

PERSPECTIVES OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS, COUNSELORS AND
ADMINISTRATORS ON RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Aundrea Denise (Burton) Smiley

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the implementation experiences and practices of restorative justice in education whose goal is to improve social-emotional skills, as well as reduce suspension rates among students, for K-5 elementary teachers, counselors and administrators at one elementary school in Virginia. This study examined the phenomena of restorative justice practices in schools and experiences of those involved. The theory guiding this study was Bandura's social learning theory. The central research question to be addressed was: What are the experiences of teachers, counselors and administrators with restorative justice practices in elementary school as it relates to improving social-emotional learning in order to reduce misbehavior and suspension rates in Virginia? The school site was an elementary school in an equally split between urban and rural area in Virginia. The school involved in the study serves students in grades PK-5. The participants included 11 teachers, a counselor and an administrator that have used restorative practices in their school and classroom, as well as those who have actively participated in the implementation of restorative practices in their educational settings. These participants were selected through snowball samplings. After collecting data that included a demographic survey, interviews, document analysis as well as focus groups and analyzing the data using the seven steps from Moustakas (1994), each individual interview and the in-person focus group were transcribed using the Temi transcription application and entered in to MaxQDA. Statements, ideas, words, and phrases that appeared regularly were highlighted and categorized into individual groups and themes. The four themes that emerged from data were relationships, school culture, buy in, and student support.

Keywords: discipline, disproportionate, implementation, restorative justice, social learning theory, suspension

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Dedication

I'd like to dedicate this manuscript to God, my entire family, and circle of friends. You all offered so much support to me, throughout this entire journey. There is no way I would be at this point without you. To my son, Liam- you are my why, my whole entire reason for all that I do. I only want the best for you in this life. To my grandmother, Iree Johnson- thank you for always believing in me when I didn't believe in myself. The same day I passed my proposal defense with flying colors, is the same day you went to heaven. May you rest in peace. I am pushing through to the finish line, because I know it is what you would tell me to do. I will love and miss you always.

To every educator, no matter the capacity in which you educate, this is also for you. The journey of an educator is not always easy, but if we continue to see the glass half full, support one another, and keep the common goal in mind- success is inevitable for everyone involved.

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To those who invited me into your world, and took the time to share your stories, thank you. It is both an honor and a privilege to share your ideas in the findings of the study.

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List of Abbreviations

Hawthorne City Public Schools (HCPS)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Restorative Justice (RJ)

Restorative Justice in Education (RJE)

Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY)

Restorative Practices (RP)

School Resource Officer (SRO)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the implementation, lived experiences, and practices of restorative justice in education for K-5 elementary teachers, a counselor, and an administrator at one elementary school in Virginia. This chapter covers restorative justice as a concept to be applied to the field of education. The discussion included the problem that currently exists for teachers and administrators along with the overall purpose of the study. A theoretical, practical, and empirical overview of the significance of the study is outlined. A full summary of the chapter, research questions and important word definitions were revealed.

Students are suspended or expelled from schools across the country each year by the millions (United States Department of Education, 2017). For many years, the zero-tolerance policy has been a primary disciplinary practice implemented in many schools and school systems. However, using zero tolerance often leads to suspension when children break a rule. That is, one strike or rule broken, and the child is suspended (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Schools across the country are re-evaluating the ramifications of high suspension rates and are seeking alternative methods to reduce suspensions and improve the learning and social environment for students. Among these methods is Restorative Justice in Education or RJE (Augustine, et al., 2018). Restorative justice views inappropriate behavior as a violation of relationships, not rules (Reimer, 2019).

Background

Historical Context

Restorative justice is not a new concept, as it was introduced into the criminal justice

system early as 1970 (Marshall, 2011). The term has since made its way into the world of education (Zehr, 2015). The concept of restorative justice was used to help those who had been charged with a crime and/or served time for those crimes; to transition back into society after their jail or prison time had been served. In some cases, the practice of restorative justice could replace the actual incarceration period, by having the individual participate in restorative mediation processes as well as restorative circles (Zehr, 2015).

It is important to include both terms of restorative justice in education (RJE) in this writing, as well as the term restorative practices (RP). Both terms are valid, while schools begin the implementing of restorative practices (Gregory & Evans, 2020). During implementation schools must remember to hold true to the values and concepts of justice and equity among all in the school community. These are the foundations of RJE (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Learning environments as viewed through the lens of restorative justice, allow one to look at several different aspects. The aspects to be examined in the proposed research are the behavior and misbehavior of students, those discipline policies that have existed to control or regulate student behavior in the past, the relationships that teachers have with students within the school setting, and the accountability that takes place as part of restorative justice practices. These areas are important as they align with the pillars of RJE (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

According to the United States Department of Education (2017), the need to reorganize and reevaluate school discipline practices is long overdue. They also suggest that removing students from the classroom should only take place as a last resort. Nationwide, as many as 95 percent of out-of-school suspensions are for nonviolent misbehavior—such as being disruptive, acting disrespectfully, tardiness, profanity, and dress code violations (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2018). Over time, the overreliance on exclusionary discipline has worsened. The number of secondary

school students suspended or expelled over the course of a school year has increased by roughly 40 percent in the last four decades (Burke & Nishioka, 2014).

Secondary schools have suspended or expelled an estimated 2-million students each year (United States Department of Education, 2017). That is a staggering amount of lost learning time--and lost opportunity in providing student support. Discipline policy and practices matter tremendously; there is nothing inevitable about high rates of suspension and expulsion. “We can, and must, do much better” (United States Department of Education, 2017, p. 2). The singular term of restorative justice originated in the judicial system as a way to rehabilitate those who had done harm before re-entry into society (Zehr, 2015). However, applying this judicial concept in schools may have taken a wrong turn along the way. An examination of these systems in the schools is critical (Payne & Welch, 2018).

Social Context

As schools are certainly a social context, a review of these social environments is a critical piece in reviewing the application of restorative justice education. In the social context, RJE is viewed as a social emotional learning strategy or technique. The concept is based on relationships and social interactions with and among peers (Winn, 2018). Restorative justice in education and restorative practices are referred to as relational behavior management approaches. These methods are being examined in schools to teach students accountability and social skills to prevent misbehavior that might otherwise keep them from an academic learning experience (Kehoe et al., 2018). Restorative practices in schools are valid in the social-emotional context as they aim to create equity and empowerment within the learning environment (Lustick, et al., 2020). A safer school community leads to a more positive social-emotional environment for students (Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2020).

Theoretical Context

Restorative justice in education can be viewed through several different theoretical and conceptual lenses. For purposes of the study, I chose to frame RJE alongside school discipline and the quality of relationships. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) is a theoretical framework on which this study was focused and grounded. Social learning theory supports the idea that students' behaviors can be learned by the examples set by those around them (Ahn et al., 2020). Restorative practices involve modeling of behaviors by teachers and students, in order to see a shift in behaviors in the learning space (Nese et al., 2020).

Situation to Self

This study has evolved greatly over time. I knew that I wanted to do a study related to RJE, as it is a topic with which I am familiar and passionate about. I was an elementary teacher, and am currently a restorative justice practitioner, having a graduate level certification in RJE. I see the need for RJE in elementary schools; and at the current time, there are few schools implementing the practice. I chose to do qualitative phenomenological research. I chose this research design as I am interested in understanding the lived experiences of the participants in the study.

I have witnessed several students removed from classes or schools as a result of their behavior. Not only do these students miss out on the learning experience, but by the time the situation is addressed, it is possible that the student has now moved his or her focus to something more negative. This makes it difficult to repair the harm that was done during removal and hard to hold the student accountable for his or her actions. He or she may not even recall the circumstances once the student is heard. I am not currently teaching in a school or school system that has fully implemented the practices of restorative justice. However, before the global

pandemic occurred – (i.e.-closing all schools) I personally implemented restorative practices within my own classroom. RJE gives students the opportunity to sit in circle, defined as a safe space that allows them to speak about their feelings on the harm that has been done (Winn, 2018). In one study focusing on restorative practices in an elementary charter school, the teachers and administrators in the study felt that the implementation of RJE improved the social and emotional environment within the school (Armour & Todic, 2016).

It is my hope that this study allowed those teachers, counselors and administrators who are bringing these changes about in their educational setting to have the opportunity to have their voices heard so that RJE can be more easily understood and applied. Sharing their experiences could be both liberating and informative for them and for their audience as well. I am happy to have learned whether a change in student behavior and consequences is observed by teachers, the counselor and the administrator involved. This study was viewed through an axiological lens. The values that shape the narrative (Creswell & Poth, 2018) in this study are dignity, respect, accountability, and fairness. I am a career educator, and I have had experience with RJE. I understand the impact it can bring to the educational environment.

Creswell and Poth (2018) express that axiological assumptions are present in a qualitative study as researchers make their values and biases known. In conducting research for this study, I am able to connect my own personal values as an educator and RJ practitioner to those participants in the study who have shared their own personal experiences. Understanding the culture of the school, and the relationship building allowed understanding to the concept of RJE and the implementation process (Pointer et al., 2020).

The philosophical assumptions used to guide this study were the above mentioned axiological, epistemological, and ontological. According to Creswell (2013) ontological

assumptions happen when different experiences are explained. Different teachers, the counselor and the administrator may explain their experiences with RJE in schools differently. The differences are based on grade level, class size and student response to RP in the school and in the classroom (Winn, 2018).

Schommer (2019) discusses epistemological beliefs and the importance they have when it comes to teaching and learning. When it comes to conducting research, Creswell (2013) stated that knowledge is known through the personal experiences of participants. My knowledge concerning job-related experiences in the teaching profession comes from my personal experience as an educator and RJ practitioner. That knowledge can be deepened by time invested in and spent with the participants in their daily school environment (Creswell, 2013).

Social Constructivism is the research paradigm guiding the study as it focuses on knowledge and behaviors of individuals. In this case, the individuals are the teacher and administrator participants. Relationships and positive social interactions are important for individual accountability and successful implementation of RP in schools (Anfara et al., 2013). According to Creswell (2013), research implementing these ideas is heavily dependent on the views of the participants. Social constructivism is the paradigm used to guide this study as the goal is to understand daily interactions and experiences of teachers and administrators with RJ in the educational setting.

Problem Statement

The problem is the current overuse and state of suspensions, poor student behaviors, and lack of social emotional learning among students in K-5 elementary schools (Rafa, 2019). For example, while boys represent 54 percent of primary school enrollment, they constitute 79 percent of all suspended primary school aged children (Rafa, 2019). Research indicates that a

child's early educational experiences have a large impact on their development and outcomes later in life, affecting a child's social- emotional wellbeing (Rafa, 2019).

Nationwide there is a concern that suspensions are used too often as a disciplinary practice (Huang et al., 2021). The zero-tolerance policy that has been previously followed in schools, meant suspension for students after one offense (White & Young, 2020). Often, there was very little conversation about the action of the student, as the policy mentioned above did not allow for it (White & Young, 2020). This policy meant that everyone received the same treatment for the same offenses. Because everyone does not have the same starting point in a situation, a "one size fits all" outcome is not truly equitable (Evans et al., 2021). Immediate expulsion has caused students to be suspended, or fully removed from the educational setting because of their behavior. They are then, no longer present in the learning environment (Winn, 2018).

Restorative justice implementation in elementary schools is not occurring as frequently as it is in secondary schools (Gomez et al., 2020). There is little research about the implementation of any sort of social emotional learning programs, and behavior improvement at the early childhood and elementary school levels (Dusenbury, L., & Weissberg, 2017). Much of the current research covers the implementation of RJE and restorative practices (RP) in secondary schools. Research is available on the outcomes of circles in a high school setting. These studies discuss the changes that have taken place within the school environment after circles were implemented. Among the positive outcomes are improved relationships and ownership of the process (Ortega et al., 2016). Other literature discusses the professional development of teachers and administrators that are seeking to implement RJ as an alternative discipline practice in order to engage students who misbehave. Implementing changes are all part

of the effort to improve the current social and learning environment in a school setting (Mayworm et al., 2016). Of the available research, there are very few guidelines for those teachers and administrators wanting to implement RJE at the primary/elementary school level. As mentioned above, the problem is the current state of suspension among students who misbehave. Winn (2018) outlines the need to remedy this very problem with a serious paradigm shift. She discusses the need for positive supports for all students and educators.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the implementation, experiences, and practices of restorative justice in 13 K-5 elementary teachers, counselors and administrators at one elementary school in Virginia. At this stage in the research restorative justice in education was generally defined as an approach to discipline that involves all stakeholders and has a primary focus on repairing the harm (Ferlazzo, 2016). Drawing from social learning theory (Bandura, 2002) the intent is to use a restorative justice approach combined with encouraging control over one's life and actions. One elementary school gave the researcher the opportunity to see different styles of implementation of restorative justice in education. Restorative justice is not only a process, but it is also a set of values and principles (Reimer, 2019).

Significance of the Study

The data obtained in the study will contribute to evidence-based research and practice. Through this study, it is intended that the qualitative research design will reveal information regarding the implementation of restorative justice in education at the elementary school level. The findings of this study will increase the qualitative research available for restorative justice in

education, and hopefully inspire educators and administrators to take a further look into the phenomenon.

Empirical Significance

This study has significance in the following ways. In the empirical sense there are very few studies that examine restorative justice or alternative discipline policies in elementary schools. There are qualitative studies of middle and high schools. However, studies at the primary level are lacking. The empirical significance of the study is that it presented unbiased data on teachers and administrators in a public elementary school setting, how they perceive the current social and emotional learning environments at their individual schools, and the process of implementing restorative justice processes as a solution to the problem. It added to the current research by allowing the voices of participants (teachers and administrators) to be heard from the point of view of the elementary school. Also, it is well documented that participants engaged in innovative approaches to create respectful learning situations feel valued when they are heard (Reimer, 2019; Winn, 2018; Yildirim et al., 2020; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2020).

Theoretical Significance

A theoretical framework is defined as a set of ideas that frame the study (Varpio et al., 2020). It is different concepts along with their definitions coupled with scholarly materials relating to the topic. It is not found in the literature review; rather several documents must be studied to find the appropriate framework for a given topic (Islam, 2019). Social learning theory is one way to explain and modify behavior. Using this framework within the context of restorative justice drew upon the personal responsibilities that individuals have for themselves and their actions. This study further extended the social learning theory, as an application to demonstrate ways of creating a just and equitable learning environment. Since social learning

theory focuses on relationships between students with each other as well as students with teachers and within the context of the classroom and school community, it is applicable to this study (Paige, 2020). It relates to the study of implementation of RJE because there is a heavy focus on relationships for students. Besides the interrelationships, there is also a focus on accountability for one's actions (Bandura, 2002).

Through social learning theory, it is understood that learning results from events (Velez et al., 2020). Events serve as reinforcements (Velez et al., 2020). In the case of punishments, behaviors that are reduced through punishment occur because they set up a tension. Thus, learned behavior is determined by expectancies. Expectancies may be elicited from environmental cues or outcomes of one's own behavior. Removing a child from the social learning environment (through expulsion) removes the learning, both social and academic (Velez et al., 2020). A missed opportunity to teach the child to understand how to behave in the future is then removed. In a restorative justice educational model in the classroom the child must understand. The child must revisit and understand his or her actions within the context of the environment (Velez et al., 2020).

Practical Significance

The study is significant to elementary education, as it highlighted how teachers, counselors and administrators integrated new practices into their classrooms and into the school as they implement restorative justice practices in the school. The study served to investigate how teachers are using restorative practices and provides possible examples of implementation. RJE practices in schools are proactive and aid in fostering healthy relationships as well as reduce the risk of expulsionary discipline (Gregory & Evans, 2020). In a practical sense this study can be used as a guide for others who wish to implement restorative practices in their elementary

education settings. The procedures and dialogues needed to implement restorative justice practices were clearly outlined in the study. There are several references that school administrators can refer to when needed. There is no one size fits all model for implementation; however, this could be used as a blueprint or starting point.

Research Questions

The problem and purpose statement helped to build the research questions for the study. In seeking answers to these questions, the lived experiences of teachers, counselors, and administrators in K-5 elementary schools during implementation of restorative practices were revealed.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences with restorative justice practices in elementary school as they relate to improving social-emotional learning in order to reduce misbehavior in one elementary school in Virginia?

This question allowed the researcher to understand in small part, the exposure that teachers and administrators have of the concept of RJ in schools. Initially, social-emotional learning is built by practices, policies, and programs (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017). As a social emotional learning practice, RJE can improve relationships and make a meaningful difference in schools while also influencing a child's life (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017). Parallel to the idea of relationships, this question confirmed the idea that student misbehavior is linked to the relationship between the student and the teacher (Aldrup et al., 2018). The information given in answering this central research question provided information to coincide with each theme outlined in later text.

Research Sub-questions (SQs)

SQ1: What was the state of the school environment or teachers, counselors and administrators when the implementation of restorative practices was proposed?

School environment has to do with the set of relationships that occur among members of a school community that are determined by structural, personal, and functional factors of the educational institution (Tapia-Fonllem et al., 2020). Addressing this question allows the researcher to gain knowledge of the previous school policies and school culture that led to seeking the implementation of a social emotional learning program such as RJE. The traditional approaches to student behavior only manage student behavior and RJE holds students accountable for that behavior and facilitates growth (Fronius et al., 2019). “Many RJE initiatives also aim to strengthen social and emotional competencies, reduce gender and racial disparities in discipline, and increase access to equitable and supportive environments for students from marginalized groups” (Gregory & Evans, 2020, p. 3).

This question brought the importance of using restorative practices to address social-emotional learning to light. Teaching social emotional learning skills promotes social awareness among students in the classroom and school setting (Yang et al., 2020). Implementing RJ in schools offers a practical approach to social equity (Gregory et al., 2021). Misbehavior is lessened by the use of RP in schools as a result of overall conflict being reduced (Dike, 2020).

SQ2: What has the overall reaction of the implementation of restorative practices been at each of the elementary schools?

Addressing this question allowed the lived experience and feelings of the teacher to be revealed. Many teachers avoid conflict management and would rather refer student misbehavior to administrators than implement these practices into their classrooms (Parker & Bickmore,

2020). Teaching with a restorative style shifts the power imbalance that exists between students and teachers (Pointer et al., 2020). Teachers can include students in a more relational way, rather than just limiting them to academic learning in the classroom (Llewellyn & Parker, 2018). Getting insight related to this question will help to reveal limitations and recommendations in the proposed study.

SQ3: How have the social and learning environments changed from the perspective of teachers, counselors and administrators?

It is important to understand the ways that the social and learning environments have changed during an implementation process to ensure that meaningful work is taking place. (Lustick et al., 2020). This question addresses the idea that teaching restorative values leads to social transformation in schools (Pointer et al., 2020). Changes in the school environment will take place (Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2020). Restorative justice is indeed a psychological practice (Velez et al., 2020).

Definitions

The following terms and definitions are grounded in the literature and related to the theoretical framework of the study making them pertinent to the study, they will be defined to ensure clarity.

1. *Elementary School* - a public school with any grades kindergarten through 5th grade (Virginia.gov).
2. *Qualitative Research* - a process that investigates research questions related to human or social issues (Creswell, 2013).
3. *Restorative Justice*- a powerful approach to discipline that focuses on repairing harm through inclusive processes that engage all stakeholders (Ferlazzo, 2016).

4. *Restorative Practices* - a social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision making as well as positive behavioral support approaches (Mansfield et al., 2018).
5. *Social Learning Theory* - a learning theory that combines cognitive learning theory, which says that learning is influenced by psychological factors, and behavioral learning theory, which assumes that learning is based on responses to environmental stimuli (Bandura, 2001).
6. *School to Prison Pipeline* - a process by which youth who experience punitive punishment in schools are increasingly enmeshed within the criminal justice system (Hemez et al., 2020).
7. *Suspension* - a term that refers to the temporary removal of a student from his or her regular educational setting for a violation of school policies or rules (supportiveschooldiscipline.org).

Summary

Many students are being suspended from school each year. Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) has been used as an alternative discipline practice to help encourage equity in schools (Nese et al., 2020). The study examined best practices for the implementation of RJE and restorative practices by reviewing the approaches used in one elementary school in Virginia. School systems all over the country are beginning to seek different ways to promote a just and equitable learning environment within the elementary school setting. Studying the implementation of restorative practices in elementary schools will allow teachers and administrators alike to evaluate ways that they can create a positive social learning environment within their own institutions of learning. A framework of social learning theory is formed around

this study and the practice of restorative justice in education. The remaining chapters cover a review of the literature, the methods used in the study, the data collected from participants in the study, as well as limitations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Suspension in schools has been an ongoing issue, and school boards as well as departments of education have long searched for possible solutions. One of the possible remedies being discussed has been the implementation of alternative discipline practices, such as restorative justice in education (Winn, 2018). Using search engines such as Google Scholar and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) with terms that included “restorative justice in education”, “restorative justice in schools”, “social learning theory” and “elementary discipline practices” among many others; a review of the literature was conducted. There is a vast array of literature that focuses on restorative justice in education at the secondary level. The idea of implementing RJ into schools at the primary level requires a paradigm shift, and is still emerging (Winn, 2018). This review was needed to identify studies about the high numbers of suspensions in schools, restorative justice (RJ), and restorative justice in education (RJE) practices in elementary schools.

Initially, there is a discussion of a theory that frames the ideas, scope and focus of this study and RJE in schools. Social learning theory was the theory discussed. Social learning theory was adapted by Bandura in the 1970s (Bandura, 1977). This theory frames the idea that human interaction allows individuals to be responsible and accountable for their behaviors and actions (Bandura, 1977). This chapter synthesized the recent literature pertaining to RJ and RJE. This section also examined current discipline practices in schools, the school to prison pipeline, and general program implementation practices. The importance of relationships were closely reviewed as well since restorative justice focuses on building relationships among the whole school community (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Winn, 2018). Finally, the review considered

studies regarding biblical worldview development, on creating a positive school culture, and building positive relationships within the elementary school setting. Altogether, the subsections in the study include an overview of theoretical framework, related literature, restorative justice origin, restorative justice in education, school culture, implementation, components of restorative justice, and biblical worldview. After reviewing the literature, a gap in the literature is revealed and provided a focused area of need for this study.

Theoretical Framework

Considering the theories that frame restorative justice in education, narrowing down just one framework is extensive. There are several theories that can frame the concept. However, the focus was on two frameworks that allow the reader to have a small view into the restorative lens. The theories focused on in the study are social learning theory that was extended and adapted into the social cognitive theory by Bandura (2001), as well as restorative justice as its own theoretical framework (Winn, 2018).

Social Learning Theory

Social learning (cognitive) theory is based on the personal control one has in his/her own life. This includes self-control and accepting things as they are. It is related to a sense of feeling authenticity or humanness (Bandura, 2001). Early developments in social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) outline a direct correlation between a person's perceived self-efficacy and behavioral change. Social learning theory describes how learning occurs through imitation of modeled behavior (Bandura, 1977). However, for one to truly have self-efficacy means that they truly believe they have the skills and abilities to deal with various situations. Bandura (1977) further explains this concept as "the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes" (p.79). When self- efficacy is present in an individual it

increases the self-belief that a challenging situation can be conquered (Bandura, 1977). Certain components of RJE are used when there is a challenging situation in an educational setting (Evans, 2014).

“The capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one's life is the essence of humanness. Human agency is characterized by several core features that operate through phenomenal and functional consciousness” (Bandura, 2002, p. 1). In explaining current restorative practices or alternative discipline practices in elementary school, the goal is to make those that do the harm aware of the harm that has been done (Gregory & Evans, 2020). There is a goal for the individuals involved in the wrongdoing to have positive self-reactiveness and engage in deep self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2002). Bandura's premises will inform and guide the proposed research to unpack the beliefs of today's concept of RJE which focuses on the concept of recognizing the harm done and correcting it for future behaviors.

Restorative justice, when applied to school discipline, is viewed as the opposite of punishment or punitive disciplinary practices that have existed in the past. According to Hopkins (2004), restorative justice in education is a full paradigm shift offering new ways to handle school discipline. Gregory and Evans (2020) discuss not only the need for a change and paradigm shift in overall school discipline, but they believe that discipline reform is needed in order to correct the disparities in school suspensions across the country.

Discipline can and should be used as an opportunity for learning and growth rather than punishment of students. This type of discipline model can be responsive to diversity within a school setting. In line with the above-mentioned ideals, Winn (2018) states, “Ideally, restorative justice will be used to cultivate a shared vision of how people in a school should be in a

relationship with one another while shaping a school's values and guidelines for interactions" (p. 22).

History of Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory is intended to be a framework for understanding human behavior (Grusec, 1992). Grusec (1992) indicates that Bandura's social learning theory is an operant approach. Interpreting Bandura, Grusec indicates that much of the tenants of social learning theory more appropriately relate to personality development and behavior. The connection between social learning theory and RJE is that RJE has a direct link to the behavior and habits of students, whereas Bandura's framework seeks to understand human behavior. RJE sometimes referred to as RP has a positive impact on student behavior and thinking (Kehoe et al., 2018).

Social learning theory is a cross between cognitive learning theory and behaviorism. It involves mental processes as they relate to external behavior (Rumjaun & Narod, 2020). In relation to this study of restorative justice in education with social learning theory as its framework, children are developed cognitively by the age of six (Yildirim et al., 2020). By this time, students are able to manage and be held accountable for their behavior. Social learning theory relies on both the cognitive ability, and environmental factors (Li et al., 2020).

Restorative Justice as a Theoretical Framework

While restorative justice has been historically situated within the criminal justice system, more recently, there have been moves to apply restorative justice in school contexts (Amstutz & Mullet, 2002; Cameron & Thorsborne, 1999; Hopkins, 2002). According to Zehr (1990) and Hopkins (2004), the discipline system implemented in many schools mirrors that of our Western legal system, which "is preoccupied with identifying the wrongdoer, affixing blame and dispensing an appropriate punishment or pain to the offender" (Sawin & Zehr, 2006, p. 43). Zehr

(2002) refers to these as retributive approaches to justice; conversely, to view restorative justice as a paradigm shift, offers “new ways to look at old challenges” (Hopkins, 2004, p. 13).

According to the literature, Cragg (1992) describes one weakness of the current system. That is, often we search for just and equitable learning environments, but we end up missing what caused the offense in the first place. For example, one of the purported aims of zero tolerance policies is to seek impartiality for the purpose of avoiding bias or accusations of profiling (i.e., to treat all students the same); however, one possible by-product of such an attempt is a depersonalization of the process. According to Cragg, “the inability to focus on the individuals involved blinds justice to the crime’s victim as well as to the personal characteristics of the offender” (p. 19). Evans and Vaandering (2016) explain that two students may behave in ways that are similar, but the reason behind the behavior of each student is entirely different. Because the motive and reasoning behind the behavior of each individual student is different, it would be unfair to give them the same consequences or peace paths for their behaviors.

Many restorative justice advocates have published literature regarding zero tolerance policies because of these policies tendency to absolve educational institutions and educators of the responsibility for generating alternatives, solutions to problems, and new disciplinary responses (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). According to these writers, zero tolerance policies, which are implemented as mandated suspensions, keep students from being able to solve their own problems, so they also lose out on developing problem solving skills (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Conflict then becomes a natural part of personal growth when it is under the lens of restorative justice and a result of ever changing times (Morrison et al., 2005). Likewise, in a restorative environment there is an effort to repair the harm that is caused by the conflict as well as repair of the relationship between those involved (Anfara et al., 2013).

Parallel to these ideas, in a manual for implementing restorative justice at a whole school level, Hopkins, (2004) suggests that the idea of positive reinforcement that has become so popular in classrooms at the elementary level, “does not help to develop an internal locus of control and an ability to take responsibility for the behavioral choices made and the impact these choices have on others” (p. 150). As a result of this, students become unable to manage their own behavior. They depend on someone else for approval or disapproval and in some cases, can become self-centered (Hopkins, 2004).

RJE, Social Media and Technology

In an age of technology and social media, ways of implementing RJE are expanding rapidly (Das et al., 2019). While using technology is something that has to take place in the current climate of schools and the world, using it takes away some of the key components of RJE such as body language and eye contact (Swida, 2020). However, it is known during this time that a very pleasant online community can be created through a virtual meeting (Swida, 2020). The space in which we engage with students in RP is important, as well as the way we engage (Rhew et al., 2021). Using technology allows for RJE to be delivered via multiple social media channels where students currently spend their time and are familiar with (Das et al., 2019).

Related Literature

The review of the literature revealed that there is very little scholarly literature regarding RJE in elementary schools, yet there is a great deal of literature centered around the origin of restorative justice in general (Paige, 2020). The origin of restorative justice began in the court system (Zehr, 1990), and has since made its way into the public-school setting (Anfara et al., 2013). The literature is heavy in general information for implementation practices and overall ideas of RJE and how to implement it (Gregory et al., 2021).

In addition to court applications, there is a growing body of literature related to restorative justice practices in middle and secondary schools (Winn, 2018). Seeking to understand the different components of RJ as an alternative discipline practice in elementary schools is important to student and school well-being (Gregory & Evans, 2020). The literature surrounding RJE also relates to the school-to-prison pipeline. This piece of the phenomena is part of the problem that began the implementation of this new discipline practice into secondary schools (Winn, 2018). The literature took a close look and synthesized many concepts and ideas surrounding RJE.

Current Discipline Practices

Currently, schools in the United States continue to use punitive discipline practices for students. Among these discipline practices is out of school suspension. Out of school suspension often leads students into the school to prison pipeline, or they drop out of school indefinitely (Hemez et al., 2020). RJE exists to offer an alternative for students, to keep them in the classroom and learning. These practices also “aim to strengthen social and emotional competencies, reduce gender and racial disparities in discipline, and increase access to equitable and supportive environments for students” (Gregory & Evans, 2020, p. 3). In the same manner, punitive discipline can cause feelings of distrust among students and their teachers. This has a lasting effect on the relationship between the teacher and the student (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). To the contrary, RJE and restorative practices seek to strengthen the relationships between students and their teachers, as well as students and their peers (Winn, 2018).

Parallel research shows that punitive discipline deprives students of their educational opportunities. This type of discipline practice also fails to make schools safer for all that are a part of the school community (González, 2012). Zero tolerance policies and punitive discipline

practices have a lasting effect on the offender. This usually leads to more discipline problems for the student in the future (González, 2012).

School to Prison Pipeline

The school to prison pipeline is a term that has become commonly known in both the educational and criminal justice worlds (Owens, 2017). The term was coined while recognizing that School Resources Officers (SROs) are sworn in as police type officers and then placed in schools (Wald & Losen, 2003). Schools across the country adopted SROs to enforce discipline practices in schools. SROs can respond to student behavior in ways that principals and other school faculty members cannot. This specific response is called an arrest (American Civil Liberties Union, 2014).

In comparison to the actions mentioned above, this term can also be described in the following way. While SROs symbolize a police action in schools there is a parallel phenomenon, the school to prison pipeline. The school to prison pipeline refers specifically to students of color and other marginalized groups (advancementproject.org). This practice works specifically to push students out of the school setting. In this scenario, when students are pushed out of the school setting, they are pushed into the prison system indirectly (Schiff, 2018). Zero tolerance punishments put students at a greater risk for decreased connectivity, increased risky behavior or illegal behavior, and poor academic achievements and dropout (Schiff, 2018).

If an arrest is made in place of out of school suspension, a student is still subject to missing school, and the behavior that would normally be referred to as misbehavior is now considered criminal behavior (Owens, 2017). This relates to current discipline practices and restorative justice as this phenomenon brings the criminal justice world, and the education world together (Owens, 2017).

Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice is not a new concept (Zehr, 2015). It originated in the western criminal justice system. This happened in the 1990's as officials were looking for an alternative approach to the court process (Zehr, 1990). Today, more than 30 states have principles of RJ written in their mission (Armour & Todic, 2016). Comparatively, Zehr (1990) and Hopkins (2004) refer to it as a system that mirrors our western legal system that rehabilitates those wrongdoers, and slowly integrates them back into society- or in the case of RJE- back into the school population. In the criminal justice system, the method of RJ adapted by Zehr (1990) states that there should be a focus on understanding what happened. In contrast, in the United Kingdom it is believed by the Youth Justice Board that offenders and victims should go beyond understanding the harm. It is important that they communicate about the harm done and proper ways to repair the harm (McCluskey, Lloyd, et al., 2008; McCluskey, Stead, et al., 2008).

Participation in RJ has left victims of crimes more satisfied than those involved in programs that did not include RJ. Parallel to the feelings of the victims the offenders also felt more satisfied after participating in restorative justice programs within the criminal justice system (Latimer, et al., 2016). The same study also found something in comparison to victims and offenders feeling satisfied with the process. Offenders were more likely to comply with restitution agreements after participating in restorative programs (Latimer et al., 2016). In the criminal justice system restorative justice is a voluntary program. Participants are more motivated to be a part of the process (Latimer et al., 2016). Similarly, if individuals are forced to participate, then the process is said to no longer be restorative. Those who make the choice to participate in the restorative process are pleased with the outcome (Latimer et al, 2016).

Comparatively, there are different names given to the concept of restorative justice time. The names given to the concept as it became known in North America and Europe are victim-offender mediation and victim-offender dialogue (Umbreit & Greenwood, 2000). Restorative justice is not easily defined since it encompasses a variety of practices at different stages of the criminal process. It focuses more on the results part of the process rather than the stage in which information is being gathered. (Daly, 2002). This idea of restorative justice evolved into a practice that included the friends and family members participating in exercises or practices including conferences and circles. These types of practices were designed to create a balance of power between the victim and the offender (McCold, 1999).

RJ has a strong origin in countries outside of the United States (US) in addition to its origin in the criminal justice system. It is a common belief that RJ was first used in schools in Australia (Fronius et al., 2019). RJ programs outside of the US took on different names and were implemented with RP and RJE principles (Fronius et al., 2019).

Restorative justice theorist Howard Zehr, (2015) stresses implementing acts of sincere concern for the victims in each situation, and a focus on how to repair the harm done as well as meeting the needs of the individual student. As this idea is applied the world of education, the focus shifts to the relationship between teachers, students, and peers while seeking community involvement to repair the harm (Winn, 2018). Many schools have adapted the term “restorative practices” instead of “restorative justice” (Winn, 2018). This same literature expresses the idea of viewing implementing new discipline practices as an opportunity for schools and school systems rather than a solution to a problem.

Restorative Justice and Minority Students

RJE in schools is used as an approach to replace previously outlined disciplinary actions such as the zero tolerance policy. Zero-tolerance policies have caused disparities in discipline among students as minority students are more likely to be pushed out of schools and into the juvenile justice system (Wilson, 2014). Youth who experience the harshest forms of punishment as a result of zero-tolerance policies often come from low income communities with high rates of violence and unemployment. These youth are often defensive have a hard time adjusting to a structured school environment (Schiff, 2018).

The set of RJE practices is being implemented in schools throughout the United States not only to reduce suspension rates, but also to help close the racial discipline gap (Gregory et al., 2016). Implementation of such practices fosters positive relationships among teachers and their students from diverse communities. Comparatively, when RP is being used, less office referrals are being sent for these students from marginalized groups (Gregory et al., 2016). Although we may believe that these referrals are a result of misbehavior in minority students, it is usually due to inadequate decisions made by administrators and teachers (Scott, 2017).

Restorative Justice in Education

The history of restorative justice in education is limited. RJ began its shift into schools in the early 2000s (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Events like the shootings at Columbine in 1999 caused the growth of zero tolerance policies in schools. By the mid-2000s there was criticism for these policies, and the need for alternative practices like RJE (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

Anfara et al. (2013) studied restorative justice (RJ) as an alternative discipline practice in middle school and discussed the zero-tolerance policy and its ineffectiveness. They suggest RJ is a possible alternative to the zero-tolerance policy for discipline and explicate the seven principles

of RJ as follows: (a) meeting the needs of individuals involved to ensure that the basic needs of the students are met, (b) providing accountability and support, (c) making things right, (d) viewing conflict as a learning opportunity, (e) building healthy learning environments, (f) restoring relationships, and (g) addressing power imbalances.

Anfara et al. (2013) further imply that implementing RJ in schools as a slow process because of the amount of work it takes to achieve and the time commitment involved. It takes time to change the overall culture of a school, and there are many different elements to creating a behavioral shift. In present day school systems, there are multiple challenges and hurdles to overcome by teachers and administrators alike, as they work to shift their mindset (Winn, 2018).

Like Winn (2018), another educator and author share the same sentiments of a mindset shift when it comes to restorative practices. In order for school culture to change, it must be done with passion, purpose, and focus (Voigt, 2020). This same text refers to the transformation of schools and implementation of restorative practices as a national imperative. Restorative principles must be implemented creatively and practically (Voigt, 2020). This is a significant step echoing a parallel idea presented by Mullet (2014).

Mullet (2014) published an article on the general idea of implementing restorative discipline in schools. These ideas are most closely related to school aged or elementary children. She shares the thought that the process should be implemented over time, and that there is a specific paradigm shift that must take place. In a contrasting manner, she does not go into detail about the definition of restorative justice in education. Rather, she references Pranis (2003) who explains that justice should be redefined. Instead of getting even with the implementation of restorative practices, schools are getting well. This also leads into the review of the literature regarding school culture.

Comparatively, implementing RJ or restorative practices (RP) in elementary schools looks different. While it is still implemented over time, it is illustrated in picture books and comic books. It is delivered in a way that school aged students can relate to. Often these stories involve children in their age group (Wallis, 2014). It is important to note, that RJE is different from traditional education in the fact that it invites all involved to engage in a manner that honors their community and their life circumstances. In other words, RJE seeks to meet individuals where they are (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). RJE creates shared spaces. Shared space is essential to engagement (Sawin & Zehr, 2006). These shared spaces created by the implementation of RJE have the ability to “nurture, feed, guide, and support” (Evans & Vaandering, 2016, p. 13).

Shame Management

Restorative justice includes the concept of shame management (Braithwaite, 1989). Well managed shame can cause the wrongdoer to be accountable for his or her actions and possibly show remorse for the harm done. On the contrary, if shame is not managed correctly, it can often result in anger and more harm being done (Braithwaite, 1989). Punitive punishment such as out of school suspension does not allow for proper shame management. RJE seeks to allow the shame to be recognized, and the student held accountable for the harm so that the wrong can be made right (Gomez et al., 2020).

Components of Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice in Education has many different working parts that make it an effective practice. Each component works together to create an environment that is respectful and safe. Among the components to be included in the study are- circles, mediation, administrative support, and overall nontraditional or alternative methods of discipline. Relationships are a key component in RJE. They are the foundation of building the trust that is

needed in order to have implementation be successful (Sandwick et al., 2019). The literature outlines several different practices or strategies that are beneficial to the whole school RJE approach. The importance of relationships will be discussed later in this chapter.

Circles. Ferguson and Chevannes (2018) investigated the use of restorative circles in a Jamaican school. In the article, the way circles are structured is detailed. The idea that it creates community among students is presented. A general circle has the very specific elements of structure. First, the facilitator outlines the procedure for the Circle and asks what additional guidelines individuals might wish to use to conduct the Circle. A talking piece, like a stick, is introduced. Only the participant holding the talking piece has permission to speak. Group leaders should outline these principles: Do not force anyone to speak. Do not allow rebuttals. Be careful of body language (e.g., not sitting with your back to anyone). Show that you are listening (echo what people say). Emphasize confidentiality because trust is critical. If making notes during the Circle, tear up the notepaper afterward in front of participants. If you take a participant outside for a caucus, do not share with the wider Circle what was discussed. Do not judge, because the Circle is a place where people can speak their truths. Allow participants to check in and check out—state how they are feeling at the beginning and end of the circle.

Another article written about the implementation of circles in a high school setting describe circles as a place that provide a space to repair harm through a facilitated dialogue process (Ortega et al., 2016). The model of the circle included major constructs of culture, barriers, internal motivation, and outcomes. Circles have a goal of promoting understanding and self-responsibility. Winn (2018) emphasizes that circles help to create a safe space for teachers and students. Teachers should not be afraid of the term justice and need to be prepared to discuss the difficult topics with students such as race.

Using restorative circles in a classroom allows the climate to be set from the beginning of the day (Winn, 2018). Students are able to express their feelings and reveal what is on their minds before engaging in classroom related activities. Parallel to this teachers are able to respond differently to behaviors that may happen in the classroom as a result of the feelings they came in with for the day. Those who participate in circles work upon a shared set of values, which creates community among them (Winn, 2018).

Mediation. Bush and Folger (2004) looked at mediation as a form of conflict resolution side by side with restorative justice. He discusses the three forms of mediation which are transformative, facilitative, and evaluative. Mediation involves the offender, the offended, support for either side, and an unbiased community member as well as a facilitator. Together they work to resolve the conflict and repair the harm.

The literature reveals that there are several methods that could fall under the umbrella of mediation. Keeping facilitative mediation in mind and staying in line with the ideals of Mullet (2014) involves restorative mini chats. They are in line with the ideas presented by Zehr (1990) and the need to understand the harm that has been done. Like circles, mediations have different ways that they should take place and different questions that should be addressed within the mediation sessions (Mullet, 2014). The different types of mini chats are as follows: unwind, rewind, and windup. In the Unwind mini chat, there is questioning for the child who was harmed. This creates a comfortable environment and encourages the child to speak on what took places. The dialogue for each of these is very specific. In the unwind chat, the following questions are asked: What happened? How are you feeling now? What do you need now? How can I help? Positive Acknowledgment then is given, so that the participant knows that his/her acknowledgement of the incident is a positive thing.

In the rewind mini chat, there is a conversation with the student who did the harm. In this process, the following questions are asked: What happened? What led up to this? What were you thinking at the time? Who did this affect? How did it affect them? What do you think about it now? What can you do to make it right? How can we make sure this doesn't happen again?

Positive Acknowledgment then is given, so that the participant knows that his/her acknowledgement of the incident is a positive thing. In the windup mini chat, is a conversation with those who observed the harm. The following questions are asked: How did you feel when that happened? What do you need to see happen now? What can you do in such situations?

Positive acknowledgment then is given, so that the participant knows that his/her acknowledgement of the incident is a positive thing. All three mini chats described by Mullet (2014) include positive acknowledgement at the conclusion of the conversation. This is not previously mentioned in any of the other processes.

Student Engagement in Process. In developing strategies for students to incorporate as part of an RJ program, planning for how to enable a student to learn desired positive behaviors is critical. There are four steps that frame social learning theory that are part of the implementation plan. The steps are attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Attention requires a focus on the task. Social contexts help reinforce how to learn a task.

For example, if a teacher wanted a student to learn to share, then the child could role play making friends. This role play could be achieved by having the child practice sharing books or materials. The second step, retention is the internalization of information to form a memory. Using that same example, we want a child to attend to sharing, but also be able to transfer that skill to new or novel situations.

Teachers would then plan their teaching by incorporating new situations where sharing is paramount (such as a meal planned together or a cooperative game). The third step is reproduction. Reproduction comes together through rehearsal. Talking about how a child will act, role playing behaviors, skills and knowledge help the behavior stick with the student. Lastly, the final step is motivation. Motivation often involves reward and punishment. Motivated learners then apply the strategy in future learning. Using the sharing scenario, praise for sharing from the teacher and co-student would be examples of motivation.

Community Involvement. One of the main principles of RJE is to create a just and equitable learning environment for students (Evans & Vanndering, 2016). In order for this to be successful, there is a need for community involvement (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2020). Evans stresses the need for collaboration, and Galloway & Ishimaru (2020) expresses a similar thought process. One person cannot create transformation alone. It has to be a joint effort. In order for the learning environment to be equitable, the collaboration to create it must be equitable in the same way (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2020).

“A reimagining of the fundamental relationship between families, educators and schools, seems both elusive and, at the same time, never more crucial and relevant” (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2020, p. 1). School populations are more diverse than ever for public schools in the United States. More than half of school populations are students of color or students from other marginalized groups. (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2020). Knowing this fact, there is research that suggests that parent and community involvement has a great impact in academic and behavioral outcomes for students from marginalized groups (Jeynes, 2015).

Another instrumental part of the community involved in student behavior and success is the parent (Otani, 2020). The attitudes of young people may be triggered by their family (Otani,

2020). The way that parents view justice can have an influence on the behavior of a child (Cavanagh & Cauffman, 2015). Thus, components of parent education and involvement will assure continuity across all levels of the implementation.

Family involvement and parent education was important for this study and is very closely related to the idea behind social learning theory (Bandura, 2002). Human interaction and human behavior are two closely related concepts (Bandura, 2002). When communities and schools are working together, performing home visits, engaging the parent in student learning and student behavior, and creating interactions, the results are better than if these types of collaborations were not in place (Sheldon & Jung, 2015).

Adjusted Principles of RJE

Anfara et al. (2013) discuss the seven principles of RJE, as discussed earlier in the text. Since then, they have adjusted the text and adapted the six principles. These ideas are thoughts that shape restorative practices and help with the implementation process in the school environment. These principles can be easily linked with practical solutions mentioned as components of RJE that can be brought back into the classroom. Once introduced into the classroom and school setting the principles are put into motion. They focus on accountability and relationships among the school community (Anfara et al., 2013).

The six principles are the following: (a) healthy relationships are essential for effective learning; (b) we all function better when our core needs are honored and met; (c) conflict is a learning opportunity, not something to be avoided; (d) within supportive environments we become accountable to one another; (e) support for making things right moves us toward healing; and (f) experiences of justice/ injustice impact peoples sense of community. The change of these

principles to statements, make them more applicable to practical implementation in a school setting (Gregory & Evans, 2020).

The current climate of education systems all over the world looks different now than it did prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students were not in the actual school building during much of 2020 and 2021; therefore, the safe places that school provided for students in some places has changed (Dahlen, 2020). This is causing some distress among students but also giving school communities the chance to return to school with a restorative plan in place (Brown, R., 2018).

RJE is growing in schools, and it is growing fast. As it relates to the social learning theory, it is composed of its own framework that includes: “Creating just and equitable learning environments, nurturing healthy relationships, as well as repairing harm and transforming conflict” (Gregory et al., 2016, p. 24). Although it is not easily defined, there are ideas that parallel the above mentioned principles. It also has a heavy focus on relationships between all involved. The focus is on the school community, students, parents, families, and the community in which they live (Winn, 2018).

School Culture

When discussing school culture two things are important. These two things are the overall environment of the school and its demographics. For purposes of the study, demographics were defined as characteristics of a population that include, but are not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, age and income level (dictionary.cambridge.org). Alongside the idea of the overall school environment, Morrison et al. (2005) investigated the challenges in using restorative justice in schools. For school culture to change, the overall values of the school must change as well. It must begin with those in leadership and trickle down to staff and then to

students. “When traditional practices are deeply embedded in schools, it is difficult for the school community to recognize the cultural cues from within” (Morrison et al., 2005, p. 18).

Change in school culture takes shifting of the mindset to welcome the change. Teachers and administrators need to resolve misconduct in a peaceful way while making sure that the basic needs of students continue to be met (Pavelka, 2013). Some research suggests that cultural shift can take several years to achieve (Winn, 2018). Empathy is a trait described by secondary teachers as something that students gain as a result of restorative practices in schools. This change has an overall effect on school culture as it allows students to change their language and how they become more accountable for their behavior (Kehoe et al., 2018).

In the same manner, Mullet (2014) points out that a caring climate is needed for there to be a foundation laid for restorative discipline. A caring climate creates healthy emotions. When people have healthy emotions, they feel better. When people feel better, they do better. Contrastingly, Gregory and Evans (2020) believe that such practices need to be a whole school approach, rather than a top down approach as discussed by Morrison et al. (2005).

Due to the COVID- 19 pandemic of 2020, school climates have changed drastically (Simmons, 2020). There are fewer students in the building which also means fewer issues with discipline (Simmons, 2020). Even still, schools are doing the best that they can to implement restorative practices where they can (Brown, R., 2018). This has an effect on school culture, and perhaps means that the implementation process could take longer than expected.

The pandemic is allowing schools, families and organizations to take a close look at equity for all (Simmons, 2020). As schools return to in person learning, it will be necessary to focus more on human connection. In addition, a focus on the relationships among all involved in the school community and learning experience will be equally important (Simmons, 2020).

Similarly, school administrators, principals, and teachers alike have the opportunity to create a restorative environment and use restorative practices to really listen to students as they return to school (Brown, R., 2018). This will build a basic trust that is so important in order for students to be successful in the classroom (Brown, R., 2018).

Implementation

Implementation is more than just a set of practices and policies that come together to create something new within an organization. It is a phenomenon all by itself (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). In the same way that Fullan and Pomfret (1977) state this idea, he also gives the definition of implementation as referring to the actual use of an innovation or practices involved in the innovation (p. 336). This insight is important as to the study, as the researcher will examine the implementation of restorative practices in schools. It is important to study implementation to understand why many of the changes in education fail to become effective practices (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977).

González et al. (2019) discussed the needs for successful implementation of Restorative Justice in schools. These authors stress that the implementation must be school wide. In addition, student led practices and imbedding RJ into the curriculum are listed as things that can be helpful to gain buy in during the implementation process. This study will focus on the practices that teachers in elementary grade levels have used in order to implement restorative practices in their classroom. When implementing RJ, staff must keep in mind the three pillars of RJ adopted by Zehr. The three pillars are harms and needs, obligations, and engagement (Zehr, 2015).

In detail the three pillars of RJ have very specific components. Harms and needs speak to who was harmed and identifying the harm that was done. Also, in this pillar, ways to repair the

harm are examined (Zehr, 2015). In the pillar of obligations, it is important to look at who is responsible for the harm done, and how they can repair the harm (Zehr, 2015). The engagement pillar focuses on the active roles that both victims and offenders in the RJ process (Zehr, 2015).

To do this successfully, teachers must be taught to create transformative learning spaces and to think restoratively (Winn, 2018). In more recent literature, RJE experts Gregory and Evans (2020) share these same views but add to these ideas in making a point that implementation should be long term as well as strategic. Although Gregory and Evans (2020) cite Zehr (2015) when designing an implementation plan, they also provide the following advice regarding implementation of RJ in schools. Schools need to use principle based RJE. It is important to take a comprehensive approach to RJE. Schools need to emphasize the equity focus of RJE. Schools must develop contextually sensitive implementation plans for the school. The implementation plan must employ strategic rollout of practices and policies. In addition, there needs to be the creation of a long term plan focused on sustainability and professional support. They recommend that an investment in long term, mixed method research should examine RJE implementations. These recommendations are given with the belief that they will result in more consistent positive outcomes (Gregory & Evans, 2020).

In addition to all the above-mentioned elements of implementation, Fullan & Pomfret (1977) points out that to keep up with changes in an innovation; one must conceptualize and measure those changes as they occur. It is not only important to measure the outcomes, but it is also necessary to understand how the implementation of practices is used in the setting (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). In doing this, to contrast the successful implementation, officials would be able to form an understanding of why implementation is ever unsuccessful.

A study published in 2018 is one of the very first implementation studies to be conducted regarding RJE in schools (Augustine et al., 2018). The findings of the study are in line with the desired outcomes of improved school climate, and reduced suspension rates according to teachers who were the participants in the study (Augustine et al. 2018). Like previously mentioned literature such as the literature presented by R. Brown (2018), it is recommended that there be a certain structure to the implementation plan. Clear expectations need to be set. Professional development should be offered. Monthly meetings should be set to monitor progress, and administrators and higher-level school officials should be able to model restorative practices effectively (Augustine, et al., 2018).

Levels of Implementation

RJE has different levels of implementation. These different levels translate into the way that practices can be used in the school setting. Community building circles and restorative conversations are the very first level of implementation (Michigan.gov). These practices can be facilitated by everyone in the school community, and help created the paradigm shift that is needed (Winn, 2018). The next level of implementation is a scaffold directly from the first. It still includes the circle process; however, the circles transform from community building circles to conflict circles and conferences. In contrast to community building circles, conflict circles and conferences are facilitated by RJ coordinators placed in schools (Gregory et al., 2016).

At the final implementation level or tier, similar to the ones before it, there are re-entry circles. Re-entry circles happen in schools when a student has been removed from the general population setting, often times into an alternative program and is ready to return (Winn, 2018). These circles are facilitated by highly skilled, trained, and experienced professionals (Gregory et al., 2016).

Implementing Virtually

The idea of implementing restorative justice in classrooms and in schools has a large focus on relationships (Winn, 2018). There is also a very important component of creating a learning environment that is just and equitable (Gregory & Evans, 2020). Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools and school systems are shifting to virtual learning. If they are not completely virtual, schools will generally implement some sort of hybrid format where students are in school learning on certain days, and at home on others (Brown, R., 2018).

As these changes are happening, the above-mentioned components of restorative practices still hold very true. According to the Restorative Empowerment for Youth Organization there are guidelines to follow to ensure that relationships are still being formed. A culture is still being created even though students and teachers are not physically sharing the same space (2020). Among these guidelines, are setting up a circle diagram to screen share it. This will allow for those who are participating in a circle or mediation to know and visualize who is present and when it is their turn to speak and be heard. It is also listed that facilitators should factor in the element of time. Time is important because everyone has to connect to the virtual platform being used. Facilitators should pay attention to number of participants as well.

In line with all of these recommendations, all users should have their cameras on and mute their microphones. Backgrounds should be simple. This will help eliminate distractions. Meeting virtually allows components and practices of restorative justice to continue to exist (Velez et al., 2021). Parallel to the idea of virtual implementation- outdoor, socially distanced circles are becoming popular as well (Simmons, 2020).

Adherence to Materials and Structure

Whenever there is implementation of a new program, it is important that there is a strict structure and set of guidelines. Without this, it is difficult to compare and analyze outcomes between participants (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). In line with this idea, Gregory and Evans (2020) break down a specific outline for implementing RJ practices in schools that will be discussed later in the chapter. Implementation practices will differ from setting to setting, but the ideas and principles remain the same (Winn, 2018). Parallel to changes in procedures when implementing practices in schools, change in structure also takes place. This is true of any organization (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). This is related to the implementation of restorative practices in our elementary schools. There is a need for several components to be present for the implementation to be successful (Mullet, 2014).

Quality of Delivery

Not all innovation of new programming can be done easily in a school setting (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). In knowing this, it is important to pay close attention to detail when implementing a new program within a school or organization. Similarly, Gregory and Evans (2020) stress that a certain set of procedures should be followed when moving forward with implementation. They are discussed later in this chapter. Having an outlined plan to follow is beneficial to the implementation of successful RJE with the understanding that it is fluid and flexible (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

Responsiveness

Responsiveness refers to the level at which teachers, students, and administrators understand each other (Nieto & Zoller Booth, 2010). Positive responsiveness is especially important when implementing programs such as restorative justice in education and restorative

practices (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Responsiveness will help to create relational, interconnected school cultures (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). This is especially important for elementary school students as they are building a basic trust with the adults, specifically those in the school environment (Brown, R., 2018).

Areas with Established RJE Programs

A study was completed in March 2020 on the implementation of RJE in a southern United States middle school (Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth [RJOY], 2020). Teachers and administrators worked together to implement this program into the school. It was recognized that traditional discipline practices were not effective. A different approach was sought. There was a need for building the initial relationship among the students and school community. In addition to that, school leaders wanted to be able to follow up and restore and repair any relationship that needed such attention. Oakland, California, like the school system from the previous study, has implemented RJE into the school systems in that location and in surrounding areas (RJOY, 2020). They run an initiative titled RJOY. However, according to their website the ages of their youth range from 11 years of age being the youngest to 17 being the oldest. This further proves the gap that exists in the elementary age group. This validates the need for this study in the elementary arena.

New York City (NYC) Schools have recently successfully implemented RJ into their schools. It is viewed as a whole school approach rather than a set of discipline practices (Sandwick et al., 2019). Over the course of a four year period, there was a 49% decrease in suspension rates for NYC schools that had holistically implemented RJE (Sandwick et al., 2019). The schools in NYC discussed in the literature are those at the middle school and secondary level

(Sandwick et al., 2019). This further validates the need for the current student focused on RJE in elementary schools.

Two studies of implementation are outlined in the literature (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). In both cases, the school systems followed the advice as outlined in the guidelines for implementing successful RJE programs. Both systems put plans in motion that were to be implemented over time (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Each plan was designed for a five year implementation. One of the school systems was successful with its implementation and the other system was not. The difference between the implementation plans among the two school systems was as follows. The school system with successful implementation viewed RJE as a holistic approach in schools and did not see it as a tacked on program, and the training for teachers and administrators was ongoing (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

Parallel to the above mentioned school systems Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) is providing formal RJE training to educators and administrators. This is so that successful implementation of RJE can happen. EMU bases its program on three pillars of human need. They are sense of control, order, and belonging (Armstrong, 2016).

Biblical Worldview of Human Development

A biblical worldview can be defined as the way that one understands and interprets the world through the lens of the Bible (Brown, C., 2018). In a 2018 article, author C. Brown references a biblical worldview as it has to do with social- emotional behavior and well-being. She references Comenius, who was a theologian and known as the father of modern education. Comenius speaks of the biblical worldview of human development, in agreement with C. Brown (2018) with the following words:

Know thyself, O man and know me, me the source of eternity, of wisdom and of grace; thyself, my creation, my likeness, my delight.” As man is the center of God’s creation, Comenius believes, “Man is naturally capable of acquiring a knowledge of all things, since, in the first place he is the image of God . . . So unlimited is the capacity of the mind that in the process of perception, it resembles an abyss . . . but for the mind, neither in heaven nor anywhere outside heaven, can a boundary be fixed” (Brown, C., 2018, p. 3).

This means wisdom is granted to all men, and C. Brown reaffirms the common character of learning potentiality in all of mankind. What one human being is or has or wishes or knows or can do, all others are or have or wish or know or are capable likewise (Brown, C., 2018). This is parallel the literature, linking it to RJE in the sense of the unlimited capacity that we have as individuals to be accountable for our own actions and reactions.

The Importance of Relationships

Restorative Justice and other alternative discipline practices are built around the foundation of relationships. Without fostering positive relationships, it can be difficult to see the positive effects of restorative justice in education. Reimer (2019) studies the idea of the relationships behind restorative justice practices in schools. According to Reimer (2019) the broad aim of RJ is for educational policy and practice to be more responsive and restorative to the needs and concerns of the school community. Thus, what is evolving in schools adopting a restorative justice framework is a clearer awareness of the social and emotional foundation of the paradigm, specifically that human beings are relational, and justice is understood broadly as honoring the inherent worth of all and is enacted through relationship (p. 23).

Trusting and safe relationships must be established early on between those in the school community if the implementation of restorative practices is going to work. Students must be

given the opportunity to trust those around them (Winn, 2018). Furthermore, looking at the idea of relationships through the lens of Bandura's social learning theory, it would make sense that human interaction is important throughout the restorative process (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). Bandura states that "Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them of what to do" (Bandura, 1977, p. 22). These two things go hand in hand. Relationships align with Bandura's social learning theory.

Requirements for Success

Professional development (PD) for teachers in restorative justice is not as readily available as other forms of training. It is also known that true implementation of RJ in schools is a longer just a one- or two-day training. Mayworm et al. (2016) conducted a study on implementation of restorative justice and training for teachers. This same study reveals the idea that RJ aims to engage students who misbehave rather than exclude them. A great deal of preparation must go into restorative practices in schools.

This aligns with the belief of Gregory and Evans (2020) that implementation is to be treated as a lengthy process. A multitude of trainings on RJ can be found through a Google search. However, scholarship providing empirical evidence or even conceptual guidance is rare to find in peer-reviewed journal articles. In the 19 articles revealed in a search of RJ studies, nine mentioned that teachers were trained in PD practices as part of the RJ implementation being evaluated, and three discussed the effect of these trainings on RJ (Mayworm et al., 2016).

It is important to know that training for this sort of paradigm shift will be different depending on the overall population of those school sites moving forward with implementation. Lack of administrative support can make implementation difficult. Teachers have stated that they

would have preferred a list of different things to implement along the way (Armour & Todic, 2016).

Implementation of RP in schools and in classrooms can be effective in fostering strong student teacher relationships and student trust (Gregory et al., 2016). The following are underlying processes during the implementation period. RJ allows staff and students to examine underlying causes of conflict and develop empathy and de-escalation practices; the student to staff interaction is intercepted with a more positive outcome than previous interactions (Sandwick et al., 2019). The importance of the student/ teacher trust that is needed to successfully implement RJ in schools can put relationship through a true test of authenticity (Sandwick et al., 2019). This is especially important at the elementary level.

Pointer et al. (2020) discusses the idea of making implementation of restorative practices fun and exciting for all involved. Implementing RJ can be done through games, play and even through media channels that appeal to the audience where practices are being implemented. An example of a game for implementing a restorative culture that would work for all students is called mirror, mirror (Pointer et al., 2020). The mirror, mirror game engages students in a dialogue that keeps them accountable and engaged at the same time (Pointer et al., 2020).

Concepts and Practices Related to Biblical Worldview

When relating Spiritual formation and RJE, John 15:12 states, “Love one another as I have loved you.” God loves us with an unconditional everlasting love. He does not keep tabs of the wrongs done; instead, He forgives us and guides us along the path of righteousness. We are to work together, and as believers in Christ we are to continue to learn and seek knowledge each and every day. The Bible mentions the Lord’s will for us to gain knowledge many times. One verse that stands out is Proverbs 18:15. This verse states, “The heart of the discerning acquires

knowledge for the ears of the wise seek it out". As educators, we are lifelong learners, and we must strive to lead in a way that is pleasing to God.

Summary

In recent years, there has been a shift away from zero tolerance policies for discipline in schools (Zehr, 2015). Zero tolerance policies have led to high numbers of suspensions of school aged children and taken them away from their learning environments (Evans & Lester, 2013). School officials have shifted toward the implementation of alternative discipline practices and restorative justice in education. The aim of the alternative discipline practices is to allow students to be more accountable and responsible for their behaviors and choices (Mullet, 2014).

Applying these practices, students can come to understand the harm that was done through their behavior and stay in school to grow and select new behaviors for the future. Restorative justice is a new concept for the educational world. With origins found in the criminal justice system, there are several theories that frame restorative practices. Social learning theory is being examined closely as a construct for restorative justice in education. Social learning theory is heavily related to RJE in the idea that human interaction is directly related to human behavior (Bandura, 2002).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The problem is the current state of suspensions, behaviors and social emotional learning among students in K-5 elementary schools (Winn, 2018). Restorative Justice (RJ), a practice that has been in the judicial system for many years, guided this investigation. In the past decade, RJ has made its way into the world of education (Zehr, 2015). There is little literature regarding benefits for students of RJ in an educational setting. There is a conjecture that restorative justice can have a great impact on schools (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Currently, a well-known practice is the zero tolerance policy in schools. This policy meant that if students were to break a rule or violate school policy, they faced immediate suspension or expulsion.

Examining restorative justice practices as an alternative for zero tolerance policy allowed the researchers and those interested in this concept to examine its uses and benefits as it relates to overall student success. There is a great deal of research on restorative justice in the judicial system and at the secondary level (Gregory et al., 2016; Zehr, 2015). The existing research reveals that alternative discipline can create an improved school climate and reduce misconduct among students (Owen et al., 2015).

This chapter discusses the design and methodology of the study. The research questions from chapter one again appear in this chapter. The setting, participants, procedures, as well as the role of the researcher, are discussed in this chapter as well. It continued with data collection and analysis followed by trustworthiness and ethical considerations followed by a detailed summary.

Design

A qualitative research design was used to collect data (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to describe the perceived relationships that restorative justice has to the behavior and social

emotional learning state of elementary school-aged students. Phenomenological methodology was used to seek understanding based on stories related to hands-on experiences and human interaction. According to Creswell and Poth, (2018) qualitative research focuses on experiences of the participants. The approach was a transcendental phenomenological approach that focused on experiences of the participants. Transcendental phenomenology seeks to understand the experiences of the individuals involved in the phenomena. Moustakas (1994) believes phenomenological research to be valuable as the human experience is understood most clearly through qualitative research. In this research, the phenomena was restorative justice in education (RJE). The problem examined in the study was the current state of suspensions, behaviors, and social emotional learning among students in K-5 elementary schools. Educators and administrators experienced with RJE and those who have implemented the process served as participants.

In restorative justice, the foundation is relationship building (Todic et al., 2020). Through qualitative research, data were collected using a naturalistic approach that sought to understand phenomena about persons' lives, stories, and behavior including those related to health, organizational functioning, social movements, or interactional relationships (Gelling, 2015). Since the topic of restorative justice in education is one that relies on building of relationships and drawing meaning of one's behavior and actions, it was important for the researcher to be authentic and seek truth behind the stories of the participants. The nature of qualitative research affirms the existence of multiple truths and multiple arbiters of what is true or authentic; as artists, researchers must work to find ways to balance the multiplicity of poly-vocal texts, realities, and 'readers' (Galman, 2009, p. 214).

“Qualitative research aims to address questions concerned with developing an understanding of the meaning and experience dimensions of humans’ lives and social worlds” (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 1). Central to good qualitative research is whether the research participants’ subjective meanings, actions, and social contexts, as understood by them, are illuminated (Fossey et al., 2002). This same point of understanding social settings is constantly repeated, and it was directly related to the problem identified in this research.

Phenomenology is defined as the science of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology seeks to return to the concrete, and the basics of experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This idea comes with the saying “Back to the things themselves!” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Moustakas (1994) discussed transcendental phenomenology as a research practice originally adopted by Husserl.

The design of transcendental phenomenology seeks to understand the experiences of the persons involved in the phenomenon. In this research, the phenomenon was restorative justice in education (RJE). Moustakas (1994) believes phenomenological research to be valuable as the human experience is understood most clear through qualitative research. This style of research was appropriate for this study, as it examined the experiences of the participants in their everyday worlds (Creswell, 2013).

Research Questions

Central Question: What are the experiences with restorative justice practices in elementary school as it relates to improving social-emotional learning in order to reduce misbehavior in one elementary school in Virginia?

Research Subquestions (SQs)

SQ1. What was the environment like for teachers and administrators when the implementation of restorative practices was proposed?

SQ2. What has the overall reaction of the implementation of restorative practices been at the elementary school?

SQ3. How have the social and learning environments changed or improved from the perspective of teachers and administrators?

Setting

The setting for the study was one elementary school in a small rural community in Virginia. For the study, the school was assigned a pseudonym and will be referred to as Hawk Elementary School. Pseudonyms were assigned to all settings and participants. This elementary school is a part of the Hawthorne County Public School system. The total population of the school is approximately 220 students. This elementary school has been tasked with implementing RJ in the school.

The overall socioeconomic breakdown of the school is primarily middle class. Of the population, about 83% White, 9.7% Hispanic, and 5.7% two or more races. In the school community approximately 45% of students receive free and reduced lunch. The participating elementary school serves students in grades kindergarten through 5th grade. This area of the state is very progressive in implementing restorative practices in schools and has begun the implementation in their elementary schools. They began with implementation as a whole school more than 4 years ago. There will be more information about the grade levels in the participants section of this study. The site is organized with one principal, one counselor, and 2-3 teachers per grade level in grades K-5.

Participants

The types of sampling that were used in this study were purposeful sampling and reverse snowball sampling (Bazen et al., 2021). Purposeful sampling occurs when the sampling process is carefully considered (Patton, 2002). Additionally, because of the nature of the setting, snowball sampling was chosen. In the context of the setting, snowball sampling occurs when the researcher informs the administrator about the study and asks them to present the information to those teachers at the site. Then, those who are interested can contact the researcher for participation in the study.

The selection criteria for the study were that those who participate in the study were teachers, a counselor, and an administrator from the elementary school site. At least one administrator and one counselor participated in the study with two or three teachers from each of the various grade levels at the elementary school. Teachers were recruited through the snowball sampling method, and their administrators requested their participation in the study. This sampling method was in place to ensure that the study revealed data from many different points of view. The total sample size was 13.

Total sample sizes of 13 participants were used. Of the participants in the study 4 were male and 9 were female. The experience of the participants ranged from 2 to 35 years. The age of the individuals participating in the study ranged from 23 to 62 years old. Each participant had 0 to 16 years specific experience with RJ.

Procedures

The researcher submitted a descriptive letter, followed by a personal phone call to describe the research to the superintendent of the proposed research site (See Appendix A). Following approval from the county, I sought approval from the university Institutional Review

Board. (IRB) After IRB approval was given, (See Appendix B), the school administrator was contacted after which were letters and phone calls. Permission forms were sent to gain their consent for participation in the study (See Appendix C). No assent form was needed as students were not participating in the study.

Teachers were recruited with the support of administration from the school. The style of sampling used in the research was one in which the administrator from the research site requested the participation of teachers in the study. Contact information for teachers was obtained from the school administrator and via public information on the school website. The researcher contacted the teachers to begin setting up focus groups and interviews. Both focus groups and interviews took place in person. Focus groups, interviews, and documentation such as student examples or teacher notes were collected to gather data on the topic. Interviews and focus groups were voice recorded for later transcription. Google Forms were used to administer surveys to participants. Upon completion of data collection, the data were organized for coding. When coding of the data was completed, analysis took place to identify patterns and themes within the data.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher was the human instrument in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher had no authority over the participants. As a career educator and restorative justice advocate/ practitioner, I am passionate about the topic. Having used RJ in the classroom, as well as observed it being used in other school settings, I brought personal experience. The outcome of RJ practices is different for each situation, as each school, each teacher, each student, and each situation was also different. As a Christian, I encourage others to foster positive relationships

with the biblical scripture in mind. The key to restorative justice or any other alternative discipline plan is the foundation and the relationships involved, including spiritual ones.

Data Collection

The data collection for the study began with simple demographic surveys for the participants. Once the surveys were completed and collected, the interviews, document analysis and focus groups took place. All documents and transcriptions were collected and stored to protect the confidentiality of the study participants. The data were then organized for analysis.

Triangulation of data is essential in phenomenological research. According to Schwandt (2015), triangulation is “a procedure used to establish the fact that the criterion of validity has been met” (p. 307). This qualitative research was triangulated for validity by incorporating data from interviews, questionnaires, and documents. In addition, member checking was utilized. Member checking, or respondent validation, increases the validity of the research by allowing the participants to have the opportunity to review information in order to confirm that data are accurate (Silverman, 2014). In depth one-on-one and small group interviews were conducted along with a focus group. The interviews were audio recorded for transcription, after which time the researcher organized them into themes. The focus group interview was also audio recorded and organized into themes.

Online interviews containing two to four participants were conducted to give the researcher a better idea of the personal experiences of the participant. Teachers were asked slightly different questions based on their grade level and the age of students they teach.

Interviews

Interviews are dialogues conducted between the interviewer and the interviewee. Interviews in phenomenological research provide a very specific source of information as they

are focused on the experiences of the participants and fully understanding those experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Structured interviews were conducted in person and recorded with an approved recording device. Structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask the same questions of each participant, and collect comparable data (Patton, 2014).

A second recording device was used in order to back up the data from the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews were conducted in person, with each individual participant. Interviews were conducted over a period of two weeks. Each interview session lasted no longer than 30 minutes. Notes were also taken and stored on a password protected computer that was placed in a locked cabinet when not in use (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Notes and recorded data from the interviews were reviewed over a period of one week in order to organize them into themes (Moustakas, 1994).

In school related research, interviews are a strong method of data collection as the goal is to gain detailed descriptions and interpretations of the experiences of teachers and administrators of the school community relating to implementation of RJ, RP, and RJE and to understand those experiences (Austin & Sutton, 2014). Interviews in educational research present more in-depth information than do other methods of data collection (Fritz & Vandermause, 2018). The standardized open-ended interview questions are listed below. The central research question (CRQ) and/or the research sub questions (SQ) for each are noted in parenthesis.

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Please describe your reaction to Restorative Practices (RP) from the time you first learned about it to now. How has using it and learning more about it affected your understanding of the concept? (SQ2)

2. What changes have you noticed being made in your school since RP has been introduced to the school district? (CRQ)
3. What have been the most challenging situations for you? (SQ2)
4. What support have you received from administration? How has it helped or hindered your use of restorative practices. (SQ3)
5. What part of RJ has been the hardest to implement? (SQ2)
6. What would need to happen for RP principles to become a fully integrated part of how teachers, staff, and administrators approach discipline? (SQ3)
7. If you were advising another teacher or administrator on implementing RP what would you say? (CRQ)
8. Give me at least three examples of strategies that you have used with students that you would categorize as RJ strategies. (CRQ)
9. How have you used RJ to build relationships within the classroom between students and between you and your students? What strategies did you use to help students learn how to interact appropriately? (SQ2)
10. In your experiences with RJE, have you noticed a change or difference in the behavior of students? If so, what have you experienced? (SQ3)
11. In implementing RJE, what have your experiences been related to relationships with students within the school setting? (CRQ)
12. What has your experience been from an accountability standpoint? How has accountability changed for you and for students? (SQ3)

Questions 1-3 give insight into the school environment before the implementation of RJE in the school setting as well as the participants' knowledge and perceptions of personal

challenges experienced with implementation of RJE. They specifically identified the need for RJE as an alternative discipline practice for the school. These questions are demographic in nature. Demographic questions give a look into the standards of living of the participants (Cojocaru, 2020). Questions of this nature are specific and cannot be expanded upon (Braun et al., 2021).

Questions 4 and 5 were designed to reveal the level of difficulty with implementation, as it relates to support from administrators. Administrative support is important when implementing restorative practices in order to balance a school-wide buy in (Gregory et al., 2021). According to Gregory et al. (2021), administrators must prioritize equity and model a relationship building and skill building approach to staff and students. Professional development should be ongoing, and administrators should make bold choices when implementing RJE in schools (Gregory et al., 2021).

Questions 6 and 7 were designed to understand the participants' experiences with collaborating with their colleagues in the school setting. Staff communication and collaborating with their colleagues in the school setting. Staff communication and collaboration are important in any implementation process (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). The professional growth is greater when teachers work together among themselves to foster a strong school community (Parker & Bickmore, 2020).

Questions 9-12 were designed to identify the experiences of teachers and administrators. The experiences are specifically related to the student interaction and social emotional learning of students as a result of RJ implementation in the schools. According to Kervick et al., (2019) RJ amplifies the voices of students, that have once felt like they didn't have a voice in the school

setting before. Implementation of RP in schools helps to build a confidence and accountability within the students (Kervick et al., 2019).

Document Analysis

For purposes of the study, the following documents were kept or collected. Meeting minutes from grade level team meetings, faculty meetings, school communication related to RJE, and administrator meetings were collected. Document analysis in qualitative research allows the text that is being analyzed to be organized into themes that continuously come up in the study (Morris & Ecclesfield, 2011). Letters from teachers to parents explaining the implementation process were also included. In addition, notes were kept from the field interviews and focus group to use as a tool during analysis of the data.

Collecting these forms of data gave insight to the needs of this specific culture shift of RJE in the school community. These documents reveal discussion about the current state of implementation in the school and specific classroom settings. Notes from the interviews answered the specific research questions for this study. The research questions were presented as interview questions as well. The questions that were answered with the analysis of documents are SQ1 and SQ3 as teachers and administrators discussed the progress of the school environment since the implementation of RJE, and what changes have occurred if any- and what changes needed to be made to the restorative practices being implemented. Documents were collected throughout the course of the study by gaining access through permission to have them sent via email or photocopied from school administrators and classroom teachers. Those documents that are received electronically were accessed and stored on a password protected computer that has remained in a locked file cabinet when not in use. The photocopied documents were kept in a file and stored in a locked file cabinet when not in use.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a qualitative method that can be used to facilitate further understanding of important aspects of processes (Gill & Baillie, 2018). Focus groups are used for exploring collective perspectives and experiences (Gill & Baillie, 2018). Focus groups have been discouraged in phenomenological research in the past. It has been said that focus groups do not allow the researcher to capture the same essence of the phenomenon as one on one interviews do (Jones et al., 2021). However, studies have concluded that focus groups can be equal to interviews if attention is paid to everyone participating in the group. Special attention is also paid to the interaction between the participants (Barbour, 2007).

Focus groups gave insight to the restorative behavior among colleagues. One promising sign of effective restorative practices is the modeled behaviors of those facilitating it (Zehr, 2015). Focus groups will help determine the existing culture of the school. Focus groups will also give insight to the state of relationships among individuals in the school community (Mansfield et al., 2018).

Like interviews, focus groups were held in person and recorded, and notes were taken during the interviews. The focus group session lasted no longer than 45 minutes. The focus group included 6 to 8 participants. In order to answer each research question, these very specific questions were asked and discussed.

Focus Group Questions

1. What was the environment like for teachers and administrators when the implementation of restorative practices was proposed? (SQ1)
2. What has the overall reaction of the implementation of restorative practices been at the elementary school? (SQ2)

3. How have the social and learning environments changed or improved from the perspective of teachers and administrators? (SQ3)

In addition to these questions, I also asked - How has the current state of the country, and school systems as a result of the pandemic changed the way RP looks in your school?

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, the modification of the Van Kaam method was used (Moustakas, 1994). In this process, following transcription of the data horizontalization took place. This is a practice where listing and preliminary grouping will take place (Moustakas, 1994).

Horizontalization is the reduction process of the research where each statement is examined, and those directly related to the research are recorded on a separate sheet of paper (Moustakas, 1994). This process allows the data to be specific to this study of the perspectives of teachers and administrators on implementing restorative practices in elementary school. Following horizontalization, reduction and elimination take place (Moustakas, 1994). Reduction and elimination is a process by which redundant statements are removed from the research (Moustakas, 1994).

During the process of reduction and elimination each expression was tested to see if it was helpful in understanding the experience, and those that are not helpful, or that are repetitive statements are eliminated. Once the elimination took place, only the invariant constituents of the experience were left (Moustakas, 1994). Invariant constituents are those statements from the research that contain information from the actual experience and are important for understanding (Moustakas, 1994). In order to identify the invariant constituents, the following questions are asked, 1) “Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient

constituent for understanding it?”, 2) “Is it possible to abstract and label it?” (Moustakas, 1994, p.121)

Coding was used to analyze the data in this study. Open coding was used with each type of data collections to identify themes. Pattern coding will follow to identify any patterns within the themes of data. Coding allows the researcher to organize the data into specific groups and understand what data are or are not relevant to the research question (Patton, 2002). There are different elements of data analysis in a phenomenological study.

Epoché is an ancient Greek term which is translated as the suspension of judgment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher must be aware of any biases or preconceived notions prior to the study and put aside as to not taint the participants experience findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the horizontalization section of data analysis, significant statements from the interviews were highlighted that supports an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon implementing restorative practices in schools, and how it affected the number of students suspended from the school (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is necessary to report on the essence of the phenomenon. This can be done by writing the description using structural and textual description (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents allow the data to be clustered or grouped into core themes of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). This step showed the individual experiences of each person who participates in the study (Moustakas, 1994). Also, according to Moustakas (1994), once the data are grouped into themes the invariant constituents are then checked against the record of the participant in order to answer the following questions: 1). Are they expressed explicitly in complete transcription? 2). If they are not explicitly expressed, are they compatible? 3). If they are not explicit or compatible, then they are not relevant to research,

and should be deleted. Following the validation of the invariant constituents an individual textural description of the experience is conducted (Moustakas, 1994). This includes verbatim examples from the interviews that are conducted and transcribed during research (Moustakas, 1994).

Following the individual textural description, an individual structural description of the experience was conducted. Finally, the essences of the experiences are constructed for each of the participants. A composite description was done in order to represent the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

In order to establish trustworthiness in the study the following concepts had to be used: Credibility was involved in the study in the form of triangulation and member checks. In order to achieve triangulation interviews were audio recorded. Member checks allowed those who participated in the study to view the credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2013). These two strategies should improve the accuracy of the research because the individuals were understood throughout the process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants had the opportunity to review the data collected by the researcher upon completion of the interviews in the form of transcripts. Dependability was present in the study in the form of a data audit. This helped determine if the findings from the research supported the data. Confirmability was present in the form of peer review of the research. Transferability of data means that the data can be transferred into several different contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was included in this study in the form of purposeful sampling. Through purposeful sampling, I could be sure that several points of view were included in the research. In qualitative research, trustworthiness must include these 4 components. Again, they are credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.

Credibility

Patton (2014) states, “Purpose drives design” (p. 660). The researcher plans to engage with participants in a systematic way through a long period of time spent in the field (Patton, 2014), triangulation of data from different sources, member checks after interviews and after representation of findings for verification and peer debriefing, and including analyzing of negative cases (Patton, 2002). Credibility was important in this study of the experiences of teachers and administrators with restorative practices in elementary schools. Individual interviews, online focus groups, member checks, and document analysis helped to achieve triangulation in this study.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is the stability of data over time and conditions. For this study, a period of three weeks was used to prove dependability of the research. Confirmability was used by the researcher to verify the findings were shaped by the participants and not the individual researcher. This was addressed by focusing on the style and tone of the participants. An audit trail was used to ensure that records were being accurately kept throughout the course of the study. Member checks are a practice that allows the participants to review the interpretations of the researcher, as well as review the findings to check the credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2013).

Confirmability describes the consistency of the findings of the study, and the ability of the findings to be repeated (Polit & Beck, 2014). In the current study of perspectives of elementary teachers and administrators on implementing RP in elementary schools, it was important to seek expert input in collecting and analyzing data. According to Moustakas (1994) peer reviews are recommended for the research process. In the present study those working

toward advanced degrees as well as experts in the field of education who hold advanced degrees assisted in analyzing data and reports from this researcher (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Transferability

Transferability is the evidence that the study's findings could be applicable to other contexts, situations, times, and populations (Moustakas, 1994). Descriptive data were used in the study to ensure that maximum variation was used. When the development of the study was discussed, and different themes are developed transferability occurs (Creswell, 2013). Themes were created by terms and phrases used a number of times throughout the text (Creswell, 2013).

For the present study, terms frequently used throughout the study such as discipline, implementation, restorative justice, social learning theory, suspension were clearly defined. The transferability of the study allowed teachers and administrators in other schools to examine their own experiences implementing RJE and RP as a part of the school culture. Moreover, the results of this study will allow administrators in other school settings to understand and be open minded to the equity that exists in their school among the teachers and students as well as their social-emotional needs.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in this study were led by the fact that the role of the researcher was clearly defined. Before collecting any data, IRB approval was obtained to ensure that the study was ethical, and that the rights of the participants were protected. Pseudonyms were used for names of participants and organizations included in the study in order to ensure confidentiality. Support was available for research participants if they find they need it at any time during the process. No exaggerations were used, and participants had the opportunity to review the research. To add to this, full written consent was obtained from willing participants; from the

beginning of the process, the participant was given the right to withdraw at any time and respect will be given to all participants.

Data collected during the research period was secured on a password-protected computer, and anything that was on paper was stored in a locked filing cabinet. In accordance with federal requirements, all data were secured in these locations to remain for a period of three years. When this period of time expires, all data will be destroyed. Upon destroying the material, all information on the password-protected computer will be erased using a commercial software application that is designed specifically to remove data, and hard-copy data will be shredded and recycled.

Summary

This chapter discussed the methods that are used in the phenomenology. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the implementation, experiences, and practices of restorative justice in education to improve the social emotional learning environment for 11 K-5 elementary teachers, a counselor and administrator at one elementary school in Virginia. The procedures that were used in the study were discussed. The setting of an elementary school in Virginia was given and described along with the characteristics of those who participated in the study. I also discussed the methods of surveys, online interviews and focus groups as well as document analysis that were used for data collection. This chapter also covers the process for gaining permission from the IRB as well as the ethical considerations for the study, and how the participants and data were protected throughout the study. The chapters that follow discuss the themes and the findings of the study as well as limitations and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the implementation, lived experiences, and practices of restorative justice in education for K-5 elementary teachers, a counselor, and an administrator at one elementary school in Virginia. Theme development and responses to research questions are presented in the results section. Data collected from interviews, the focus group interview, and documents were analyzed to develop themes. The themes and subthemes developed from the data are presented in the form of a narrative. Responses from participants are also presented in narrative form to support themes and subthemes discovered. In addition, direct quotes from participants' interviews are included to provide thorough insight into their lived experiences regarding restorative justice in education at the elementary school level, and their perceptions of student behaviors and the school learning environment.

Participants

A total of one administrator, one counselor and 11 teachers agreed to participate in the study. All participating individuals worked in positions at one K-5 elementary school in Virginia. Requirements of the research study were met as all participants the same elementary school in Virginia had experience implementing restorative justice in education in their classrooms or within the school. Teachers interested in participating in the study were sent a consent form to view via email, before completing a demographic survey and participating in audio recorded interviews with the researcher. Selected school personnel participated in individual interviews, a focus group interview, and contributed to document analysis. To protect the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms were provided and used throughout the study so

that their given names would not be revealed. To take confidentiality one step further, the name of the school and the school system were assigned pseudonyms as well.

To gather information about participants' experience in the field of education and their experience teaching and leading, participants were asked to identify the number of years they had been in the field of education, the grade level they are teaching currently, how many years they had been in their position at Hawk Elementary, as well as how many years of experience they had with RJE prior to implementation. Of the participants, one taught kindergarten, two taught first grade, two taught second grade, one taught third grade, one taught fourth grade, one taught fifth grade, five were involved in working with all grade levels as they are an administrator, counselor or specialty teacher. Seven participants reported having little to no experience with RJE prior to implementation, while the remaining participants reported two to sixteen years of experience. Collecting information about participants experience with RJE prior to implementation as well as their years of experience in the field and years teaching their current grade level before the beginning of this study was important to determine as this would determine how much information they could provide about the implementation of RJE at the elementary level.

Educators' years of teaching experience varied at the time of the study, two had 2 years' experience, two had 8 to 10 years' experience, six had 15 to 20 years, and three had 25 to 35 years' experience. A summary is provided in Table 1 of the demographic information about participants in this study. Included in Table 1 are participants' years of teaching experience, the grade levels they currently teach, number of years in their current position at Hawk Elementary school, and well as the number of years of experience they had with RJE prior to implementation.

Table 1*Teaching Experience of Participants*

| Name | Gender | Years of experience total/ Years at Hawk Elementary | Position/Grade Level | Years of experience with RJE prior to implementation |
|--------|--------|---|----------------------|--|
| Anne | Female | 33/4 | Administrator | 1-2 |
| Ashley | Female | 15/4 | 2 | 0 |
| Beth | Female | 8/4 | 3 | 0 |
| Carson | Male | 2/2 | 5 | 4 |
| Dave | Male | 35/17 | K-5 | 0 |
| Gloria | Female | 25/8 | K-5 | 0 |
| Kevin | Male | 20/>1 | K-5 | 1 |
| Lance | Male | 17/17 | 1 | 12 |
| Laurel | Female | 16/16 | 4 | 16 |
| Moriah | Female | 3/3 | K | 4 |
| Nancy | Female | 8/6 | Counselor | 0 |
| Reba | Female | 31/5 | K-5 | 2 |
| Shelly | Female | 19/12 | 1 | 5 |

Anne

Anne is the sole administrator (working alongside a counselor) at Hawk Elementary School. At the time of the study, she had been in the field of education for 33 years. Prior to taking her current position, she had been an administrator as well as classroom teacher. She began the implementation process of RJE at HES. When asked what her feelings were about RJE, she stated that it changed her life.

Ashley

Ashley is a classroom teacher, and she teaches second grade at HES. When asked about her initial feelings towards RJE, she first felt that it was alarming until she saw the benefits of the

process. She felt happy that students began to be able to see problems within the classroom, and then use the tools from RJE to help resolve the conflict.

Beth

Beth is a third grade classroom teacher at the research site. At the time of the study, she had been at HES for 4 years. Altogether, she has a total of 8 years of experience in the field of education. She had no prior experience with RJE when implementation began. She had previously come from a school system where everything was driven by data and there was no such thing as a community circle. She shared of her experience with implementing restorative practices in her classroom: “I turned around really quickly when I decided to put my big girl panties on and embrace this, and just do it- it was mind blowing. The consistency and the community that you can build by being consistent and being really purposeful with your conversations.”

Carson

Carson is a new teacher of just 2 years. He has been a member of the faculty at HES for that amount of time. At the time of the study, he had 4 years’ experience with RJE as a result of his work in college. As a fifth grade teacher, he teaches the oldest children in the school. He speaks of the challenges associated with finding content to create activities and developing questions for circles to last an entire year. From there, he thought about things he could do for the school that would have long term benefits. He made social – emotional learning a goal and is leading the creation of a SEL curriculum for the teachers at the school.

Dave

Dave is the PE teacher at HES. He has 35 years of experience in the field of education. For 17 of those years, he has been in his current position. Before implementation of RJE at the

school, he had no experience with this particular set of practices. He mentions being familiar with RJE, but the practical application in the elementary setting was new. He had doubts that the younger ones may not understand, but he states that it has worked well. Students can engage in the process without prompting. Challenges have been those students that do not buy into the processes of RJE but would rather continue to argue with one another, rather than repair the harm.

Gloria

As the reading teacher at HES, Gloria has the opportunity to see students at all grade levels. At the time of the study, she had 25 years of experience in the field of education. She has been teaching for 8 years at this elementary school and was there for the beginning stages of implementing RJE practices. She discusses seeing less punitive consequences for students. She sees more conversations happening, and emotional support for the students. She shares that students are more important than academics, that academics have not been pushed to the side, but educators have permission to put the needs of the students first.

Kevin

Kevin is the new special education teacher at the research site. He has been there for less than one year. Prior to beginning his new position at HES Kevin had 20 years of experience in the field of education at the middle school level. Although he was familiar with RJE from his previous experience, he had never personally implemented it into his own classroom at the time of the study. Kevin recalls working with RJE at the middle school level. He says: "I thought it was a better alternative to punishment and an opportunity for all parties involved. They were able to create a resolution that was beneficial to both- without the idea of one side being punished and the other side not."

Lance

With 17 years in the field of education and all 17 of those years at HES, Lance is a classroom teacher. He teaches first grade at the research site. At the time of the study, he brought with him 12 years of experience with RJE practices. The fact that he was familiar with the process allowed him to understand the shift in school culture when implementation began at the research site.

He speaks of RJE as one of the tools that are available to respond to behaviors and not the only tool. He discusses the administrative support as something that is very strong with RJE at Hawk Elementary. The expectations are high, and the kids love the administrator. Addressing the challenges of RJE, he speaks of parent buy in- and how not having it makes it hard, and that parent education is important.

Laurel

This educator has been teaching at HES for 16 years. Laurel has 16 years of experience in education under her belt. At the time of the study the participant indicated that she had 16 years of experience in implementing RJE practices and practices similar to it. Having been at the school for such a long period of time, she was able to observe the changes very closely as the various changes in school culture were made with the implementation of RJE practices.

She talks about the time that is needed to implement RJE correctly, and how it is not a process that is meant to be rushed. She also brought up the idea of behaviors that take place outside of the classroom, and the struggle with knowing where the RJ process should begin. Laurel emphasizes the need to be able to begin the process in a timely manner in order for it to be effective.

Moriah

Moriah is a kindergarten teacher at HES. She is a recent college graduate and has had more experience with RJE practices than she has had with teaching. This is because of her experiences with the phenomena in undergraduate school. At the time of the study, she had been teaching for 3 years at the research site.

When she first learned of RJ the history of the topic did not seem beneficial to her in the classroom, as a result of its origin in the criminal justice system. She gives an example of students that were struggling in the cafeteria and how teachers took the time to talk with the cafeteria staff about RJE, and the relationships and behaviors in the cafeteria began to change and become more positive.

Nancy

At the time of the study, Nancy was the school counselor. Prior to the implementation of RJE at the research site, she had very little to no experience with the phenomena. Nancy has 8 years of experience in the field of education. She has been in her position as school counselor for the last 6 years.

She speaks of RJE as having a positive impact on students and staff at the school. She also mentions that her training as a counselor, does not always match RJ practices and principles. It is for this reason that she does not always adhere to RJ guidelines. Nancy states that it is important for her in her position to “do what is right for the client/student at the time.”

Reba

Reba is another reading teacher at the research site. She sees all students in grades K-5. She has been teaching in the field of education for 31 years. Five of those years have been at

HES. At the time of the study Reba had 2 years of experience with the phenomena of restorative justice in education practices.

She shares, when a whole school works toward creating a dialogue and communicating in the ways of RJE, it is effective. In her opinion, it can be challenging when it comes to a child that takes a while to reach. She shares with strong emotion that the administrator is so supportive in building the relationships with the students, and the teachers must be as well. Meeting students where they are is so important.

Shelly

As first grade teacher at the research site, Shelly has 5 years of experience with implementing RJE practices. She has been teaching in the field of education for 19 years. Shelly has been at HES for 12 years.

She shares that using RJE in the classroom has diminished the need for other behavior management strategies. There are not as many referrals to the office, or cases of bullying, and not many discipline issues that take place because of RJE. Shelly says that the most challenging thing for her was getting parents to shift their mindset to a growth mindset, instead of a fixed mindset. She shares that buy in does not happen all at once or simultaneously, but as people see benefits, the buy in comes.

Results

It was important to thoroughly analyze all collected data to determine emerging themes. Codes were identified from teachers' responses and categorized to aide in presenting themes. Four major themes emerged from the data to present the narrative of the lived experiences of elementary teachers, counselors and administrators in Virginia. The following section detailed

the theme development of this study and includes direct quotes from participants to describe their lived experiences.

Theme Development

Each individual interview and the in-person focus group discussion were transcribed using the Temi transcription application and entered in to MaxQDA. Documents for analysis were received electronically. Over a period of 2 weeks the data collected from the interviews and focus groups as well as the documents collected were reviewed closely. Statements, ideas, words, and phrases that appeared regularly were highlighted and categorized into individual groups and themes. MaxQDA has a feature that pulls out the most used words in all the data collected in the study. With this feature a word cloud was generated using the top 50 words to show the ideas and words that appeared continually. This word cloud is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

MaxQDA Word Cloud



The words displayed in Figure 1 were used in the coding process. When analyzing the word frequency chart, restorative justice was at the center, surrounded by students, relationships, support, and culture. In addition, those that are involved in the RJE process such as parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators were surrounding students. Needs was another word that was at the center of the chart just below students. This word was used often by the teachers, counselor and administrator as they discussed the process of RJE as one that worked to meet the needs of students, and student needs being important to address before academics. After generating and analyzing the word frequency chart, the coding process began. During the process of coding, nodes were used to pick out important ideas that were present across collected data. The four themes that emerged from data were relationships, school culture, buy in, and student support.

The first major theme identified was relationships/accountability. In speaking with the educators, it was very clear that relationships and accountability among the school community were main concepts in implementing RJE in schools. When discussing relationships participants often talked about how the feelings of students changed when relationships are the primary focus. In studying the responses of the participants, the feelings displayed were comfort and positivity. These ideas emerged as subthemes. Other words that stood out when discussing relationships were needs and awareness. Through participants' responses, needs of students were able to be met, and they themselves as the teachers, counselor and administrator were more aware of how to deal with children and situations. These responses supported the use of needs as a subtheme.

The second major theme discovered from the data was school culture. With this theme, elementary school, and younger children were prioritized as participants discussed the culture of

their elementary school as it related to their lived experiences. Participants' responses helped create a detailed image of the school environment. The teachers, counselor and administrator spoke often about the initial changes that took place in the school and classroom, which allowed changes to be listed as a subtheme. Participants discussed student behavior as a part of school culture, they often mentioned how it is more positive, that there are less behavior issues, and less of a need for alternate behavior management strategies. As a result behavior is listed as a subtheme. While teachers appreciated the changes that took place with behaviors affecting the overall school culture, they collectively talked about wanting more strategies, dialogue and time were desired for the implementing of practices. This helped the development of the three above listed concepts as subthemes.

The third major theme discovered from the data was buy in. As previously mentioned, Figure 2 shows a chart created using MaxQDA's word frequency feature. The term buy in came up on the graphic that was created, and as part of the study this concept came up across all data sources. Administrative support was identified as a subtheme as it plays a major part in how well educators buy in to the process of RJE. Following this subtheme, one of challenges evolved as result or reason why there is hesitation with buy in. Tools were then developed into a subtheme, as educators felt – as long as they had adequate tools, they were more enabled to implement RJE practices and pedagogy into their respective spaces within the school.

The fourth major theme that developed from the data was student support. Responses from participants showed that student support is needed during the implementation stages of RJE. Therefore, parent involvement was developed as a subtheme under the major theme of student support. Having parent support is important in order to successfully engage students in each stage of the restorative process. It was pointed out in participants' responses that engaging

in restorative conversations and other restorative practices supported students as it was not a punitive form of discipline. These practices are integrated with teaching and educating, and also engage community support for the students and the school as a collective body. Many of the themes and overlap as there is a spotlight on the lived experiences of elementary administrators, counselors and teachers. After very close examination and analyzing of the data, it was clear that there were specific concepts that stood out about the lived experiences related to the phenomena of RJE. This was helpful when grouping the data into separate themes and subthemes. The codes included in the tables, are the number of times each idea occurred with the participant responses.

Major Theme 1: Relationships/Accountability

The first major theme that came from the data was relationships/ accountability. The two subthemes under relationships/accountability were comfort and positivity (see Table 2). Using RJE in schools focuses on building relationships with students (Pointer, 2020). The implementation of restorative practices in the elementary schools fosters a sense of accountability among students and teachers alike (Winn, 2018). In examining the data from the time of the study teachers, counselors, and administrators discussed the relationships that are fostered alongside RJE principles.

Table 2*Theme 1: Relationships/Accountability*

| Theme 1: Relationships/Accountability | |
|--|----------------------------|
| Subtheme | Code |
| Comfort | Positive (Positivity) (14) |
| | Opportunity to Open Up (6) |
| | Overall Kindness (5) |
| | Voicing Needs (5) |
| | Awareness(4) |
| | Cohesive (4) |
| Positivity | Whole Child (10) |
| | Across the Building (8) |
| | Community (7) |
| | Whole Child (3) |

Subtheme 1: Comfort. The initial subtheme that emerged from the first major theme of relationships/accountability was comfort. As a result of the relationships built using RJE students are able to feel like they are seen, and heard (Winn, 2018). There is a sense of community that comes with these (positive) feelings that are shared by counselors, teachers, administrators, and students alike (Lustick et al., 2020). In interviews and documents collected and analyzed the importance of creating a comfortable and safe space is essential when implementing RJE. Overall kindness and awareness as well as voicing needs happens more easily when relationships are in place.

When speaking in his interview, Carson describes an experience dealing with the strength of relationships built among his students. He says: “Students feel heard, and they (students) often would step in to begin to mend a situation together.” These relationships take time to build and create. It is not something that happens overnight. Safe spaces are created to allow for

comfortable interactions among the school community. In his interview, Lance stated the following about fostering relationships and creating safe spaces,

I encourage students to have a special job where they must work together for a week. Always focus on the positives. Because it is a whole school process, you are not afraid to intervene. If I see two 5th graders in conflict on the playground, that can turn into “Hey, why don’t you two come help out in my classroom?”, and I can have them teach the first graders something. That’s focusing on the positives.

Engaging students in activities and situations like the ones that Lance mentioned in his interview really set the stage for authentic relationships within the school setting. In her interview, when asked to reflect on relationships across the school, Ashley said

Across grade levels you can see the skills at work. Students are relating to one another, and after some time the processes become student led.

For Reba, relationship building has been a huge part of what she does as an educator. She has been in the field for 16 years. She prioritizes relationships and because of this she says:

I taught 5th grade, and my students would move on to the middle school and I wouldn’t really see them anymore. Whenever they would come back for things with siblings, they would always come back and talk to me. Since I have moved down to third and now fourth grade, students still come, stop by and say hi- we are still friendly and supportive because of the relationships built when they were in my class.

Every participant shared their ideas on the good changes happening in their classrooms and around the school since the implementation process has been in place. “Relationship building happens across the building”! “I feel like I am finally able to teach the whole child”.

Subtheme 2: Positivity. The second subtheme of the major theme relationships/ accountability was positivity. The administrators, counselors and teachers expressed an overwhelming amount of positivity throughout the school building. There is very little to no animosity among faculty, staff and students. Due to the positivity the changes in the school are seamless, and the positivity brings comfort, as stated above and confidence. When hard situations arise teachers are more aware of how to deal with these situations in ways that are likely to yield positive results and behaviors.

Beth stated in her interview:

Good things are happening as far as making sure we are getting rid of focus on negative things and situations. There is no public shaming, or office referrals. Students are able to build empathy.

This shift toward positivity is changing the way that teacher and student relationships are built and fostered. Shelly revealed the positive nature of restorative practices in the school allows the implementation of the processes to come more naturally. As we discussed the effect of positivity on relationships, Shelly shared that the positive relationships carry on throughout the school building from the classroom to the cafeteria.

Anne shared how the program is very positive overall and a very positive way to deal with children and foster relationships in the classroom:

Overall, teachers look for ways to support children in conflict and have found ways to give support that is not punitive.

Laurel discussed that there is no expectation of a reward, for the positive behavior that she experiences with students in her classroom:

In my opinion, I was raised where you're supposed to respect- and you're not supposed to be bribed to do it. Before restorative justice, they would have to just bypass it (rewards). I feel like now, (with RJE) they just do it, and they don't expect a reward. I just think that's the way it should be, you know. I don't think they (students) should want something or need to be nice to others because they want to earn a trinket or a toy.

During the focus group, educators were asked what social emotional changes they had experienced among students following the implementation of RJE at the school site. They spoke again about positive relationship building saying:

There is definitely a shift in relationship building, when it (RJE) is done appropriately. If a teacher comes in and says "What's your favorite food?" and kind of asks those really general questions, you can kind of tell that it's not as effective, but when the protocol is followed you can tell that there is an increase in relationships, not just with the teachers but with the students as well.

The first statement was echoed with another teacher experience: "I think that the relationships between teachers and their students have definitely improved greatly. I feel like students are more willing to talk about their feeling and come forth with what is happening and what is bothering them. They (students) are able to speak about things in a more calm manner. We have been teaching the skills to them." Kimberly re-emphasized the idea of teaching the skills (for students and adults), she says: "Even in our world now, adults don't know how to talk to each other, so we are building from the ground up. At the elementary level, these teachers and counselor are teaching students how to talk in a healthy way, and that can happen during community circles. The conversation might be about food first, but then we have to go deeper."

I'm still learning, I've got more to learn. After this year I am going to enroll at EMU for the restorative certificate. I too want to perfect my skills.

Carson then chimes in saying:

I have noticed that these kids, really know how to talk to adults. They are taught the skills that they need to build relationships and just like the basics that are not always taught at home – you know, eye contact and manners, and stuff like that. Also there's a lot more mutual respect, between the students and teachers, between the students and students, and between the administrators and students.

Another participant shares:

“Even though we may have different styles we are all working with the same procedures. We are all working with the same language and the student feels respected and safe.” Moriah explains,

For me as a kindergarten teacher, I feel like what I see often is the student-to-student relationship. A lot of kindergartners come into kindergartners come in not knowing how to communicate with one another. You get a lot of fussing and whining and neither student knows how to say “I need space, or I was sad because you wouldn't play with me.” They come in not knowing how to verbalize their feelings, and I feel like I end up having to step in a lot less than I used to or be in between them. They start learning throughout the year how to communicate those things for themselves and solve their own problems.

The document analysis confirmed these statements given in the in person focus group, and interviews. The social emotional learning curriculum materials showed the focus and emphasis on relationships. There were many practical ways of fostering connection within the

school community. The brochure shows the restorative questions, which are wonderful conversation starters when teaching the restorative process (Pointer et al., 2020).

Major Theme 2: School Culture

The second major theme to emerge from the data was school culture. When implementing RJE in schools, a paradigm shift happens results in many changes within the school community (Winn, 2018). The five subthemes under the theme of school culture were changes, behavior, strategies, dialogue and time (see Table 3). The changes that take place are overall positive, yet educators still find that there is a huge need for time in order to implement the different components of RJE in the school/ classroom communities (Gregory & Evans, 2020). In this study, personnel at the elementary school site described the changes that took place with school culture.

Table 3*Theme 2: School Culture*

| Theme 2: School Culture | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Subtheme | Code |
| Changes | Classroom Environment (6) |
| | Less Behaviors (8) |
| | School Environment (9) |
| Behavior | Automatic (6) |
| | Positive (13) |
| | Student led (13) |
| Strategies | Morning Meeting (5) |
| | Curriculum (7) |
| | Educating Support Staff (8) |
| Dialogue | Restorative Conversations (7) |
| | Modeling (10) |
| Time | Practical Resources (9) |
| | Planning (6) |

Subtheme 1: Changes. From the data analyzed, it was evident that the teachers, counselor, and administrator noticed changes at the school site. In her interview Laurel says, “I think it diminishes the need for other behavior management systems.” Laurel emphasizes the fact that there has been less worry about undesirable behavior within the school, as RP have become a school wide initiative. In his interview Dave says:

Seeing that the students can almost without a prompt, can almost go through the restorative process by themselves. You may have to get in there a little bit and prompt it. They (students) almost know, this is how we’re going to handle it. It’s not going to be an argument; the teacher is not making a ruling of who is wrong and who is right. It’s not

perfect but it (RP) has been more effective than the traditional way of working through conflict.

These changes that happen slowly but surely, have an overall effect on the school community as well as the individuals involved in implementing the changes. When interviewing the administrator, Kimberly- she speaks of the following changes:

It has changed my life. When I first learned about restorative practices, I started attending some of the summer programs at Eastern Mennonite University, and then took other courses along the way, just to make sure that my appetite was wet for what was going on with that. My school runs beautifully. I don't have suspensions. I don't have any major, major behavior issues. They are handled in house with the classroom teacher. They are handled with the class family, because students help each other through the conflict. It is a beautiful process to say the least.

In his interview Lance says of the changes he has experienced: "To me, it was just sort of seamless because it was already a part of my repertoire, I guess. I think it is nice to have everyone on board."

During her interview Gloria refers to the whole school changes, with the following:

I think it is always about the conversation. The conscious discipline really talks about taking a deep breath, realizing what's going on, and taking a moment. When you have a whole school that embodies that and works towards that with the kids and other people, it's just effective.

Subtheme 2: Behavior. RJE and RP implementation is an alternate response to behavior in schools. (Zakszeski & Rutherford., 2020). It takes the place of punitive discipline policies, such as zero tolerance and other policies, that do not focus on repairing the harm and remove the

student from the learning environment (Voigt, 2020). In this study, teachers, counselors and administrators discussed their experiences with student behavior and shared how RJE has had an impact on student behaviors in all grade levels in all areas of the school. Moriah shares in her interview about student behaviors in the cafeteria, “After we shared with them about restorative justice, and the things that we are doing in the classroom, I saw those behaviors in the cafeteria being minimized. I felt like our relationship started there. It was super positive.”

Participants shared a common ground when it came to the behavior of students in the school building. They all felt that with RJE it was headed in a more positive direction with less punitive consequences for students. Beth says the following about behaviors in her interview:

I was never a send to the principal kind of teacher. The relationship is there, the students are a part of deciding the consequences for their behavior. This is so that they are always accountable.

Educators also expressed the way that the positive behaviors become automatic, and student led over time. After watching restorative behaviors being modeled and practicing with their peers, students begin to make it possible for the teachers, counselor, and administrator to step back a bit from the behavioral situation. Shelly explained, “I think students are more aware of how they are acting. Each day the kids know that they start fresh. When you have a child who acts out and you talk to them about it and let them hear that what they are doing is bothersome to others, they are just more aware of their own behaviors.”

Subtheme 3: Strategies. Within the major theme of school culture was the subtheme of strategies. When implementing RJE it is important that educators are given these strategies as tools to be able to practice restorative language in the classroom. It is important that teachers are

working with students to help them be successful. If we do things for students, or dictate to them how they should be, then we are not seeking restorative behavior (Evans & Vandering, 2016).

It is important for the teachers, counselor, and administrator in this study, and in schools everywhere to have instructional strategies that they can put in place when implementing RJE in schools (Pointer et al., 2020). During interviews, participants were asked to name three restorative strategies that they use with their students in their experiences at the school setting. When asked about the strategies they use, each participant gave a response. Carson says, that the strategies he uses are ones that help the students feel heard, and are his way of stepping in to mend the harm done. They are, notice, meet and step into the shoes of the other person. Dave works hard to try to discuss character with students, and letting students know that it is not about winning and losing. Lance speaks of creating a garden for students, and hand-picking students to be in the garden club. This becomes a safe space for them. Kevin discusses letting both sides speak, clarifying for understanding, and making sure there is agreement for the solution to the conflict.

Subtheme 4: Dialogue. Dialogue emerged as a subtheme under the major theme of behavior. Restorative conversations are not something that come naturally, instead they must be taught. The best way to teach restorative conversations is through modeling. This can be done through talking tasks, or games- any media that will allow the student to be interested in communicating restoratively (Pointer et al., 2020). Kimberly expressed in the focus group: “This (modeling) happens during the community circles. When I walk around the school I hear and see teachers have real conversations with children, beyond – “What’s your favorite food.” Gloria spoke in her interview about her experiences with creating a restorative dialogue:

So I guess for me, it's just kind of layers upon layers of understanding how people interact and how to have conversations and how to build trust and have dialogue. And just not assuming that this person is this way because of this. It is usually some other question like, how can you understand that person?

Subtheme 5: Time. When discussing the challenges that come as a part of implementing RJE into the school, educators expressed the idea of not having enough time to implement the strategies that were needed, due to a lack of practical resources and planning. During her interview Ashley expressed her initial reaction to this new way of doing things:

Um, so my first year here was when it was being introduced. I came from a county that was very, very data driven and based on scores. That led everything. So the idea to me, that I was going to give up 30 minutes of instruction to dedicate to community circles- was like, "I don't have time for that in fourth grade!" That was my initial reaction. I was like, I still do community- I still get to know my kids all the time.

Kevin expressed a similar about not only the time that it takes to find resources, but the following ideas in his interview when he said:

I think the hardest part can be the process itself, and having time to put it into action.

There are many things that have to be put together in the restorative process before the conflict can be resolved. Going through the process from start to finish can take quite a bit of time when you are first learning to implement the steps.

Major Theme Three: Buy In

In this study, there was much discussion and information in all forms of data collected that related directly to buy in. The adoption and implementation of RJE in schools is a paradigm shift, that requires a large amount of buy in from the school community (Winn, 2018).

Table 4*Theme 3: Buy In*

| Theme 3: Buy In | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Subtheme | Code |
| Administrative Support | Past Administration (6) |
| | Current Administration (8) |
| Challenges | Parents (13) |
| | Students (12) |
| | Time (10) |
| Tools | Virtual Tools (7) |
| | Practical Tools (8) |

Subtheme 1: Administrative Support. Although buy in can happen from all angles, this study revealed that administrative support is extremely important in the experiences of educators when implementing RJE into the elementary school setting. Participants interviewed spoke of the current and past administrative support within their current professional setting.

It is the perception of the participants that the administrative support they receive is very genuine. Implementation of RJE in the school, was not just another task given to them. Although there are challenges that come along with the process, the administration makes themselves available to assist teachers and staff when needed. There is administrative support that becomes evident in the document as well. The brochure provided was created by someone at the district level, for the school and its stakeholders.

Subtheme 2: Challenges. Anything new does not come without its challenges. What is important is that there are ways to work through the challenges that present themselves (Gregory & Evans, 2020). Even after 4 years of actively implementing RJE at the research site-

participants still reflected upon those things in their experiences that proved to be challenging.

In her interview, Moriah shares:

I once had a student who was a runner and a biter, and the typical response would be to fuss at him. Instead, I just sat there with him, in the moment and did not say anything.

All of a sudden, he just melts into me and starts sharing all of the things that happened that morning. I think, he actually offered to take care of the situation. After that, we were able to give breaks and talk through things. It definitely was a big “aha” , this is why we do restorative practices.

Subtheme 3: Tools. As previously stated, it is important that educators are given the appropriate tools in order to successfully implement RJE. Throughout the study, the teachers, counselors and administrators engaged dialogue about the tools they have and have not been provided with to navigate through implementation. They specifically discuss using the tools they have been provided to the best of their ability during the virtual school year due to the global pandemic. During the in person focus group, the following experience was shared: “We definitely stuck to the basics, but we did revamp our curriculum a lot, because we wanted to focus on the social and emotional aspect.” “We were out of school for four or five months, so we needed to reach them(students) in different ways.”

Major Theme 4: Student Support

The word support came up often in the study. As educators talked of their experiences and the documents submitted for document analysis were reviewed, student support emerged as a major theme. Within student support, the subthemes of parent involvement, restorative conversations and community support were revealed.

Table 5*Theme 4: Student Support*

| Theme 4: Student Support | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Subtheme | Code |
| Parent Involvement | Parent Buy In (8) |
| | Restorative Process (8) |
| Restorative Conversations | Teaching Skills (11) |
| | Social Groups (6) |
| Community Support | School Community (7) |
| | District Level (9) |

Subtheme 1: Parent Involvement. One of the subthemes within the major theme of student support was parent involvement. Parent involvement is essential as one moves through the different processes and tiers of RJE. Past restorative conversations there are restorative conferences and re-entry circles that require parent participation (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). This also helps educators in their experience, as parents are more likely to understand the process. In his interview, Lance discusses the idea of parent buy in:

Sometimes I think buy in from the parents is the hardest thing, you know? Sometimes, in my attempts to have transparency, it was too much communication for them. Then Pre Covid, when we would actually have parents, we would have some come in with the old style. So, you know perhaps maybe parent education would be a good opportunity to realize how this (RJE) works and to know we are not just letting things go.

Subtheme 2: Restorative Conversations. Again, in this study restorative conversations emerges as a subtheme. As previously shared, teaching students how to communicate in a healthy way is a large part of RP and RJE implementation at the elementary level. From the

youngest student to the oldest, restorative conversations work best when they are modeled and practiced. In the experience of the educators involved in the study, this comes with time.

In the in person focus group participants discussed how students at the research site are learning the skills of communication and how to communicate with one another. Once they have spent time learning the skills behind restorative conversations, these conversations become student led. In his interview Dave revealed that students begin to step in and begin the process with very little assistance from an adult. The document analysis revealed the restorative questions. These are very important when working to solve conflict or repair harm.

Subtheme 3: Community Support. The research site included in this study is a small school that thrives on the support from the local community. Those in the local community become a part of the whole school community and help in different ways in the implementation process. The educators speak of the individual that came in to do their initial RJ trainings, and the support that was provided there. In documents provided there is a brochure that was created by a community member to show what RJE looks like in schools. It shares the mission of the school, along with the components of morning meeting, and important parts of the circle process. It also shares how the elementary school site connects to the community through RJE as well as the restorative questions used in the restorative process.

Research Questions Responses

The research questions for this study were aimed to fill in a gap in the existing literature surrounding the experiences of teachers, counselors, and administrators with implementation of restorative practices at the elementary level. The CRQ was asked to understand the lived experiences of teachers, one counselor and one administrator at one elementary school in Virginia. In addition, three research sub questions were included to address specific experiences

regarding implementation of restorative justice in education practices at the elementary school level. SQ1 served to examine the state of the school environment before the implementation of restorative justice practices was proposed. SQ2 examines the reactions of the participants to their experience with implementation of RJE and SQ3 addressed any changes in behaviors and social emotional learning environments for those in the school community. All three sub questions were used to determine how participants' perceptions of these experiences at the elementary level impact the implementation of restorative justice practices. This section includes a final discussion and review of the connection between the research questions, the three research sub questions and the responses of the participants.

CRQ. What are the experiences with restorative justice practices in elementary school as they relate to improving social-emotional learning in order to reduce misbehavior in one elementary school in Virginia? The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the implementation experiences and practices of restorative justice in education whose goal is to improve social-emotional skills, as well as reduce suspension rates among students, for k-5 elementary teachers, counselors and administrators at one elementary school in Virginia. Participants shared their lived experiences in interviews, an in person focus group interview, and document analysis. As a result of participant responses, a detailed narrative was revealed and delivered in this study. Four themes came as a result from the data that provided greater insight into the lived experiences of participants: relationships, school culture, buy in, and student support. Responses from participants supported the themes found within the study. All participants expressed that they are feeling positive about the overall experience of implementing RJE practices at the elementary level. As Carson explained during the in person focus group interview,

“Students are really learning how to communicate. They are learning those things that are not always taught at home.” He goes on to say:

Things like eye contact and manners are seen. There is a lot more mutual respect between students and teachers, between the students and students, and between the administrators and students. So that has a huge impact on the social environment.

Similarly, Moriah says she feels as a kindergarten teacher that students start learning throughout the year how to build their own self-worth and communicate their feelings in order to solve their own problems.

SQ1. What was the environment like for teachers and administrators when the implementation of restorative practices was proposed? The state of the school environment was revealed in Major Theme 1: Relationships/Accountability and Major Theme 2: School Culture Participants’ experiences discussed in these two themes answer SQ1. In Major Theme 1, participants discussed the importance of building relationships throughout the entire school community. They discussed the idea of the mandatory community building circles that happen at the same time every day, as an essential part of ensuring that positive relationships and basic trust were in place. A few participants often said that they didn’t know teaching without RP in place. Moriah shared in her interview, that she has never taught any other way. She also used RJE in college, so she came in as a kindergarten teacher familiar with the concept. Lance also shared, that although the school had only been implementing RJE officially for four years, programs that he had worked with and used in his classroom in the past were very similar. He also discussed that with a change in administration there was more of a relationship and kindness focused initiative among the school community.

Participants also perceived that the concept of accountability was both something that all faculty, staff and students experienced. The implementation of RJE at the school site made it so that all personnel held themselves accountable for assisting in in the restorative process when needed. As a result of this, students became more accountable for their behavior. During the in person focus group, we talked specifically about relationships. Kimberly, the administrator had this to say:

I think that relationships have greatly improved. I feel like students are more willing to come forth and speak up about what is happening and talk about it. I also feel like students are more comfortable in going and talking with the school counselor or even the administrator where they used to view the administrator as more of a punishment.

Another participant in the focus group confirmed the positivity surrounding relationships when she said:

There is definitely a shift in relationship building, when it is done appropriately. When you can follow the specific protocol, you can tell that there is an increase in relationships. Not just with teachers, but with students as well.

Major Theme 2 captured the way that participants perceive school culture. All participants spoke of an overall positive school culture at the time of the study. They also spoke of the fact that it was a change from previous school culture before the implementation process began. Many participants perceive the change in school culture as being directly related to the school environment, which is how this idea emerged as a subtheme in the study. Many teachers shared that they have a mostly negative rapport with administration. An example of this was evident in the in person focus group: "I think it's a very conducive environment (for students) because even though we might have different styles we're all kind of working with the same

procedures.” The pandemic was also discussed in the in person focus group as having an effect on the overall school culture: “It was hard, when we started off the year virtual, it was hard for the students to connect to one another online.” Teachers still attempted to teach the skills that come along with RJE. As stated in the focus group interview,

Teaching the skills, like I would still do some read aloud and teach empathy or responsibility. Then when we came back to school it was still kind of hard because of the distancing rules. We had to find, and be creative to find, ways for the students to connect. Community circles looked a little different as well.

SQ2. What has the overall reaction of the implementation of restorative practices been at the elementary school? The overall reactions of implementation of RJE practices at the elementary school were highlighted in in Major Theme 3: Buy In. A response to SQ2 was addressed in detail within these themes. Responses of participants showed that they were bought in to the implementation of RJE very early on. In the focus group interview it was stated:

I know some people dabbled in it for a couple of years before it was an established thing. I think there were two classes that were already doing it. I think there was an overall apprehension of just trying to make sure that there was time to do everything in the morning. There is some confusion of what to talk about, but I mean- overall it is still positive.

Kimberly’s perception of the overall reaction was similar: “I think at first, teachers were like – “oh , what am I doing?!”. She continued this thought in the focus group when she said:

They were just kind of thrown into it a bit, but I think they were also excited about the new things that were going to be happening. I knew there might be some resistance. They were excited about how we were going to handle different situations within the

building than in the past. Teachers were not really sure how they were going to fill thirty plus minutes of time.

SQ3. How have the social and learning environments changed or improved from the perspective of teachers and administrators? The response to SQ3 was acknowledged in Major Theme 4: Student Support. Previous research has shown, that in order for RJE implementation to be successful there must be student involvement in the process. In this study, school personnel shared that they saw changes in the social and emotional learning environment, because they work hard at supporting students.

They expressed administrators seem to forget what it is like to be in the classroom and to perform the job-related responsibilities of a teacher after transitioning into an administrative role. In the focus group Kimberly shared, “I see these teachers having real conversations with these children, to get them to open up and talk about feelings.” Another colleague shared similar thoughts: “Students are going to feel respected.” She continues these thoughts on improvement of the social emotional learning environment by saying:

Students feel comfortable enough to verbalize, because hopefully everyone in the staff is a safe place, because we should all approach them (the same) because it is kind of all laid out. So you’re going to have your own style, but it’s nice to know if I’m going to help another students; I know how to approach them because we all do the same practices.

Summary

The experiences of an elementary school administrator, a counselor, and teachers with restorative justice practices at the elementary level were examined in this study. Data collected were analyzed using MaxQDA. This qualitative data analysis software assisted in the development of three major themes and 13 subthemes. The themes and subthemes that were

identified vividly address the questions guiding this study including the central research question and each of the three research sub questions. Participants in this study divulged those relationships among all in school community are important. They believed that creating this relationship base and a safe space early on helped to limit the amount of behavior issues within the elementary school setting and had a positive impact on the social emotional learning environment. The administrator spoke very clearly on how implementing these practices at the elementary level changed her life, and the school culture all together. The counselor noted that the change in school culture and in the environment lends itself well to the proactive work she does with students on a daily basis, though the practices are different from what she uses regularly. Teachers stressed the need to have buy in from everyone in the school community, as well as the need to educate the parents on RJE practices so that they will be on board as well. With all of this said, student support is vital to the success and implementation of RJE at the elementary level, as these years are so fundamental and foundational. Participants expressed the idea that students are learning how to communicate and form relationships, and they need to be provided with the right tools to know how to communicate and resolve conflict effectively. In Chapter Five, the study was concluded as the connection between the research findings and theoretical framework were provided. Moreover, implications, limitations, delimitations, and recommendations for future research were also discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the implementation, lived experiences, and practices of restorative justice in education for K-5 elementary teachers, a counselor, and an administrator at one elementary school in Virginia. This researcher sought to understand how the administrator, counselor and teachers perceived factors related to the implementation of RJE practices at the elementary level such as relationships, administrative support, school culture and student support. Chapter Five includes a summary of findings from this study as well as implications, limitations, and delimitations within the study. Recommendations for future research are included in detail in this chapter as well.

Summary of Findings

This study was set to describe the lived experiences of one administrator, counselor, and teachers, at one elementary school in Virginia. Participants' experiences were recorded through interviews, an in person focus group interview, and document analysis. These data collection methods and the use of the MaxQDA application were used to develop four major themes: (a) relationships/accountability, (b) school culture, (c) buy in, and (d) student support. The themes and subthemes address the central research question in great detail, along with the research sub questions that were addressed in the following sections.

CRQ

The central research question guiding this study was as follows: What are the experiences with restorative justice practices in elementary school as they relate to improving social-emotional learning in order to reduce misbehavior in one elementary school in Virginia? This research questions allows for understanding of the encounters that teachers, counselors, and

administrators have of the concept of RJ as it is used in their specific elementary school setting. Overall, participants spoke of positive experience with RJE within the school setting. They were grateful for administrative support, and expressed the need for parent buy in. Each of the four themes that came as a result of data analysis provided insight and clarity to the overall central research question for the study. Major Theme 1 stressed the importance of relationships between students and students, students and teachers, students and administrators, and administrators and teachers. Major Theme 2 pointed out the need for a whole school culture, and how it lends itself to implementing the processes and practices of RJE at the elementary school setting. Major Theme 3 provided further insight on the concept of buy in, and how important it is to have all stakeholders in the school community on board with RJE practices, so that students will be able to use them in school and at home. Major Theme 4 gave an understanding of student support, and how student involvement in the process is just as important as the adult participation.

SQ1

SQ1 in this study was as follows: What was the school environment for teachers and administrators when the implementation of restorative practices was proposed? Major Themes 1 and 2 developed from the collected data for this sub question. Major Theme 1 discussed the relationships that teachers had been able to build in the elementary school setting, and how much RJE highlighted the value in building said relationships. Participants discussed that prior to implementation, they had been using some sort of character-building program that they felt was like restorative justice in education practices. Some teachers explained that time was an initial fear or obstacle that they had, before taking the leap to implement these mandatory practices into their classrooms and learning spaces.

Major Theme 2 spotlighted the overall school culture and school environment. Teachers that had been at the school for more than 4 years explained the differences in administrative support before implementation. While there was structure, going to the principal or seeing the principal prior to implementation was something that the students feared, and did not look forward to. Under the new administration and school model with RJE, the administration is a welcome face and presence around the school. The call for RJE implementation from the top down, has been well received- and will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter.

SQ2

SQ2 in this study was as follows: What has the overall reaction of the implementation of restorative practices been at the elementary school? Major Themes 2, 3, and 4 addressed this sub question. The way that one reacts to implementing something new has an impact on the environment and all those that they will encounter which will determine major theme 2 of school culture overall. Relating to major theme 3, without buy in to the concept there could be no implementation- as it would not be well received. The idea of student support as covered in major theme 4 parallels with reactions as multiple participants stated, it becomes a challenge to implement when the students are not bought in. This places the responsibility on those within the school community to model RJE in a way that makes students feel comfortable and safe.

SQ3

SQ3 in this study was as follows: How have the social and learning environments changed from the perspective of the teachers, counselor, and administrator? Major Theme 1 addressed this sub question. The administrator, counselor, and teachers spoke of the way that the relationships, basic trust, and accountability was apparent. Dave discusses that he was at first

worried about implementing within a physical education class. He then goes on to say, that after a while- students will begin a restorative conversation all on their own.

Discussion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the implementation experiences and practices of restorative justice in education whose goal is to improve social-emotional skills, as well as reduce suspension rates among students, for K-5 elementary teachers, counselors and administrators at one elementary school in Virginia. This study was specifically centered around the implementation of RJE practices at the elementary school level as a way to reduce misbehavior among students and improve the social- emotional learning environment. The findings of the study show the lived experiences of the participants. In addition, the perceived feelings of having RJE practices at the elementary level. The findings also relate to empirical and theoretical literature discussed in Chapter Two. Empirical research was presented in the literature review to provide information on RJE and how it has been implemented in different levels of education over the years. Theoretical literature was grounded in Bandura's (1979) social learning theory as it is a framework intended for understanding human behavior.

Empirical Literature

Many ideas related to the overall social emotional learning environments, student behavior, and experiences with implementation of RJE in schools were covered in this study. In Chapter Two, many components of RJE and implementation practices were covered such as relationships, circle processes, mediation, and implementation. Data from this study is parallel to past research on RJE in schools. Empirical literature has been centered on RJE at the middle

and high school levels, in city schools. There is a gap in the literature concerning RJE and RJ practices at the primary, or elementary school level.

Empirical literature has shown that educators engaging in approaches that are innovative and different, such as RJE to create safe spaces, and respectful social – emotional learning environments feel empowered and heard (Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2020). Reimer (2019) expands on this idea by highlighting that educators feel valued, when they are supported in such efforts. An example shined through in Kevin’s interview: “For students, they are willing to associate more with each other. Positive support allows us teachers to be able to find the root cause of the conflict and look beyond the circumstance.” A few participants discussed the need for continued training and professional development in order to continue successful implementation at the elementary level. They voiced the need for there to be buy in from everyone and have everyone on the same page as far as creating a whole school culture with RJE. As Shelly explained,

Having resources available to teachers and more guidance on building classroom community and structure of how to handle the situation would be helpful.

The integration of new practices in the elementary setting aid with fostering healthy relationships within the environment, and more accountability is present (Gregory & Evans, 2020). As Reba discussed in her interview, the more exposure there is, “I have experienced, that students are more comfortable, and as they get older, they know the restorative process.”

Past research discusses the idea of implementation of new programs such as RJE needing to be initiated by teachers and faculty and spread around rather than a directive that is given by administration (Gregory & Evans, 2020). When educators feel that they are being told how to run their classrooms, or learning environments - it can feel as though they are being given yet

another thing to do. This type of directive is then added to the mounting list of responsibilities that educators face each day.

In this study, however- the reaction of the participants seemed to be the opposite of those collected by Winn (2018), Evans and Lester (2013) as well as Evans and Vaandering (2016). They discussed the fact that the whole school implementation of RJE and RJ practices actually went better. Their reasoning for this is that it was a directive from administration. Not only did the principal hand down this directive, but she then gave support to her faculty and staff in the process. An example of this came from Lance: "I think it's top down, I mean, I think the principal has to be involved."

One of the subthemes in this study, and a component that comes up in previous literature and research was administrative support (Voigt, 2020). Along with this, came the importance of professional development (Pointer, 2020). This professional development was not only for the teachers, but for everyone in the school community. Previous research says that professional development should be transformative and include peacebuilding pedagogy (Vaandering, 2014). In her interview Moriah said,

In our school it is not a catch phrase, there is support there from administration and it is important that we continue to be sure that new teachers and support staff get the training in RJE as well.

Previous research on RJE in schools reveals the challenges that come along with implementation of new discipline policies in schools. Among these challenges are the time and resources that are involved with successful implementation (Morrison, Blood & Thorsborne, 2005). Previous research including studies by (Rhew et al., 2021; Sandwick et al., 2019; Swida, 2020) were found true and authentic within this current study as educators referred to the

challenges they face when implementing RJE. According to Winn (2018), some educators feel that simply implementing RJE into the school is not enough, as it often ends of holding one or two people accountable, rather than creating a school culture that is nurtured by shared values. Gloria explained in her interview that challenges arise when it takes a while to reach a child, when support systems are not in place and when parents are not on board. Furthermore, Reba explains that challenges come about when students are in “the heat of the moment”. Maybe one student needs time before they can truly address the conflict or issue, and the other student involved needs to take time to calm down before any communication is done. Previous research that each event that occurs serves as some sort of reinforcement (Velez, et al., 2020) is confirmed through these findings.

The tools needed by educators are so important in order to foster the relationships, school culture, buy in and the student support that is mentioned in the 4 themes that emerged from this study. Pointer et al. (2020) discusses that if we really want to transform the justice system, we must look closely at the restorative processes that address the lack of educational and economic opportunity. Tools emerged as a subtheme in the current study under the major theme of buy in. Educators, support staff, parents and community are more like to buy in to the above noted restorative processes if they feel that they are being given the proper tools (Winn, 2018). All participants expressed that they had been given great tools to work with and would be grateful to learn more.

Theoretical Literature

Restorative justice in education can be viewed through several different theoretical and conceptual lenses (Winn, 2018). The idea that deep learning occurs for students when they observe and experience behaviors set by others in their environment is grounded in the

theoretical framework of social learning theory (Bandura, 2002). The modeling of exemplar behaviors by teachers and students alike is valued and central to restorative practices in order to create behavioral shifts within a learning space. This supports the framework of RJE alongside school discipline and relationship quality as the focus of this study (Nese et al., 2020).

This study draws on social learning theory as a framework applied in the context of restorative justice in education. The focus within this specific context draws upon ideas about personal responsibility regarding one's actions and accountability as a critical aspect for explaining and modifying one's own behavior (Bandura, 2002). Furthermore, social learning theory within this framework is applicable to building just and equitable learning environments as it relates to relationship between students and teachers alike within the classroom and school community at large.

In the context of social learning theory, it is understood that learning results from events which serve as reinforcements (Velez et al., 2020). In a restorative justice educational model in the classroom the child must revisit and understand his or her actions and behaviors within the context of the environment (Velez et al., 2020). Within punitive models of discipline, learned behavior is determined by expectancies set up by tension created through punishment. These expectancies may be elicited from environmental cues or outcomes of one's own behavior. When the punishment results in a student's removal from the social learning environment (such as with expulsion) both the social and academic learning is in turn inaccessible to the student (Velez, et al., 2020). A missed opportunity to teach the child to understand how to behave in the future is then removed.

“The capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one's life is the essence of humanness. Human agency is characterized by several core features that operate through

phenomenal and functional consciousness” (Bandura, 2002, p. 1). In restorative practices modeled in elementary school, the goal is to make those that do the harm aware of the harm that has been done (Gregory & Evans, 2020). Bandura’s premises for individuals who have done harm to have positive self-reactiveness and to engage in self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2002) will inform and guide the proposed research to unpack the beliefs of today’s concept of RJE which focuses on recognizing the harm done and correcting it for future behaviors. According to Hopkins (2004), restorative justice in education is a full paradigm shift offering new ways to handle school discipline. Gregory and Evans (2020) discuss not only the need for a change and paradigm shift in overall school discipline, but they believe that discipline reform is needed in order to correct the disparities in school suspensions across the country. This type of discipline model can be responsive to diversity within a school setting. In line with the above-mentioned ideals, Winn (2018) states, “Ideally, restorative justice will be used to cultivate a shared vision of how people in a school should be in a relationship with one another while shaping a school’s values and guidelines for interactions” (p. 22). This type of discipline model provides opportunities for growth and learning and is impactful in its responsiveness to diversity within any school setting.

RJE and restorative practices have a positive impact on student behavior and thinking (Kehoe et al., 2018). This framework shares a connection with social learning theory through its direct link to human behavior and habits of students. Bandura’s social learning theory is intended to understand human behavior. Social learning theory is a cross between cognitive learning theory and behaviorism that involves mental processes as they relate to external behavior (Rumjaun & Narod, 2020). It relies on both the cognitive ability, and environmental factors (Li et al., 2020). In an interpretation of Bandura’s original theory of behavior, Grusec (1992) views

it as an operant approach and indicates that much of the tenants of social learning theory more appropriately relate to personality development and behavior. In relation to this study of restorative justice in education with social learning theory as its framework, children are developed cognitively by the age of six (Yildirim et al., 2020).

Implications

This study consisted of the use of individual interviews, an in person focus group interview, and document analysis to grasp the lived experiences of one administrator, counselor, as well as teachers and their perceptions of implementing RJE practices at the elementary level. When examining to the findings of this study, participants in the study have a positive perception of implementation within the elementary school setting. The data collected provided information that could be helpful for teachers, counselors, and administrators at the elementary level, as well as parents and community members. In order to successfully implement restorative practices at the elementary level there needs to be a foundation of relationships, a positive school culture, buy in from the school community and stakeholders, as well as support for students in the process (Gregory et al., 2021). The following sections include discussion of the empirical, theoretical, and practical implications.

Empirical

Findings from this study confirmed and added to empirical research on the topic of implementation of RJE practices in schools. Although there is not much research on the implementation of RJE at the primary level (Mullet, 2014), this study added to the empirical research that is there. Empirical research has identified a variety of components that impact the perceptions of counselors, teachers and administrators who are in the implementation process. Some of the major components in the implementation of RJE practices at the elementary level

include, relationships, school culture, buy in, and student support. This study supported and added to the literature, but also diverged from previous research.

Literature on the importance of relationships within the school setting says that relationships are the foundation of building the trust that is needed in order to have implementation be successful (Sandwick et al., 2019). The findings of this study supported the literature on relationships. Elementary school teachers, a counselor and an administrator described fostering relationships as the main part of what they do each day. This is even with the implementation of restorative practices. Many participants continue to explain that relationships are the foundation of what they do. “Nurturing the relationship is important, and in order to do this we have to start small and find the time.” He also discussed three steps that he uses in his classroom. They are notice, meet and step into the shoes of the other person. Kevin and Kimberly stated that the relationship /accountability aspect of RJE helps students to communicate with peers outside of their social circles and communicate effectively.

Empirical research on school culture is also added to in the context of this study. Past literature has shown that empathy is a change that takes place as a result of using RJ practices in schools (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). This change has an overall effect on school culture as it allows students to change their language and how they become more accountable for their behavior (Kehoe et al., 2018). The findings of this study support these claims, but also differ just a bit, as everyone in the school community does not always show empathy. During their interviews Dave, Ashley, and Beth discussed that students become more comfortable with one another and feel a sense of community. As a result of this, students begin to engage in the restorative process themselves. They also state that students can be less empathetic at times and the above-mentioned engagement in the restorative process does not come so easily.

The existing literature on buy in for RJE suggests that the implementation process cannot be a top-down approach from administration, but instead needs to be a process that trickles in, and others will see the change want to become a part of it (Winn, 2018). This study does not confirm that literature as all participants spoke very highly of the idea coming from administration. Each teacher shared that both the counselor and the administrator are very supportive. In her interview Laura shares that she is pleased that the morning meeting, or circle as it is called through the RJ lens is built in.

Participants perceived student support as a huge part of the success of implementing RJE. They feel that the supports that are put in place for students at school are strong but could always use improvement and growth. In the documents that were analyzed as a part of the study, a social emotional learning curriculum designed by a committee within the school was shared. This set of resources is only starting, but it contains several ways that teachers, counselors and administrators can support students with RP at school. It also has tools such as parent letters and information sheets that help bridge the gap between school and home. Support for students is essential. Findings from the study confirm the research that says transformation and change cannot happen with only one individual. It has to be a joint effort. In order for the learning environment to be equitable, the collaboration to create it must also be equitable. (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2020).

Theoretical

The theoretical framework guiding this study is social learning theory adapted by Bandura. The implications in this study confirm the social learning theory. Social learning theory has been previously defined as the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce desired outcomes (Bandura, 1977). RJE is not just a set of practices, rather is

is a shift in processes that allows for and change in mindset and shift in behavior (Evans & Lester, 2013).

Relating to the processes of RJE the participants in this study had an overall positive perception of how implementation impacted their school setting and work environment. They shared that they feel like they are working together as one cohesive unit, and that the overall culture is one of kindness and care. Laurel says that the strong feelings she holds for the restorative process keep her accountable and that students hold themselves to a higher standard. Anne states that there is a sense of community, and that she is not quick to admonish. Students feel things, from adults.

One way to explain and modify behavior is covered in social learning theory (Bandura, 2002). In context with restorative justice in education personal responsibilities and accountability for their actions is highlighted. The participants in this study work hard to create just and equitable learning environments for their students. They expressed different ideas, such as morning meeting, closing circle, and a school garden.

Practical

The existing literature has practical implications for those who have worked with the implementation process of RJE in an elementary school. Administrators, teachers, and counselors play an important role in education as they the school culture and social emotional learning environment for students (Armour & Todic, 2016). Administrators are instrumental in this process. In this study it is shown that administrators set the stage for the way that implementation can go. They are in charge of choosing the professional development and beginning resources to help with the culture they choose overall for the school setting in which they lead. The findings in this study provided information administrators, counselors, and

teachers may find useful and could help work together to create a positive school culture that could become ready for a mindset shift. One recommendation is to be sure that there is professional development and resources in place. Elementary school teachers, a counselor and administrator perceived that strong administrative support lends itself well to implementing this whole school approach of RJE. Participants voiced the desire to be able to participate in more formal training for the benefit of themselves professionally, and to continue to help strengthen the school community. According to Gloria, this type of ongoing and training will keep her accountable as she continues to work through RJE processes. Teachers expressed the feeling that there is not adequate time for planning in order to be able to do more than what they are currently doing. However, they mentioned if they had access to resources that were practical and keeping these time constraints in mind- they would gladly use them.

Educational stakeholders at the district and federal levels may find the accounts of lived experiences of the administrator, counselor, and teacher helpful. Employees at the central office level, as well as those making policy decisions may be able to help create the same culture that is happening in this one school- across the district. Participants in the study voiced their gratitude for the fact that the district has brought in behavior specialists to assist with student behavior, and that it has been helpful for them. Kevin shares that having this support created a more positive environment in the school community. This confirms that educational stakeholders are aware of the need for change when it comes to student behavior and overall school culture. Knowing this is promising for teachers, and school personnel at all levels because it can help drive reform in a time when it is needed.

Delimitations and Limitations

To collect data that aligned with the purpose of understanding the lived experiences of elementary school teachers, a counselor, and an administrator- it was necessary to examine delimitations. This study contained specific requirements in order to maintain an overall focus on the demographics of the participants. The criteria for participation in this study required teachers, counselor and administrators to work in an elementary school in Virginia, as the study was focused on the implementation of RJE at the elementary level. Participants also had to be actively implementing RJE at their school site at the time of the study. Elementary schools were specified as there is currently not enough research on the primary or elementary level. This study was designed to understand the lived experiences of elementary school teachers, a counselor and an administrator who were implementing RJE practices at the elementary level. This was revealed in a demographic survey. The purpose of having participants who had experience with implementing RJE was not only to share their lived experiences, but also to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions concerning the many components of implementing the RJE process.

Although there were delimitations set in place, there were limitations present in the study that were important to address. For instance, although interviews could have been longer, the fact that there were two days of interviews caused them to be shorter. Ultimately, 13 individuals participated in the study, but there was a gender bias present as there were four male teachers and ten female teachers, counselor, and administrator. Another limitation to this study included the study focusing on educators in Virginia. Middle schools, high schools and secondary schools were not focused on in the study. Furthermore, Virginia educators in the Southeastern part of the United States were the only sample used this study of implementation of RJE.

Another limitation was the reliability of demographic survey for this study in gathering participants. For instance, before and after individual interviews, some participants expressed confusion concerning some of the questions asked on the survey. Some of them were confused by the question of how many years they had been involved with RJE implementation. They wondered if it meant before they started teaching and working at the current site, or after. Due to the confusion in this there were varying answers for this question on the survey.

Another limitation was the use of document analysis. Although the documents provided good information, there was very little interaction regarding the documents collected. Due to the teachers being at the beginning of the year, and having many different things to do, the document collection and analysis was the best option. Only three participants shared documents and 8 documents were collected in total. As the researcher, having the interaction with participants face-to-face was important in order to get to know the participants better. Additionally, interviews in person provided the opportunity to collect information about participants and their lived experiences that would not have been gathered without personal interaction. Although teachers answered interview questions in-depth and participated in real time in an in-person focus group, reflective journals may have provided greater insight into the questions asked.

Recommendations for Future Research

Restorative justice is making its way into the school setting (Zehr, 2015). Teachers, administrators, and counselors play an important role in education and the future. It is important to listen to the voices of those educators that are inside the school walls. This will allow for school personnel to be provided with the tools that they need in order to implement whole school programs such as RJE or programs like it. While this study presented the lived experiences of teachers, counselors and administrators who lived through the implementation process of RJE at

an elementary school, there are still gaps in the literature. For future research, more studies on this general topic at this particular level are recommended.

As previously mentioned, this study contained a total of 13 participants. Many of the participants were new teachers with 7 years or less of experience. A transcendental phenomenological study with more novice teachers could be helpful in avoiding a limitation and to compare the perceptions of new teachers and veteran teachers. This study was also focused on only one elementary school. Due to the ever-changing climate in elementary schools across the country, it could be helpful to examine multiple elementary schools within one study. Furthermore, this type of research could provide an understanding of the lived experiences of teachers, counselors and administrators when implementing RJE. This could provide insight to district leaders and policy makers as far as deciding what can be implemented within one school system. Another recommendation for future research was a phenomenological study with a transcendental approach on the lived experiences of students, which could be useful in getting the insight and opinions from students, on practices that are aimed at having them in charge of their behavior and learning.

Finally, there was a recommendation to conduct a study in other parts of the state of Virginia and other parts of the country. This will capture the lived experiences of educators in those areas. Restorative justice in education stood strong as a foundation in the finding of this study. It can remain its own framework. This study can add to the framework of RJE identified in Winn (2018).

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of teachers, one counselor and one administrator implementing RJE at one

elementary school in Virginia. Data were collected through individual interviews, an in person focus group interview, and document analysis. The lived experiences of the participants at one elementary school in Virginia resulted in four major themes: (a) relationships/accountability, (b) school culture, (c) buy in, and (d) student support. It was found in the study that the teachers, counselor and administrators believed relationships to be a very important part of the implementation process. Also as a part of implementation it was felt by participants that accountability among all in the school community became stronger.

Participants perceived that there is a positive school culture among teachers, and students, students and teachers, students and students, students and administration, teachers and administration, and teachers and teachers. This comes as a result of the implementation of RJE being something that was required from the top down. There was a little hesitation from a few of the participants, but it did not take long for them to begin the process of implementation within their own classrooms and professional spaces. The administrative support played a huge role in the positive school culture. Buy in was perceived by participants to be lacking from the aspect of parents and students. It is believed that if there is more support and training opportunities available that the buy in would come.

Student support is perceived to be important so that the connection is consistent between school and home. Parents are essential in this component, as they are required to participate in the restorative process. Students can also receive support from their teachers. Community members also play a huge role in the restorative process.

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APPENDIX A: PERMISSION REQUEST LETTER

June 10, 2021

Doug Alderfer, Assistant Superintendent of Leadership and Academic Support

100 Mount Clinton Pk

Harrisonburg, Virginia 22802

Dear Sir:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is Restorative Practices in Elementary Schools: A Phenomenological Study. The purpose of my research is to describe the implementation, experiences, and practices of restorative justice in education where the goal is to reduce suspension rates among students and improve the social emotional learning environment for 12-14 K-5 elementary teachers and administrators. I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research in your school district once I receive approval from the IRB. Participants will be asked to complete the attached survey/contact me to schedule an interview. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Identity of all participants will be kept confidential, with the use of pseudonyms. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval and respond by email to

aburton29@liberty.edu

Sincerely,

Aundrea D. Smiley

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 18, 2021

Aundrea Burton
Timothy Nelson

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-56 Perspectives of Elementary Teachers and Administrators on Restorative Justice Practices in Elementary Schools: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Aundrea Burton, Timothy Nelson,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information

electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

Perspectives of Elementary Teachers, Counselors and Administrators on Restorative Practices in Elementary Schools: A Phenomenological Study

Aundrea D. Smiley

Liberty University

School of Education

You are invited to participate in a research study on the lived experiences elementary teachers, counselors and administrators implementing restorative practices in Virginia. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a current elementary school teacher, counselor or administrator in Virginia, and are implementing restorative practices at some level in your school or classroom. Before agreeing to be a part of the study, please read this form and ask any questions that you may have.

Aundrea D. Smiley, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The present study is a phenomenological study designed to understand elementary school teachers, counselors and administrators lived experiences with implementing restorative practices in schools.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Allow the researcher to use the data collected from the demographic survey.
- Participate in an audio-recorded interview (60 minutes).
- Review a transcription of your interview (30 minutes).
- Participate in an online focus group (60 minutes).
- Review researcher notes (10 minutes for each set of notes).

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit by participating in this study.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Any report or piece of data that may be published, will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data. Data collected from the present study will be stored for three years after completion of the study. The following measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality of participants:

- Participants and research sites will be assigned a pseudonym.
- Individual interviews will be conducted in a location where conversations cannot be easily heard.
- Participants will be assigned an email pseudonym created specifically for the present study for the online focus group interview.
- Data collected from interviews and the reflective journal will be stored on a password protected computer, which will be locked with a key when not being used.
- My personal researcher notes will be stored in a file cabinet and locked with a key.
- All data from interviews, the reflective journal, and researcher journal will be deleted electronically or shredded after three years of completing the present study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you

decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included on this form. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from the focus group, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Data from the online focus group will not be destroyed; however, your individual contribution to the group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Aundrea D. Smiley. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at 540. 243. 1022 or aburton29@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Timothy Nelson, by email at trnelson2@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature of Participant

APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Teacher/Counselor/Administrator Demographic Survey

Title of Project: Perspectives of Elementary Teachers, Counselors and Administrators on Restorative Practices in Elementary Schools : A Phenomenological Study

1. Are you a teacher, counselor or an administrator?

2. If you are a teacher, what grade level do you teach?

3. How long have you been in the field of education?

4. How long have you been in your current position at this school?

5. How many years of experience did you have with RJE prior to implementation?