific harm. Tertiary level of implementation centers on more formal responses to serious infractions and is facilitated by trained professionals within the learning community. See Table 6 for a list and detailed description of the 11 elements.

Table 6

Eleven Elements within a Restorative Justice in Education Model

Preventive Elements		
Level of Action	Element	Description
Primary Implementation: School-Wide	Affective Statements	Informal, respectful, personal statements of feelings
	Fair Process	Approach to decision-making that included student input when outcomes impact them
	Restorative Staff Community	Models conflict resolution, building healthy relationships, and restorative practices such as circles and restorative questioning
	Fundamental Hypothesis Understandings	Aligning actions with philosophy that behavioral changes occur when there are high, consistent expectations where authority figures do with not to others
Secondary Implementation: Broad-Based Intervention	Restorative Approach with Families	Use of restorative practices in interactions with families to build transparency, respect, and genuine relationships
	Proactive Circles	Precede incidents and focus on specific topics; conducted on a regular basis and used to build trust and community with shared input from all members

Table 6 Continued

Responsive Elements		
Level of Action	Element	Description
Primary Implementation: School-Wide	Restorative Questions	Informal questions that allow for the offended to be heard by the person engaged in harm and placed responsibility on the offender
	Small Impromptu Conferences/Circles	Two or more people engaged in low level conflict; involved expression of feelings and reflection of actions
	Reintegrative Management of Shame	Anticipated shame results when confronted with negative actions, active listening and acknowledgement, accepts the person but condemns the behaviors, moves past shame
Secondary Implementation: Broad-Based Intervention	Responsive Circles	Circle with no barrier, group addresses behavior and the negative effects on the community and promotes responsibility/making amends; sharing and making a plan
Tertiary Implementation: Targeted Intervention	Restorative Conferences	Most formal; in response to a serious incident; involves a facilitator, offender, victim, supporters; it is highly scripted with a focus on solutions and reintegration

Trainings concerning the SafeSanerSchools Whole School Change Program were completed over a two-day span and focused on primary processes to be utilized throughout the school. All members of the staff were trained for consistency. Efforts for execution were incremental with Year 1 introducing restorative questioning, followed by restorative conferencing, and then classroom implementation in Year 3.

Mansfield et al. (2018) examined data collected from office and discipline referrals and found results generated through the application of the Whole School Change system were

positive. Prior to employment, “the school reported more than 3,000 office referrals in a single year. Within four years, that number had diminished by more than 80% to approximately 500 referrals” (Mansfield et al., 2018, p. 314). The rate of suspension decreased as well with 19% of the population receiving some form of suspension (in-school or outside-school) in 2010 falling to 7% in 2015. Additionally, researchers looked at suspension rates of specific categories to determine if the use of restorative practices decreased the discipline gap as well. In 2010, 7% of the white population of students received some form of suspension while nearly 26% of those identified as African American received the same. Since the adoption of restorative practices, suspension rates decreased to 4% and 12% respectively. Furthermore, the suspension rate for students with disabilities decreased roughly 10% as well. An additional aspect of behavior examined by Mansfield et al. (2018) was the rate of recidivism within Algonquin High School to determine if the use of restorative practices were associated with a change to student behavior. Investigation of student data looking into those who received more than one incident of suspension in a given year was completed. In the baseline year of 2010, 111 students received in-school suspension and by 2015, that number was reduced to 37. Moreover, students receiving outside-school suspension decreased from 50 in 2010 to 27 in 2015 as well (Mansfield et al., 2018). From the data collected, implementation of restorative practices created an environment of respect and mutual concern resulting in less use of punitive measures as a means by which to deal with discipline concerns. Student rates of suspension decreased and there was a narrowing of the discipline gap for groups in specialized categories within Algonquin High School.

Limitations to this study, as well as results, include the single set design. Researchers examined the discipline results from one school over the course of a five-year period.

Investigation of a single sample set does not allow for generalization to the population as a whole. Sustainability of the practices is also a concern for researchers. With the increase in teacher turnover and flight, building capacity to practice restorative programming disappears. The need for on-going training is essential for success. While there seems to be a correlation between the use of restorative practices and the reduction of discipline referrals, this does not equal causality. There may be other factors influencing the rates of change as well as the mindset of those completing the referrals. Bias continues to impact implementation and behavioral concerns. It is difficult to determine which factors play a role in the success or failure of a system ruled by subjectivity.

Much of the data presented has focused on generalized practices within specific educational environments. Each school has developed and modified systems to implement within their classrooms that are reflective of their student population and reported through the lens of the whole school approach. As mentioned above, there are varied methods of restorative practices. From restorative chats to circles to family-group conferencing and victim-offender mediation, each method plays a role in the process. On the continuum of implementation, two of the processes require specific and more structured engagement. Family-group conferencing and victim-offender mediation are two such processes that are utilized when offenses are more significant. Frequently used in the juvenile justice system, these practices have been slow to transition to the school environment due to the intensity of the process as well as the requirement for trained facilitation. However, a few studies have shown implications to the school environment that are relevant when looking at full implementation of restorative programming.

Family-Group Conferencing in New Zealand

Wearmouth and Berryman (2012) examined the use of family-group conferencing in a school in New Zealand. Researchers were looking for alternative methods of discipline due to the detrimental effects of exclusionary practices. Similar to data collected across studies, The Department for Education and Skills in New Zealand demonstrated that over a ten-year period of study (2000-2010), Black-Caribbean students were three times more likely to face exclusion than white students. This created a system where students impacted by punishment lost the sense of belonging and acceptance needed to engage in pro-social behaviors in the learning environment. New Zealand has been a leader in utilizing restorative practices due to the prevalence of the Maori people. Restorative protocols are reflective of traditional Maori conflict resolution meetings in which tribe members come together to facilitate collective responsibility, restitution, and reciprocal accountability. This study explored two examples of these processes and the impact following a family-group conference.

Family-group conferencing was employed in a school in Aotearoa, New Zealand due to the increased miscommunication between the family unit and the school unit in response to student behavior. Wearmouth and Berryman (2012) looked specifically at two student situations and the methods employed following harm. In the first situation, a student had been suspended multiple times for aggressive behaviors towards peers. Due to the frequency of these behaviors, a disconnect developed between the school and the home. Parents expressed the need to try an alternative approach and contacted the Resource Teachers Learning and Behavior service to assist in addressing the challenging behavior. A trained educator (broker) was asked to facilitate a meeting between the victim of the last attack, the offender, their families, and the school. The

process was difficult as all members were hesitant to participate. Once gathered, the participants followed a prescribed set of procedures that allowed for all members to express themselves in a safe environment. The broker facilitated the meeting to ensure that the process was free of judgement and resulted in a community-based plan that was reflective of the group. The offender was able to face the harm he had caused and make restitution to his victim and the victim was able to better understand the offender and move on. Additionally, the conference highlighted numerous issues which were impacting the behaviors of the offender, as well as the victim, based in the school environment. One of the discoveries was that the school lacked a structured, positive learning environment that centered on community. Students were unengaged and lacked investment in the school as a whole and parents were unaware of the issues facing school personnel. The participants created a plan following the conference to redesign curriculum and the school culture to increase safety and community. After eight weeks of employment, there was an increase in trust between home and school where parents felt more connected with student learning. Furthermore, students were more engaged and decreased the use of negative behaviors across all settings.

The second situation examined by Wearmouth and Berryman (2011) involved two boys with challenging behaviors who were referred to special education. These boys were provided numerous interventions at home as well as at school, none of which had an impact on their behaviors. The special education teacher implemented a family-group conference in order to search for alternatives as the behaviors were severe and impacting the students' education. Procedures were similar to the previously described meeting with participants involving the family, the boys, school personnel, and a broker. The family-group conference brought to light a

myriad of issues that were affecting the boys that were unbeknownst to the members of the group. Parents described inconsistencies within the home setting that were contributing to a lack of awareness of the importance of appropriate behavior. School staff described barriers between the school and home which caused a lack of communication. The students were able to confront the impact of their behaviors on those closest to them as well. Following the meeting, the participants made a plan in which consistent routines and expectations for home and school were established, communication methods for all stakeholders were created, and adaptations were made to accommodate the boys and their needs. After four weeks of implementation, feedback from all members were positive and there was a reduction in engagement of maladaptive behaviors by the students (Wearmouth & Berryman, 2011).

While these two situations are stand alone, the use of family-group conferencing provided an alternative to the continued use of punitive procedures which were having no impact on student behavior. As participants came together to discuss the problem and look for solutions, all members were able to confront the issues, enable reparation of the harm done, and maintain inclusion in the learning environment. Moreover, family-group conferencing allowed for the restoration of the community both inside the school as well as outside of the school. Parents became more invested in the learning environment, communication between home and school increased, and families felt more connected to the school. Additionally, school staff felt that relationships with students and the home environment flourish. There was no longer a difference in perspectives or a distrust in the system. There was a greater understanding of the community due to the positive interactions, discussions, and planning with the family-group conference (Wearmouth & Berryman, 2011). Alternatively, the use of family-group

conferencing can be challenging and time consuming. Victims may refuse to engage in the process. Furthermore, families may be less than supportive of the process and be hesitant to share information. The two situations yielded positive results; however, the results are situationally dependent. Numerous individuals are involved in the process which can lead to distrust, miscommunication, and unresolved conflict.

Victim-Offender Mediation in the Midwest, United States

Similar to family-group conferencing is the process of victim-offender mediation. Following some form of harm, the goal of victim-offender mediation is “to obtain answers, repair harms, and make amends to the victim in a safe and controlled setting” (Choi, Green, & Gilbert, 2011, p. 338). A trained facilitator brings together the victim and the offender, along with a system of support, to explore the offense. Choi et al. (2011) explored the experiences of youth who engaged in victim-offender mediation in a mid-sized midwestern city. The intent of this study was to examine the impact of victim-offender mediation on youth offenders. While this study does not include school-based mediation, it is important to observe the results as many of the offenses take place at school or have school connections. Many of these offenses are funneled through the juvenile justice system, encouraging the school-to-prison pipeline. Examining the impact of victim-offender mediation may provide schools with an alternative means of intervention for students engaging in challenging behaviors, thus, interrupting the pipeline.

Researchers completed a qualitative study through the use of observations and interviews with 37 participants over a one-year period. The participants included eight juvenile offenders and their parents, eight victims, ten mediators, and three referral sources members. Interviews

were based on five sets of semi-structured questionnaires examining perceptions, feelings, and observations of the participants. Furthermore, observations of interactions between the participants were completed throughout the process to inspect expressions, body-language, and non-verbal responses. Choi et al. (2011) collected and compared the data generated from the interviews/observations and found two themes that emerged from analysis. The first theme that appeared following victim-offender mediation was that this intervention was far more difficult for offenders to experience than traditional punishment. The initial perspective of mediation is one of “get off easy.” Victims and offenders alike believed the process would be undemanding. Victims wanted accountability for the harm done and believed this would not happen through mediation. Traditional punishment is done *to* the offender, meaning that offenders are given some consequence that is ideally supposed to hold them responsible and change their behavior. Offenders perceived punishment as something to “get through” and not something from which to learn. However, mediation is done *with* the offender, meaning that offenders must experience the impact of the harm delivered to the victims and provide restoration for that harm. Choi et al. (2011) found that mediation created an uneasiness among the offenders upon meeting their victims. Furthermore, they were confronted with difficult feelings/emotions which impacted how they related to their crime.

The second theme that emerged was that youths believed mediation was a “good punishment” (Choi et al., 2011, p. 345). Offenders found that mediation provided them with opportunities to learn that traditional practices had not. Additionally, there was an opportunity for the offender to see the different aspects of the crime committed. Mediation allowed victims to share their story and the effects of the crime on all aspects of their lives. Offenders learned

more about the victims, gained a better understanding of what harm was caused, and provided a personal connection to crime that had not been experienced by the offenders studied. “The Youths were able to construct a new meaning of their crimes after hearing the victims' reality, which helped them develop a sense of empathy” (Choi et al., 2011, p. 350). Moreover, mediation had an impact on the victim as well. Punishment no longer became the focus of the interaction between the participants. Following the mediation, all members gleaned a different perspective of the harm that took place and the effects. Furthermore, the offenders who were interviewed had not engaged in previous behaviors for the following year of observation.

Limitations to this study include the use of a small sample size. As we look to generalize findings across populations as well as across settings, it is difficult to do with only a sample size of eight offenders. Furthermore, the offenders in this study were all referred to this process within the juvenile justice system as part of their sentence. While the participants engaged in the study voluntarily, it is unknown whether the perspectives generated were ones with validity. Offenders, as well as victims, may have provided data that was impacted by the purpose of the study as well as the intent of the consequence. One issue that has surfaced with the use of victim-offender mediation centers around the quality of the mediator. When facilitating a process such as mediation, it is necessary to have a consistent skill set founded in restorative practices. In order for the process to be relevant and effective, mediators must eliminate bias and insensitivity towards offenders as well as victims. Otherwise, the use of these processes become unproductive and can cause more harm for all participants. This study showed positive results with altering offender behavior following mediation. However, establishing a causal relationship between victim-offender mediation and recidivism rates would be inappropriate at best.

This review of literature focused on 9 studies investigating the implementation of restorative practices in schools and the impact of these practices on discipline data and behavior. As educational environments continue to look for alternatives to punitive methods of behavior management, restorative practices have shown to be a positive replacement with numerous benefits for the school community. Table 7 provides a summary of the research findings highlighted in this chapter with discussion following in Chapter III.

Table 7

Summary of Chapter II Research Findings

Authors	Study Design	Participants	Procedure	Findings
McCluskey et al., 2008	Quantitative	18 schools, 10 secondary, 7 primary, 1 special population. 627 school staff, 1163 students	Staff/students were interviewed and given surveys to complete	Restorative practices implemented in schools ranged on a continuum; those completed with foundation saw positive results in relationship building, less behavior referrals.
Choi, Green, & Gilbert, 2011	Qualitative	eight juvenile offenders, eight offenders' parents, eight victims, 10 mediators and three referral sources	interviews	Consistent skill set across mediators that eliminates bias and insensitivity towards victims and/or offenders needs to be addressed for practices to be effective.
Reimer, 2011	Qualitative	Teachers and administration trained in RP	39 questionnaires; 5 personal interviews	Although staff provided positive attitudes and a willingness to implement, administration was unwilling to see RP as a means to change behavioral patterns limiting implementation with fidelity or support.

Table 7 (continued)

Wearmouth & Berryman, 2012	Qualitative			Offenders who engaged in FGC were less likely to offend and procedures brought about change among the school-family connection.
Bevington, 2015		6 staff from a mixed primary school in London	Over a 4-month period, staff engage in a four-stage process of inquire, imagine, innovate, and implement	The process resulted in staff looking at increasing consistency across practices implemented to be more effective procedure in dealing with behaviors.
Ingraham et al., 2016	Qualitative	Single case study of an elementary school in San Diego, CA	Surveys, interviews	The development of a school-wide program steeped in cultural values and perspective relevant to the surrounding community showed positive results in reduced discipline referrals.
Acosta et al., 2016		14 middle schools in Maine	5-year cluster-randomized control trial assessing the implementation of RP; observation and survey to students and staff	Results are pending; after year two, students and staff have shown an increase in positive relationships and a willingness to repair harm rather than discipline.
Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016		High school students and staff; 31 teachers, 412 students	Surveys	Greater implementation of RP with fidelity led to great positive student-teacher relationships, less discipline referrals, and more equitable discipline practices.
Mansfield, Fowler, & Rainbolt, 2018	Qualitative	High school students in a Central Virginian school	Discipline data	Whole-school system change brought about decreased suspension and expulsion rates as well as lower recidivism rates.

Chapter III: Conclusions and Recommendations

The educational environment is rife with challenges outside the academic lens. As violent behavior in schools increased, there was a quick reaction to turn to harsher, more punitive practices in discipline. Zero-tolerance policies as well as exclusionary practices became the norm within schools as a response to student behaviors. However, these practices had unintended consequences. Studies found that students were less likely to engage in prosocial activities because they lacked the appropriate skills to follow expectations in structured environments. Due to the exclusionary nature, students had been taken out of the learning environment and lost academic instruction, increasing the achievement gap. Moreover, traditional policies created discipline disparities among students with varied cultural backgrounds. Students of color are two-three times more likely to be suspended or expelled for behaviors compared to students who identify as white (DeMitchell & Hambacher, 2016). The need for reform to meet the needs of youth in a proactive and skill-centered way has led officials to look at alternative methods for discipline. One approach that has gained momentum in education is restorative practices. Restorative practices are founded on the principles of respect, dignity, and mutual concern within a community. The goal is to transform conflict and repair harm by addressing issues in a safe and caring climate for all individuals involved. Processes in restorative practices focus on the victim, the offender, and the community as a whole to rebuild connectedness and repair damage done to all parties. The victim and the community are given a voice and the offender is given an opportunity to understand the impact of behavioral actions. Students learn skills to participate in the learning community as an integral social member. The purpose of this paper was to examine restorative practices and its impact on discipline data and

procedures within the educational system. Chapter I provided an understanding of restorative practices as well as a historical background on the topic. The focus of the paper along with the research question was examined. Chapter II presented a review of literature concerning basic practices of restorative programming in schools and the results these practices had on the school environment as well as school discipline. In this chapter, I discuss findings, recommendations, and implications for practice as a result of the review of literature.

Conclusions

I reviewed nine studies that examined the use of restorative practices as an alternative method of discipline in response to youth behaviors. Seven of the studies focused on general programming models founded in restorative principles implemented in the school environment (Acosta et al., 2016; Bevington, 2015; Gregory et al., 2016; Ingraham et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2018; McCluskey et al., 2008; Reimer, 2011). Two of the studies looked at specific methods within the restorative practices continuum that require facilitation from a trained professional (Choi et al., 2011; Wearmouth & Berryman, 2012).

Of the seven studies examining restorative practices as a whole, eight themes emerged:

1. *School Climate Change*. Five of the studies examined demonstrated that there was a climate change within the school environment (Gregory et al., 2016; Ingraham et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2018; McCluskey et al., 2008; Reimer, 2011). Students and staff were more respectful to each other, were more likely to engage in conflict resolution, and were more engaged in the idea of a safe and caring community. Students felt as though teachers who utilized restorative procedures when handling

- disruptions in class were more considerate of student needs, creating that safe environment needed for learning.
2. *Successful Implementation Requires a Whole-School Approach.* Four of the studies surveyed emphasized the need for a whole-school approach when implementing restorative programming. (Acosta et al., 2016; Gregory et al., 2016; McCluskey et al., 2008; Reimer, 2011). Schools that developed a common language across the system centered on the values of community, empathy, and culture, acknowledged improvements were more successful in implementation. Furthermore, teachers were more likely to engage in the prescribed practices as it became common practice. However, as Reimer (2011) noted, the effectiveness of these programs is centered in the roles of each member of the community and without staff owning those roles, the system deteriorates.
 3. *Consistent Procedures.* Researchers expressed that when creating a system based in restorative practices, the school and staff values must converge, as must expectations and outcomes, with the ideologies of the program. When there are inconsistencies within the system, implementation and use of restorative practices will be less effective and eventually dissolve any progress made in developing a community infused in empathetic care (Bevington, 2015). Similar to consistent ideologies, there is a need for a consistent skill set for those engaged in facilitating procedures as well (Choi et al., 2011; Wearmouth & Berryman, 2012). Training is essential when looking at implementing a systems change. Additionally, the need to eliminate bias

- and insensitivity towards victims and offenders is crucial to the effectiveness of restorative practices.
4. *Development of Student-Centered Practices.* Of the seven studies investigating whole-school approaches, four implemented strategies within the restorative programming lens. However, strategies were manipulated to meet the needs of the student population (Bevington, 2015; Ingraham et al., 2016; McCluskey et al., 2008; Reimer, 2011). Stakeholders created practices that were relevant to the needs of the community as well as to its population of students. As Ingraham et al. (2016) described, “the specific cultures, perspectives and practices of the community and school were recognized and embedded within the interventions and practices” (p. 365). This created an environment that provided students and families with a connection to school that was more reflective of the distinctive needs present, increasing effectiveness. However, when attempting to compare practices across school settings and generalizing these strategies to other facilities, it becomes impossible due to the uniqueness of the programming.
 5. *Community Outreach.* Three of the studies illuminated the importance of community outreach when attempting to implement valid restorative procedures (Choi et al., 2011; Ingraham et al., 2016; Wearmouth & Berryman, 2012). Bridging the family-school connection leads to better communication and support across all areas and promotes positive school perspectives. The home-school connection is essential for promoting positive learning experiences. As exclusionary practices increase for students with behavior challenges, families become disenfranchised. Through the use

- of community programming as well as family-group conferencing, student support systems come together in an effort to provide solutions.
6. *Discipline Disparities.* The racial discipline gap has been documented through time with students of diverse backgrounds disproportionately overrepresented in school discipline, specifically through exclusionary practices. Four of the studies explored the impact of restorative practices on the discipline gap (Gregory et al., 2016; Ingraham et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2018; Wearmouth & Berryman, 2012). Ingraham et al. (2016) revealed that full implementation of restorative programming within the classroom environment impacted the use of discipline referrals. When examining the influence of implementation on discipline data, greater utilization of practices was linked to lower use of defiance referrals as indicated by students. However, while the data suggested that referrals decreased across categories, a significant difference remained. Similarly, Mansfield et al. (2018) found, in 2010, 7% of the white population of students received some form of suspension while nearly 26% of those identified as African American received the same. Since the adoption of restorative practices, suspension rates decreased to 4% and 12% respectively. This suggests that use of restorative programming may narrow the racial discipline gap but does not serve to eliminate it.
 7. *Decrease in Discipline Referrals.* All seven studies focusing on restorative practices in schools found that with implementation, there was a decrease in discipline referrals for student behaviors (Acosta et al., 2016; Bevington, 2015; Gregory et al., 2016; Ingraham et al., 2016; McCluskey et al., 2008; Reimer, 2011; Mansfield et al., 2018).

Researchers found that the higher the implementation of practices among educators, the less likely they were to use traditional methods of discipline. Students felt as though teachers who engage in restorative programming provided a space of mutual respect. As Gregory et al. (2016) demonstrated, students reported that with higher rates of utilization, fewer referrals were issued. Student perceptions changed as the practices within the classroom changed. Teachers were more likely to provide methods of conflict resolution rather than assign a referral.

8. *Training and Sustainability.* Effective training and structures for sustainability were concerns in all nine studies examined (Acosta et al., 2016; Bevington, 2015; Choi et al., 2011; Gregory et al., 2016; Ingraham et al., 2016; Mansfield et al., 2018; McCluskey et al., 2008; Reimer, 2011; Wearmouth & Berryman, 2012;). The use of restorative practices is increasing across educational environments. However, the implementation of these procedures tends to fall into “pilot” programs. Too often these programs are provided with support through grants that are limited. As McCluskey et al. (2008) discovered, when support ceases, schools must find alternative methods of funding which is difficult. Furthermore, with the increase in staff turnover, continual training and support may not be feasible.

Limitations and Recommendations

When investigating restorative practices, much of the literature revolves around qualitative analysis of participant perceptions. There is very little data to demonstrate association with specific processes and its impact on student behavior or discipline. In the studies examined, implementation of restorative programming required communities to observe

behavior in an alternative way than is prescribed by traditional methods. Subsequently, the data collected in these studies could have been influenced by the change of mindset. A behavior that was previously seen as worthy of referral, no longer was perceived as harmful. Furthermore, it is unknown whether data collected was a valid representation of offenses. There was no data presented concerning the number of instances that required intervention through restorative practices. While data reflected office referrals, as schools turn toward methods that require teacher management, data should be collected on how often intervention is needed. This would allow for an understanding of whether restorative practices are providing a skill-centered approach from which students are actively learning conflict resolution and social/emotional competency.

As mentioned above, another limitation to research on restorative practices is the use of single set studies and small sample sizes. Many of the studies examined focused on singular schools or situations as well as sample sizes which were less than 30. These samples cannot be used to generalize data to the population due to the increased standard measure of error. Additional research is needed to include larger numbers of students and staff involved in restorative practices. Furthermore, the studies explored were relatively short in duration. When looking at human behavior and the impact of processes on altering those behaviors, studies need to be completed over a lengthy period of time to truly determine effectiveness. The implementation of restorative practices within a school setting may have initial positive results simply because it is a new process. Observing behavior and data longitudinally would allow for more valid and reliable results concerning the effectiveness of practices.

An additional limitation to the studies explored related to academic achievement. Only one study approached the topic of graduation; however, this was in response to parent concerns for students working towards that milestone. As we look at implementing restorative practices, much instruction and training must be provided in order for this system to be effective. Furthermore, academic systems would be affected as these procedures take time when completing and intervening. Research needs to be completed to determine if restorative programming has any impact on academic achievement. As we look at exclusionary protocols increasing the academic gap, a comparison to alternative methods should be done to assess the impact as well.

Implications for Practice

As an educator, I am charged with the task of providing an environment for students that promotes learning. Students have differing needs that impact the way in which they navigate their education. Many students lack the skills necessary to navigate in a pro-social and constructive way. As policies have changed towards more punitive methods, we have seen an increase in the achievement gap for students at-risk. Additionally, as pressures increase to produce high academic achievement and global-readiness in students, educators experience high levels of stress which promotes a punitive mindset. Teachers often resort to exclusionary practices as a response to disruptions in the learning environment due to these demands. Students are not learning new skills to impact behavioral patterns, nor are they learning academic skills to succeed when removed from learning. Moreover, schools are faced with more trauma-infused populations – students who are coming to school with increased challenges. These students require a different approach to instruction and to discipline. The studies examined

demonstrate alternative methods to punishment that create an environment dependent upon safety and security. The implementation of restorative practices within the classroom setting provides skills to negotiate conflict, allows for student voice to be heard, and creates community for all students. Teachers and students alike expressed that restorative programming offered a change in the school climate. While the pressure for academic achievement was still present, classroom communities were better prepared to handle the stress due to the existence of mutual concern and respect.

As an educator of students with emotional/behavioral disorders, I witness on a daily basis the lack of care and concern for students with these challenges. As a school, we have seen that traditional punitive measures are ineffective in changing student behavior. Additionally, we have observed that students with the most challenges continue on a path of negativity as they lose a sense of success and connection with their learning community. Ingraham et al. (2016) highlighted that through the use of restorative practices, not only did student behavior change, there was an increase in teacher efficacy as well.

Summary

Overall findings from the data reviewed showed that restorative practices are a viable alternative to traditional discipline procedures. Schools that had implemented programming found a change in the school climate that reflected mutual respect and concern. Students were less likely to engage in behaviors that constituted a discipline referral and staff were less likely to issue them. Furthermore, staff and students engaged in alternative means of responding to challenging behaviors that were more skill centered. Students and families felt more connected to the school environment. Discipline rates dropped and the racial disparity gap narrowed. Each

system of practice developed their own set of procedures based on the principles of restorative programming. While the intent behind this was to focus on student and community needs, it is difficult to assess what methods employed were effective. Family-group conferencing provided a more structured system of response to harm that allowed students and families the opportunity to problem-solve with the school. This allowed for consistency across settings and provided support for students with behavior challenges. Furthermore, victim-offender mediation provided students the opportunity to make amends and have accountability for the harm caused. Choi et al. (2011) found that recidivism rates for youth who engaged in mediation were low, indicating a change in behavioral outcomes. This shows promise as we look towards implementation of mediation in schools. As the education system continues to face increasing demands to provide students with a high level of learning, classrooms become an environment filled with stress. Students and staff are entering this environment without the necessary skills to navigate that stress which increases the likelihood of encountering and managing behavioral issues. Restorative practices provide a positive method of response to behavior that is founded in providing a safe and caring environment for staff and students reflective of the community. As more school communities look towards implementation of restorative practices, there continues to be much work to be done to employ effective strategies with the resources that are currently available.

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