MANAGING STUDENT MISBEHAVIOR THROUGH A RESTORATIVE APPROACH: A

PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Michael Preston Christie

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of alternative education teachers in utilizing a restorative approach to managing student behaviors at a small, rural school district in north Florida. Gordon's (1981) theory on Teacher Effectiveness Training (TET) steered this study in investigating the research questions central to this study: (1) What are the experiences of alternative education teachers in using a restorative approach for addressing student behaviors? (2) How have these experiences shaped the teacher-student relationship? (3) What are the professional development needs of alternative education teachers to improve the restorative practices experience? Through purposive sampling, 10 to 12 participants were selected from an alternative school within north Florida. These participants were selected through convenience due to their role as the only instructional personnel at this site. Data collection was conducted in various ways, including focus groups, interviews, and classroom observations. Subsequent data analysis revealed three themes from this study. These themes are relationships, negative interactions, and understanding.

Keywords: relationships, restorative practice, restorative justice, alternative education, teacher-student relationships

Dedication

This body of work is dedicated to several individuals. First and foremost, I dedicate this dissertation and my life to my Savior Jesus Christ. Without Him, I would not have made it this far. During the times I wanted to give up, He was the one that carried me and guided me to the right destination. For this, I am forever grateful. To Dr. Matthew Ozolnieks, thank you for your mentorship and patience in guiding me on this journey. Next, my two beautiful daughters, Ava and Gracyn. Unknowingly, they have pushed me beyond my limits to set a good example of being a life-long learner and a better dad. More importantly, Ava and Gracyn have propelled me to finish this process to show them that goals are attainable and to never give up on your dreams. Last, but not least, to my parents. They were my first teachers and instilled in me the pursuit of knowledge throughout my life.

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List of Abbreviations

Alternative Learning Center (ALC)

Behavioral Resource Teacher (BRT)

Theory of Parent Effectiveness Training (PET)

Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems (PBIS)

Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS)

Restorative Practices (RP)

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Theory of Teacher Effectiveness Training (TET)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Managing student behaviors is perhaps the single most discussed topic amongst all educators. Unfortunately, this is where teachers have the least amount of training before being hired (Duong et al., 2019; Reimer, 2019). In the past, the only way for a teacher to improve their skill set in behavior intervention is through experience and trial and error (Simonsen et al., 2020). However, developing a Targeted Professional Development (TPD) approach efficiently improves teacher competency in many areas, especially classroom management (Simonsen et al., 2020). This chapter provides a concise introduction to the research plan for this qualitative study. This chapter includes the background of using restorative practices within an educational environment.

Further, this chapter will outline the purpose, problem statement, and significance of using a restorative approach within an alternative education setting. The researcher's motivation for engaging in this phenomenological study is the lack of knowledge in utilizing effective behavioral management techniques before enrollment in this program. Due to limited research-based behavioral strategies available, this phenomenological study aims to explore the perceptions of educators while using a restorative approach to manage student behaviors. Three research questions were developed to capture the lived experience of using a restorative approach to address student misbehavior to guide this study. Hopefully, after this research, the finding will yield all educators' assistance when dealing with students that display undesirable behaviors.

Background

      Effectively managing relationships is imperative to developing a child (Breedlove et al., 2020). This is especially important for children and adolescents in an alternative educational setting (Henderson et al., 2018). According to the Connecticut Department of Education (2021), an alternative education center can be defined as "a school or program maintained and operated by a local or regional board of education that is offered to students in a nontraditional educational setting and addresses the social, emotional, behavioral and academic needs of such students" (p. 1). Using a restorative approach provides an appropriate intervention in addressing students with these behavioral needs (Henderson et al., 2018). With the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015) by then President Obama, schools have committed to reducing exclusionary discipline policies using a restorative practices approach or risk losing federal funding (Henderson et al., 2018). One beneficial outcome of employing a restorative approach is emphasizing the significance of interconnectedness amongst building relationships and repairing relationships once harm has taken place (Zehr, 2015).

      Unfortunately, there is little to no existing research on using restorative practices to improve the teacher-student relationship within an alternative setting. This study will add to existing scholarly research by examining alternative education teachers' experiences and relationships with their students. Further, the aim is to generate a list of common themes found within an alternative setting that contribute to alternative education teachers' shared experiences using a restorative approach.

Historical

      Although the use of restorative practices within different cultures worldwide for quite some time, American schools' use is a relatively new practice (Peachey, 1989). Restorative

practices, in use since the early 1970s, when it was developed after many incidents of vandalism from teenagers in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada and subsequently used in Elkhart, Indiana in the late 1970s (McCold, 2006; Peachey, 1989). The custom of offenders meeting the victims of their vandalism sought to establish restitution and repair the damaged relationship. Social psychologists consider this a "watershed moment" in integrating restorative practices into the criminal justice system (McCold, 2006; Peachey, 1989). The Kitchener Experiment, as it came to be known, marked a turning point within the criminal justice system by shifting from a strictly crime and punishment ideology to one that believes some individuals can be reformed and transformed by their experiences (McCold, 2006). The popularity and success of this new concept spread to American schools, where some administrators deemed it successful in improving strained relationships between the victim and the offender (McCord, 2006; Mika & Zehr, 2017; Peachey, 1989).

School leaders must create an environment conducive to student learning to promote significant change. A crucial part of this learning is understanding behavioral expectations. When the desired criteria are presented to students, they are much more likely to meet the standard. The overall intent of using a restorative approach is to rebuild a damaged relationship between two individuals (Reimer, 2019). Currently, there is a solid push to promote an inclusion model for special education students within education to assist them with learning the necessary tools needed for success from their non-disabled peers (Gadd & Butler, 2019). The current push for an inclusion model is in stark contrast to educational initiatives from years past. Once a student was staffed into a self-contained special education classroom, they stayed there until they graduated. Fortunately, this is no longer the situation through observations, data collection, and discussions (Gadd & Butler, 2019). However, with the rise in popularity of this inclusion model,

there are increasingly more special education students with behavioral and social-emotional

deficiencies to address (Gadd & Butler, 2019).

To adequately address unwanted student behaviors, we must first examine the level of

social and emotional (SEL) skills that our students possess. According to Oberle et al. (2016),

over the previous 20 years, there has been a proliferation of programs designed and implemented

for implementing social/emotional skill-based instruction into schools. This whole-school

approach is favored because it is considered more effective than a single, stand-alone classroom

program (Oberle et al., 2016). To effectively implement a schoolwide SEL program, create a

comprehensive support system to allocate vital resources and prioritize student SEL learning

(Oberle et al., 2016). This process must include programs and structures to support and conduct

high-quality skill development.

Further research conducted by Brasof (2019) asserted that school leaders should ensure

that student disciplinary issues do not impede another student's instruction in the classroom. In

theory, the design of most discipline systems concentrates on student misbehavior that is a

barrier to learning (Brasof, 2019). Unfortunately, these punitive approaches to curbing student

behavioral issues are not valid at reducing long-term discipline trends in schools (Brasof, 2019).

According to Holmqvist (2019), preservice teachers have an increasingly difficult time

understanding how to manage behaviors effectively. One of these issues is the multitude of

varying approaches and theories to use within a situation, coupled with the lack of confidence in

knowing which view to use in the appropriate context (Holmqvist, 2019). Holmqvistcontended

the lack of continuing in-service training for teachers at school, which results in limited

possibilities to discuss the theoretical assumptions with the supervising teachers at [the] school

exacerbates this issue. In essence, new and preservice teachers would like to discuss why certain

classroom management approaches are utilized in a specific situation—the lack of professional development stunts these growth opportunities.

Social

The lack of teacher professional development in all areas, especially behavior management tactics, within education is alarming (Duong et al., 2019; Holmqvist, 2019). Further, a consistent "expert and practitioner consensus about the terminology" is lacking in utilizing a restorative approach to discipline (Duong et al., 2019, p. 213). The use of a restorative approach to reduce suspension rates and increase teacher-student relationships is promising; however, the few completed studies have not been peer-reviewed or concluded with generalizable findings (Duong et al., 2019). According to Duong et al. (2019), the current studies completed are deficient in providing robust research designs for other researchers to "conclude the efficacy of the findings" (p. 213).

In recent years, educators' professional development has shifted to external conferences and retreats to job-embedded learning (Fuller & Templeton, 2019). Unfortunately, these professional development opportunities have lacked the researched-based practices that had previously dominated education (Fuller & Templeton, 2019). Instead, professional development research has transferred to areas related to outcomes for stakeholders and not student achievement (Fuller & Templeton, 2019). An investment in professional development on restorative practices, which addresses social-emotional learning, can improve student behavior and decrease teacher frustration using various behavior management approaches (Duong et al., 2019; Holmqvist, 2019; Lustick et al., 2020).

Theoretical

The motivation behind children's misbehavior has been studied for decades (Bandura et al., 1975; Christensen & Thomas, 1980; Gordon, 1981; Milgram, 1963). Perhaps the most pivotal work on behavior, misbehavior, and obedience was developed by Milgram (1963). According to Milgram (1963), obedience is the "dispositional cement that binds men to systems of authority" (p. 371). Further, obedience links our actions to the individual purpose (Milgram, 1963). Further research suggests that when individuals misbehave or engage in behavior that violates social norms, the most appropriate action to take by those in positions of authority is to treat the perpetrator as humanely as possible to reduce the risk of counter aggression as well as to engage the learning process (Bandura et al., 1975). Failure to employ countermeasures to reduce dehumanizing actions and punishments may contribute to greater aggression in students. Additionally, students may continue long-term engagement in inappropriate behavior (Bandura et al., 1975).

Social learning theory explains the rationale behind integrating new behaviors through the observations of mimicking others (Bandura et al., 1975). Unfortunately, some of these behaviors are inappropriate, undesirable, and socially destructive (Bandura et al., 1975). Parents must possess a unique skill set to extinguish these children's behaviors to counteract these measures. Parent effectiveness training theory (PET) was developed by Thomas Gordon (1981) to help parents improve their children's relationships. This training helps parents migrate from solely using punishments and rewards to mold behavior (Gordon, 1981). The theory on parent effectiveness training provides parents with an alternative technique for resolving parent-child relationships (Gordon, 1981).

Gordon's (1981) no-lose method provides opportunities for both parents and children to resolve issues that result in an acceptable outcome for both individuals. The core premise of utilizing the PET is teaching parents how to create and live with their children in a democratically centered environment (Gordon, 1981). PET allows for both parents and children to assist in the creation of setting the rules, division of all chores, and seeking common resolutions to many conflicts that families encounter, such as T.V. time, noise, bedtime, technology use, and picking up clothes and toys (Christensen & Thomas, 1980; Gordon, 1981). This training has been expanded to include teachers through the theory of teacher effectiveness training (TET) (Gordon, 1981). According to Gordon (1981), both teachers and parents alike are the "victims of either-or thinking—either the adult must retain power, or the child will assume it" (p. 239). Gordon's (1981) theory on TET will serve as the theoretical framework for this phenomenological study. This framework fits because of the reliance on equality within relationships and the connection to restorative practices belief of repairing damage caused by strain to a relationship when someone violates the established norms.

Situation to Self

This study was driven by my desire to explore alternative education teachers' shared experiences within the phenomenon of using a restorative practices approach to managing student discipline as a public-school administrator at all levels from kindergarten through twelfth grade. As an administrator, I have fulfilled many academic areas such as guidance, curriculum and instruction, and student affairs such as discipline, athletics, attendance, and student activities. However, the most influential site for this research is my experience as a dean and disciplinarian of a large senior high school. While I was assigning disciplinary actions to these high school students, I would often see the same students repeatedly. Despite how progressive discipline I

assigned them, these frequent fliers would never seem to "learn" their lesson. At best, it was frustrating, while it was just downright depressing on other days. I realized that a better, more effective, and efficient way to improve student behavior existed. Unfortunately, I worked a few more years assigning disciplinary actions and seeing repeat offenders before discovering restorative practices.

After changing schools several times and working for a few different principals, I discovered restorative practices before becoming principal. In utilizing a restorative approach, individuals who commit infractions are confronted with their actions, must repair the damage caused by their actions to the victim, and give a consequence to provide alternatives before engaging in the previous behavior hopefully. For this study, I will bring both the epistemological and ontological assumptions to provide a framework to analyze the data collected from the interviews, observations, and focus groups. The ontological assumptions are appropriate in this context because I am interested in exploring teachers' lived experiences within the alternative setting and believe each teachers' reality can be interpreted through their experience. In contrast, the epistemological assumption will help in this role to reduce my bias from the data collected.

Additionally, using the process of bracketing to acknowledge and address biases with the research. Further, I will employ the social constructivist framework to understand how a restorative approach impacts participants' daily practice during this phenomenological study. In serving as an observer and interviewer, I will investigate how participants use their experiences to address student behavior.

Problem Statement

The problem is the lack of quality professional development available to alternative education teachers in successfully implementing a restorative approach to address classroom

management issues. The limited availability of professional training has left many alternative educators who presently utilize this approach to report a lack of preparedness to deal with the litany of their student's significant behavioral and social-emotional issues (Breedlove et al., 2020; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). Additionally, when teachers implement a restorative approach lacking acceptable professional development, there will be increased self-doubt, anxiety, and frustration in their practice (Vaandering, 2019; Winn, 2018). Further, these teachers report the importance of establishing buy-in through a robust whole-school implementation plan that includes embedded professional development rather than a one day sit and get training held once a year (Breedlove et al., 2020; Gregory et al., 2016; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016; Marsh, 2017; Mansfield et al., 2018). This commitment to professional development will improve the school's future implementation (Song et al., 2020).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological research was to investigate the experiences of alternative education teachers using restorative practices to manage student behavior. At this stage in the research, a restorative practice approach will be generally defined as an alternative approach to a suspension that provides certain elements to help rebuild damaged relationships due to the previous inappropriate behavior or actions (Mayworm et al., 2016). The theories guiding this study are derived from social psychologists Bandura et al. (1975) and Gordon (1981). According to the social learning theory developed by Bandura et al., individuals can learn new behaviors by observing and imitating others. Bandura et al.'s theory on social learning will be used in this study to explain how individuals learn new behaviors through the active process of watching others (i.e., Using restorative practices). Gordon's theory of TET, developed through the classroom management theory, emphasized cultivating and nurturing significant relationships to combat conflict within the educational

setting. This theory will be utilized in this study to examine how alternative education teachers use a restorative approach to build and improve relationships with their students.

Significance of the Study

This study's significance can enlighten all educators on the benefits of using a restorative approach to managing student discipline. School administrators may view this information as a way to reduce the number of exclusionary discipline events that are used in their schools. Additionally, district leadership can utilize this research to explore diverse ways to address disproportionality in discipline actions among minorities and students with special needs. Further, the information discovered through this study will be utilized to implement restorative practices in additional school sites within my district.

Empirical Significance

This study's findings will benefit the educational community, considering that all teachers, regardless of grade level, subject, or experience, will encounter students with severe behaviors that need to be corrected at some point in their careers. The goal of this phenomenological study is to utilize the information discovered through observations, interviews, and data analysis to assist in developing a more robust, diverse set of behavioral interventions that can be applied to many student behaviors rather than just using punishment as a deterrent (Mayworm et al., 2016). Instead, this study will seek additional disciplinary options for educators rather than the overused exclusionary practice of suspension and how these shared experiences can be used to design a whole-school approach within an alternative setting.

Theoretical Significance

Gordon's theory of teacher effectiveness training (1974, 2003) provides the theoretical framework for this study. The TET is an offshoot of Gordon's (1970) seminal work on parent

effectiveness training theory. These two training programs are backed by field research

conducted by Gordon from early works in the 1950s and 1960s (Gordon, 1970, 1974, 1981,

2003). The PET and TET are supported by using relationships to change behaviors at home and

school (Gordon, 1974, 2003). The TET explicitly teaches several skills specifically designed to

foster independence and cultivate growth and development within children. Primarily, the TET

utilizes strong communication to cultivate meaningful relationships that assist in shaping

behavior (Gordon, 1974, 2003). Applying TET to this research within an alternative setting

should produce a fresh viewpoint related to this theory.

Practical Significance

For the researcher, this phenomenological study will assist in the development of a

whole-school behavioral program. According to Acosta et al. (2019), the utilization of a whole-

school approach helps in promoting a positive outcome in a multitude of areas, including the

reduction of promiscuous and risky behaviors, social development with peers, improved attitudes

towards school climate as well as decreasing event of bullying and harassment for all students.

Additionally, implementing a schoolwide reform model can improve academic performance

(Goldberg et al., 2018). Research has suggested that using a whole-school model has increased

student performance on standardized testing by 11 percentage points (Senol-Durak, & Durak,

2011). Further, research suggests employing a restorative approach to discipline, as opposed to

exclusionary models, can reduce racial inequalities disproportionality among minorities and

students with special needs (Gregory et al., 2018)

Research Questions

According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research questions should be

constructed with clarity and precision. Further, Moustkas contended the researcher must first

arrive at a place to develop a "topic and question that has both asocial meaning and personal significance" (p. 17). The research question is developed within phenomenological research due to an "intense interest in a particular problem or topic" (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, the researcher's passion for this can provide personal insight and knowledge of the problem to assist in creating the research questions (Moustakas, 1994). During this process, the researcher's "excitement and curiosity" will help drive the development of the research questions (Moustakas, 1994).

Central Research Question

What are alternative education teachers' experiences using a restorative practices approach for addressing student behavior?

Sub-Question One

What are the perceptions of alternative education teacher regarding professional development on restorative practices?

Building a robust professional development plan is essential to ensuring teacher success with implementation (Garnett et al., 2020; González et al., 2018; Vaandering, 2019). Implementing a whole-school approach prioritizes all students' social and emotional well-being above punishment and consequences (Oberle et al., 2016). Indeed, consequences are a component of restorative practices. Still, the bulk of the focus for both teachers and students lies in learning from mistakes and restoring the damaged relationship due to the infraction (Mayworm et al., 2016; Oberle et al., 2016). Within the alternative setting, developing positive relationships with students is fundamental to improving their academic and social-emotional well-being (Breedlove et al., 2020; Henderson et al., 2018; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016).

Sub-Question Two

How have teacher perceptions shaped the teacher-student relationship?

This is especially true for teachers within an alternative environment (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). Rebuilding trust and the teacher-student relationship is a top priority within the alternative setting (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). According to Kennedy-Lewis et al. (2016), over 75% of districts across the United States report using educators' subjective opinions on the primary factor at the comprehensive school as grounds for placement within the alternative school.

Sub-Question Three

How has the teacher-student relationship experiences shaped teacher expectations of future student behavior?

To effectively manage student behavior within an alternative setting, teachers must have a predetermined set of interventions within their tool kit (Henderson et al., 2018; Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016). The alternative education setting creates a unique experience for teachers within this environment (Kennedy-Lewis et al., 2016).

According to Mayworm et al. (2016), restorative practice principles can help reduce misbehavior in schools and accelerate community building. Further, restorative practices hold students accountable for their actions by using an inclusive approach to ensure students learn and grow (Mayworm et al., 2016). This approach differs substantially from the exclusionary practice of suspension (Mayworm et al., 2016; Oberle et al., 2016). When students feel supported, they will be less apprehensive about committing behavioral infractions (Mayworm et al., 2016).

Definitions

Alternative Learning Center - is an off-site educational program for students who repeatedly

    commit low-level offenses such as insubordination, disrespect, and skipping class.

    Students are encouraged to make up missed credits and participate in group counseling

    sessions (Henderson et al., 2018).

Disproportionality - is the unequal, non-equitable use of punishment to individuals in different

    subgroups within society compared to the proportionate population numbers that those

    individuals represent (Gilzene, 2020).

Inclusion - is the act of including all students within the general classroom regardless of

    behavioral, academic, or social-emotional limitations while designing appropriate

    learning opportunities for everyone (Rose et al., 2018).

Parent Effectiveness Training - a "no-lose" method used by parents, developed by Thomas

    Gordan, to establish relationships with their children that are "egalitarian, collaborative,

    synergistic, collegial, reciprocal, mutually beneficial, and democratic" (Gordon, 1981).

Restorative Practices - an alternative approach to a suspension that provides certain elements to

    help rebuild damaged relationships resulting from the previous inappropriate behavior

    (Mayworm et al., 2016).

Social-Emotional Learning - educational opportunities specifically centered on addressing

    students' social-emotional deficiencies (Gregory & Fergus, 2017).

Social Learning Theory - behavioral theory developed by Bandura et al. (1975) posited

    individuals learn expectations primarily by observing and imitating others in similar

    situations.

Teacher Effectiveness Training - a "no-lose" method used by teachers, developed by Thomas

      Gordan, to establish relationships with their students that are "egalitarian, collaborative,

      synergistic, collegial, reciprocal, mutually beneficial, and democratic" (Gordon, 1981).

Summary

      The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological research was to investigate the experiences of alternative education teachers using restorative practices to manage student behavior. This phenomenological study explores teacher experiences in using restorative practices to manage student behaviors at an alternative public school in a north-central Florida school district. This study builds upon prior research that supports the notion of providing robust professional development opportunities before implementing initiatives. This chapter contains personal experiences in using a restorative approach to addressing student behavior. While most previous research examines the effects of using a restorative approach in an educational setting, this research seeks to fill the literature gap regarding teachers' experiences using a restorative approach within an alternative educational environment.

      Currently, the problem is the lack of professional development available to alternative education teachers in successfully implementing a restorative approach to address classroom management issues. This phenomenological study aims to provide educational professionals with valuable and much-needed tools for successful implementation. Further, this deficiency can be resolved by providing in-depth professional development to all employees. Additionally, by exploring the shared experiences of alternative education teachers, a clear understanding in using restorative practices to elicit successful student behavioral outcomes can be achieved.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to investigate teacher perceptions while using a restorative approach within an alternative educational setting. As related to this study, this chapter will offer an overview of current literature pertaining to teacher experiences using a restorative approach. The first section contains a brief introduction and discussion of the selected theory to develop the study's theoretical framework. The following section will synthesize related literature about teacher perceptions using a whole-school approach within an alternative setting. Following implementing a whole-school approach, the next sections will focus on teachers' perceptions regarding personnel decisions and professional development to increase buy-in for all adult stakeholders. After addressing the human capital needed to implement a restorative approach, the focus will shift to teacher perceptions regarding student outcomes using a restorative approach. After reviewing the literature, a gap will emerge, creating a need for a concentrated study.

Positive Relationship Theory

The theoretical framework for this study is centered around the establishment and maintenance of healthy, positive relationships. The theory of Gordon's (1981) parent effectiveness training theory (PET) and subsequently teacher effectiveness training theory (TET) will serve as the foundation for this study. The literature found inclinations regarding the positive impact of a targeted professional development plan centered on school-wide initiatives. This study builds upon previous research by exploring alternative education teachers' experiences using a restorative approach to manage student behavior after receiving professional development on implementing this initiative.

Theory of Teacher Effectiveness Training (TET)/Parent Effectiveness Training (PET)

In the 1950s, Thomas Gordon worked with leadership teams to make them more efficient and productive. Gordon (1981) labeled this first-hand experience "group-centered leadership." This work propelled Gordon to develop the theories of both the PET and TET. Gordon examined the detrimental effects punishment had on children's health and well-being and decided to create a different program to help parents apply structure to their child's daily routine to form a better outcome related to personal performance. Gordon's parent effectiveness training theory eventually led to teacher effectiveness training theory. The premise of PET is to create an environment within the home where both parents and children can live in a democratically controlled state where each individual shares a mutual respect for one another. In this setting, parents and children work together to make all rules, divide up chores, and find mutually acceptable ways to resolve frequent conflicts (Gordon, 1981). Gordon contended that there must be ongoing practice and reinforcement of mutual respect within the parent-child relationship for this no-lose PET to work. Further, Gordon elaborated that successful use of the PET allows parents and children to be more "open, honest, and direct in sharing their feelings and problems so that their children are more apt to listen to them" (p. 240).

Eventually, after several years of perfecting the PET, Gordon developed a very similar action plan for educators. Gordon's (1981) teacher effectiveness training theory allowed for a robust, practical method for teachers to manage classroom behaviors. Like the PET, the TET allows for the successful diffusion of conflicts by establishing mutual respect for teachers and students. Further, Gordon insisted on using teacher effectiveness training theory to allow students to learn interpersonal skills that will help them establish relationships with both adults and students from various backgrounds. Gordon replaced the term *control* with *influence* to

further desired leadership traits between adults and children. Additionally, Gordon emphasized the effective use of words to create a "win-win" situation for all involved.

Related Literature

According to Kervick et al. (2019), minority students and students with special needs are more likely to have adverse classroom experiences than their non-disabled peers and Caucasian counterparts. The adverse experiences have been directly correlated to how discipline and consequences are administered for behavioral offenses. Research suggests that when students are disciplined, they view these conversations as being "picked on" rather than concerned with improving their behavior (Carter-Andrews & Gutwein, 2020). These students had a firm grasp of behavioral expectations regarding school rules. However, they felt that adults within the building did not adequately enforce the expectations evenly or consistently (Carter-Andrews & Gutwein, 2020).

Moreover, eliminating exclusionary discipline practices for minor offenses such as disrespect and insubordination in schools can reduce students' feelings of anxiety and repair damaged relationships (Hashim et al., 2018). Research also reflected that students will have fewer behavior issues, truancy concerns, better grades, and mental/emotional health (Acosta et al., 2016; Ingraham et al., 2016). González and Buth (2019) contended that restorative practices are helpful in schools because those in authority (adults) include students in the decision-making process by "doing things with them, rather than to them or for them" (p. 245). Quite possibly, the most significant benefit of utilizing a restorative approach is the confrontation of the perpetrator by the victims (van Alphen, 2015). This creates a unique environment for the offender and brings forth many negative emotions, including shame (van Alphen, 2015).

Whole School Approach

According to Velez et al. (2020), scholars have increasingly suggested that restorative practices should not be seen as a tool kit to assist with change but rather a process to bring forth cultural change within the school. Whole-school implementation is centered on the premise that school problems can be resolved by cultivating behavioral and interpersonal skills within students and teachers before escalation (Passarella, 2017). When considering implementing any school-wide initiative, administrators must be aware of the challenges before seeing the program results (Gilzene, 2020). A few of these challenges include a failure by school stakeholders (staff, administration, and teachers) to recognize the need for a change, a history of failed or unsuccessful school initiatives, and the actual or perceived pressure placed on relationships (Gilzene, 2020). Improvement on the implementation's overall effectiveness, research suggests that administration should use an intentional and gradual method to routinely engage all stakeholders into the continuous improvement cycle that assesses need, buy-in, and overall readiness to full implementation (Garnett et al., 2020). This implementation plan is specifically designed to engage with the adult stakeholders on campus to create a shared understanding of the importance of using a restorative approach (Garnett et al., 2020). In achieving this, the adults on campus must first restore and repair their relationships with each other. Setting the expectations in the school setting is essential to realizing the initiative's initial potential and buy-in (Garnett et al., 2020).

This realization and commitment to buy-in often come from the desperation of adult stakeholders on campus searching for a different approach to tackling student discipline issues (Weaver & Swank, 2020). Research suggests that restorative practices offer several benefits when implemented in a whole-school setting (Garnett et al., 2020; Weaver & Swank, 2020).

These benefits include decreasing reliance on ineffective exclusionary discipline practices,

behavioral support, and cultivating relationships (Weaver & Swank, 2020). Moreover, school

leaders choose the restorative model approach to address racial disproportion in student

discipline (Gilzene, 2020). Occasionally, the implementation runs into barriers to stakeholder

buy-in (Lyubansky & Barter, 2019).

Assisting students with self-regulation and intrinsic motivation is an excellent benefit of a

whole-school restorative practice approach. Both Greenstein (2018) and Short et al. (2018) have

research that supports the belief that students will continue to work hard when they see their

academic and educational decisions produce positive results. An intrinsic reward system creates

a feedback loop within the student. When engaged correctly, this internal reward system then

extends itself to self-regulation and the active effort to make the right decision academically and

socially (Greenstein, 2018; Short et al., 2018). Greenstein (2018) argued that when students are

recognized for their excellent works, ideas, or behavior, they will see these as an affirmation of

their conscious decisions to improve their outcomes. Similarly, Short et al. (2018) supported this

position and added that this feedback provides students with an appropriate avenue for being

heard.

Further, teachers and administrators should investigate proven methods to assess

students' knowledge of a given topic for the most substantial investment return, especially for at-

risk students (Greenstein, 2018). Potential methods could include: creating a video instead of

writing a paper, creating a song to discuss relevant issues, project-based learning activity to

demonstrate they understand the learning goal, or only talking with students to understand the

barriers to their learning and causes of misbehavior (Brasof, 2015; Greenstein, 2018). When

students are afforded different opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings, they are more

likely to engage in more appropriate social behavior (Short et al., 2018). By employing these activities, students will have a more significant opportunity to achieve positive academic outcomes. These outcomes can be observed in improving school climate and safety and reducing discipline referrals (González et al., 2018).

Providing alternatives to disciplinary actions has allowed the behaviors in question to transition through remediation and rehabilitation to support student growth and learning. McCluskey et al. (2008) contended that implementing a restorative approach may provide an atmosphere that creates a cohesive, more in-depth understanding of current school initiatives and programs. This research coincides with similar findings from Weber and Vereenooghe (2020). This study concluded that using an evidence-based school-wide restorative practices approach was beneficial in curbing student behaviors and subsequent discipline referrals. Moreover, an evidence-based approach works best within a school setting by reducing problematic behaviors, its use has reduced effectiveness by curtailing school-related issues such as school climate, attendance rates, harmony, sense of belonging, and school connectedness (McCluskey et al., 2008; Weber & Vereenooghe, 2020). Despite the inconsistent and inconclusive findings, the effects of restorative practices can be improved by the inclusion of a humanistic perspective that benefits both the students and the school (McCluskey et al., 2008; Weber & Vereenooghe, 2020). When schools utilize a restorative approach to student discipline, studies show a shift to using a more humane response to the presence of school violence (Frias-Armenta et al., 2018).

Frias-Armenta et al. (2018) and Passarella (2017) contended that schools must institute a "paradigm shift in relationships" for the purpose of developing a strong culture between all stakeholders within the school to implement this model. For this transformative process to succeed, a change in the "hierarchical structures of authority" and beliefs regarding school

discipline practices (Frias-Armenta et al., 2018). This is achieved when schools explicitly state expectations for all students. By showing students the expectations, they will be more likely to meet their standards. Additionally, implementing a school-wide approach benefits all students by creating a healthy, supportive environment, and culture that nurtures all learners (Acosta et al., 2019; McCluskey, 2008; Passarella, 2017).

According to Passarella (2017, p. 5) "restorative practices work best in a strong school culture" that has cultivated an expectation of respect for individuals and consistently addressed disciplinary issues. This research is corroborated in research conducted by Acosta et al. (2019). Research supports a whole-school approach to combating the adverse events due to bullying within the school (Acosta et al., 2019). There are research-backed programs that seek to build up the student's positive support system and opportunities and influence social and moral choices to counteract these negative risk behaviors' impacts; unfortunately, these interventions do not offer any added benefit within middle schools in the way they improve the culture within elementary schools (Acosta et al., 2019; Farr et al., 2020). Possible reasons for this include early involvement in the formative years, a more structured school setting, and the school's overall atmosphere (relationships, connectedness).

Research suggests that to be effective, restorative practices are more successful when the appropriate restorative approach is used for the needs of the school (Farr et al., 2020). Moreover, Farr et al. (2020) cautioned that the chosen model is a prescription intended for that school only, not a universal salve that can be used liberally within an educational context. Acosta et al. (2019) emphasize that students with the most considerable improvement reported experiencing the most beneficial interactions with teachers and developing positive relationships. Morrison et al. (2005) contended that schools should view restorative practices as a continuum of services offered to

students embedded into the school's culture. Additionally, Passarella (2017) suggested that school administrators should improve implementation and provide enough time for staff buy-in, training, and new procedures to remove arcane exclusionary discipline practices. Hollands et al. (2022) discovered through their research that black students fared better than their other counterparts with the implementation of a whole-school restorative approach. Additionally, using a restorative approach for positive behavior intervention systems (PBIS) has consistently shown to be more cost-effective and results oriented compared to other PBIS programs (Hollands et al., 2022).

Personnel Decisions

Hiring the right individuals to staff any business is extremely important. This process is even more magnified within a school setting. According to Laura (2018) and Kohli et al. (2019), principals should have an expansive knowledge of educational leadership philosophies, staffing considerations, and their school's needs prior to conducting interviews. Before hiring, teachers must be vetted for how well they understand and implement a restorative approach once they assume their classroom direction (Kohli et al., 2019). Laura asserted that school leaders should push for social initiatives that increase all students' success, especially those that have been historically neglected and underserved. Building leaders must adhere to due diligence when hiring prospective candidates to join the school community's ranks to achieve this goal.

The relationship between a student and teacher is vital to the child's overall mental and academic success (Acosta et al., 2019). Therefore, principals must be very selective in hiring teachers to fill vacant positions (Acosta et al., 2019; Laura, 2018). To educate the whole child, schools must be aware of hiring individuals capable of nurturing student learning's social and emotional components and their academic needs (Gregory et al., 2020). Laura (2018) offered one

piece of advice to slow the rate of turnover within education to provide learning opportunities:

that engage teachers' creative and reflective side to effect change on a large scale within their

community. Short et al. (2018) found that inconsistent implementation of restorative practices

was directly attributable to teacher and staff attrition.

When searching for individuals to serve within the school in any capacity, the school

administration must be conscientious of the need for personnel to remain flexible with students

as they work through the restorative process (Weaver & Swank, 2020). For a restorative

approach to be successful, the implementation must concentrate on two main areas: control and

support (Weaver & Swank, 2020). Understanding the ways, the adults integrate control and

support within the school's fabric will create an atmosphere where students feel heard

(McCluskey et al., 2008; Weaver & Swank, 2020). Often, this includes sorting through

uncomfortable topics such as race, privilege, and power and how they interact with disciplinary

policies (Gregory et al., 2020). Research suggested that engaging in these explicit conversations

and systematically hiring more minority teachers can go a long way in addressing equity and

other social justice initiatives within education (Gregory et al., 2020). In these instances, students

begin to recognize that restorative discipline is meant to include them in the process to create an

environment where consequences are done "with" not "to" them (McCluskey et al., 2008;

Weaver & Swank, 2020).

Professional Development

Unfortunately, professional development is often lacking in schools implementing

restorative practices first (Vaandering, 2019). Vaandering (2019) contended schools that provide

professional development that is "grounded in the core values" of restorative practices realize the

most beneficial gains after implementation (p. 201). Before implementation, an intake survey

should be completed to gauge adult stakeholder perceptions of restorative practices (Garnett et al., 2020; González et al., 2018). Including this pre-implementation step will elicit better buy-in from the faculty and staff (Garnett et al., 2020). Kaveney and Drewery (2011) contended that restorative practices provide a less confrontational method regarding student discipline by focusing on the relational practices employed by educators. Further, Kaveney and Drewery affirmed restorative practices "lie at the boundaries of discipline and care" (p. 5) when dealing with students.

Cook et al. (2018) investigated the impact of professional development in providing implementation follow-up regarding the strategic use of relationship-focused practices to improve teacher-student relationships to control their behavior. This study examined the establish-maintain-restore (EMR) process in building strong relationships between students and teachers to improve behavioral outcomes within the classroom. After the review, students within the experimental groups reported higher behavioral expectations and quality with their learning (Cook et al., 2018). Instead of focusing on fires, school leaders can use restorative practices more effectively by building capacity within their leadership teams and throughout the school (Gregory et al., 2020). Additionally, these educational leaders should establish systems designed to support staff through necessary training and professional development opportunities to successfully implement discipline reform policies (Gregory et al., 2020).

According to Gregory et al. (2020), the implementation of restorative practices can be categorized into four distinct areas: (a) administrative support, (b) school-wide buy-in and distributive leadership, (c) discipline policy reform, (d) data-based decision-making to guide change. The aforementioned categories provide valuable insight into where teachers state where further training is needed to meet the objective of implementing restorative practices within

schools (Gregory et al., 2020). Lohmeyer (2017) contended that when similar principles are implemented, individuals are more likely to trust and cooperate freely within their environment. Specifically, Lohmeyer stated the appeal for cooperation within individuals is rooted in the premise that a restorative approach is achieved by working "with" others rather than "to" or "for" them.

Further, this research coincides with an increasingly large volume of prior work. There are significant associations between the quality of teacher-student relationships and improvements in classroom behavior, relationships, and academic improvement (Cook et al., 2018; Parker & Bickmore, 2020). When teachers implement a restorative approach without adequate professional development, feelings of being overwhelmed, self-doubt, and disappointment emerge (Winn, 2018). On the other hand, when educators are provided with ongoing support, technical assistance, and explicit and job-embedded professional development, they can confidently execute equitable discipline reform (Reed et al., 2020). Recent research has uncovered a novel idea in assisting first-year teachers with implementing all school-related initiatives, including restorative practices (Gray, 2021). Gray (2021) asserted that when new teachers are tethered to their college or university, a reciprocal relationship will provide an environment for the transference of information between professors and their former students. Additionally, this relationship can tailor professional development for individual teachers or provide an opportunity for teacher preparation colleges to examine their methods and instructional practices to improve the quality of the overall program (Gray, 2021).

Providing explicit job-embedded professional development within any organization, primarily educational institutions creates a foundation for future endeavors and initiatives to be implemented (Song et al., 2020). The delivery of robust professional consultation during the pre-

implementation phase will develop a strong foundation before full implementation throughout the school (Song et al., 2020). Bal et al. (2019) contended that the overall effectiveness of professional development hinges on the involvement of the adult stakeholders within the school. Having these adults participate in professional development can shift more quickly and adjust more rapidly than traditional training opportunities (Bal et al., 2019). Moreover, an essential consideration for implementing restorative practices is the fidelity of treatment and training provided to stakeholders (Katic et al., 2020).

According to Dover et al. (2020), restorative practice professional development with educators creates an environment in which they understand the impact of driving social change they possess. Further, these trainings catalyze in-depth, robust discussions on delicate issues like racism, discrimination, and implementation that improve all aspects of the educational community (Dover et al., 2020; Lustick, 2017; Vaandering, 2019; Winn, 2018). Professional development with restorative practices provides educators with specific examples of diffuse situations with students to move forward with instruction (Winn, 2018). Coupled with federal, state, and local discipline reduction initiatives, restorative practices can improve student behavioral and academic outcomes (Katic et al., 2020). Currently, educator preparation programs concentrate primarily on the academic and cognitive needs of students to prepare teachers for the classroom experience (Silverman & Mee, 2018). Unfortunately, this concentration is extremely shortsighted at best. Instead, teacher preparation programs should devote more time to examining the role teachers play in their students social and emotional development (Silverman & Mee, 2018).

Social/Emotional Learning

With the development of the, *Every Student Succeeds Act* in 2015, schools and school districts across the United States have researched innovative ways to improve all students' learning (Gayl, 2018). Within American schools, the need to provide additional support for student growth outside of academics is rising (Haymovitz et al., 2018). Now more than ever, schools are focusing on a student's personal development to facilitate increased success in other areas of their lives (Haymovitz et al., 2018). This newfound reliance regarding the importance of restorative to improve student growth in personal and academic settings is gaining traction within many schools (Haymovitz et al., 2018). Further, students must feel as though they are connected to the process by having their voiced concerns heard (Velez et al., 2020).

According to Gayl (2018), "social-emotional development has often been called the 'missing piece' of America's educational system" (p. 17). Further, research on employing restorative practices to compliment or establish social-emotional learning within schools reveals that these programs centered on evidence can "instill strong values, foster relationships" (Haymovitz et al., 2018). Potential benefits of employing a vigorous SEL program include the development of prerequisite skills needed for behavioral change, acquiring specific skills designed to regulate emotions, develop positive relationships, and successfully manage conflict (Gomez et al., 2020). Additionally, these procedures can provide support through targeted resource usage from the school, family, and community (Haymovitz et al., 2018). Although many studies have confirmed the extensive benefits of explicit social-emotional learning, implementing these vital skills within the educational curriculum is non-existent (Gayl, 2018).

Kervick et al. (2018) and Garnett et al. (2019) contended that minority students have a much higher chance of being placed into a more restrictive environment for emotional/behavioral

disorders than white peers. According to van Alphen (2015), we learn best by solving our problems, not others' issues. This personal growth is generated through internal strife, not through outside interventions. A restorative practice approach focuses on this fundamental skill. Further, when teachers and administrators successfully implement restorative practices, the result is clarity, kindness, and freedom to explore different ideas. To be successful, Goldberg et al. (2018) consider that students must have a well-balanced skill set of cognitive, social, and emotional tools to help them realize their full positive potential. This is even more significant for children from diverse cultural backgrounds (Ingraham et al., 2016). Establishing positive relationships with adults and peers is paramount for nurturing a sense of belonging to a child's community (Mowat, 2019). Further, research concludes that these skills are malleable and can be adapted over time through embedded classroom activities (Goldberg et al., 2018). By subscribing to a whole-school approach, school leaders can enlist all faculty and staff members to model and reinforce expected behaviors (academic and social).

According to Carter-Andrews and Gutwein (2020), when minority students are called out for misbehavior, they often feel they are the only ones getting into trouble. When students use the phrase "picked on," it is used to describe a situation in which they felt unnecessarily disciplined or were the only ones disciplined when others were misbehaving (Carter-Andrews & Gutwein, 2020). Potentially, the vagueness to which student discipline is assigned should be improved for clarity and increase the number of students meeting the expectations simultaneously. Further, enhancing this communication issue will improve the teacher-student relationship over time (Carter-Andrews & Gutwein, 2020).

Norris (2018) suggested the recent influx of school-wide interventions is proportionately related to potential success from engaged students and directly tied to an ever-changing idea that

mostly depends on the school environment's context. To improve student behavioral issues, school leaders must first promote strong relationships throughout the campus (Norris, 2018). Further, Norris (2018) pointed out that consistent school-wide systems are the catalyst that drives positive trends with both student happiness and engagement. Norris (2018) stated "consistent practices are also integral to eliciting the restorative mechanism referred to as procedural justice" (p. 231).

To adequately address unwanted student behaviors, we must first examine our students' social and emotional (SEL) skills. According to Oberle et al. (2016), over the past 20 years, there has been a proliferation of programs designed and implemented for implementing social/emotional skill-based instruction into schools. This whole-school approach is favored because it is considered more effective than a single, stand-alone classroom program (Oberle et al., 2016). To effectively implement a school-wide SEL program, a comprehensive support system must first be created to allocate vital resources and prioritize student SEL learning (Oberle et al., 2016). This process must include programs and structures to support and conduct high-quality skill development. Further, having the opportunity to freely express our feelings in a safe environment to build emotional and social skills (Silverman & Mee, 2018).

Social/emotional learning is important because it provides all children with the training to develop the necessary skills to succeed in life (Oberle et al., 2016) and the classroom (Evanovich et al., 2020). According to CASEL (1994, as cited in Oberle et al., 2016), practical SEL skills-based education comprises five distinct domains: Self-awareness, Self-management, Social-awareness, Relationships, Responsible decision-making. Children who can learn and integrate proficient SEL skills can better grasp and utilize essential school and life (Oberle et al., 2016). Preparing students for the 21st century is imperative for them to be successful in an ever-

changing environment is an essential task for all educational professionals (Boulden, 2021).

Mastering these "soft skills" is imperative for students to compete in a diverse, expanding world

economy (Boulden, 2021). Unfortunately, teachers report students to lack basic interpersonal

skills, as witnessed, through peer-to-peer communication and classroom discussions (Boulden,

2021; Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Further, employers describe an emerging workforce struggling

to navigate shifting work environments due to a significant lack of cultural awareness,

collaboration, and conflict resolution (Boulden, 2021).

        With the right amount of effort and planning, the aforementioned students can grow and

mature into responsible adults (Boulden, 2021; Kendziora & Yoder, 2016; Oberle et al., 2016).

Given the proper training and practice, successful students will be able to manage their emotions,

form healthy relationships, set realistic and positive goals, meet personal and social needs, and

make competent and ethical decisions (Hymel et al., 2018; Oberle et al., 2016). According to

Kendziora and Yoder (2016), educators should adhere to one of these four primary approaches to

effectively implementing social-emotional learning within their classroom: (a) direct instruction,

(b) integration of social-emotional learning integrated within academic content, (c) development

of a positive learning environment, and (d) general teaching practices that support student

development and application of social-emotional skills.

        Although educators have long decried the lack of emphasis placed on social-emotional

learning, the recent development of utilizing a restorative approach to building community,

improving behavior, and changing school climate has provided the necessary attention regarding

the lack of students that will practice social-emotional skills (High, 2017). In years past, students

were expected to come to school with the requisite skills to succeed (Kehoe et al., 2017). These

skills were further reinforced in an educational setting with other students from diverse

backgrounds while at the same time accounting for the learning of academic knowledge (Kehoe et al., 2017). According to Kehoe et al. (2017), incorporating a restorative approach can drastically improve children's social-emotional skills. These skills include harmony, empathy for others, awareness and accountability, respectful relationships, and (reflective) thinking, and they must be explicitly taught for maximum benefit (Kehoe et al., 2017).

The emergence of restorative practices to curb undesirable behaviors has increased in recent years (Evanovich et al., 2020). For effective implementation of expected behaviors at school, school administration and school personnel should develop expectations for each setting on the campus (Evanovich et al., 2020). These expectations must be explicitly taught to students using effective social-emotional instruction, lessons, and skill practice (Evanovich et al., 2020; Kehoe et al., 2017). Further research suggested that social-emotional skill development has been shown to reduce inappropriate and challenging student behaviors (Evanovich et al., 2020). Moreover, researchers have discovered that SEL programs positively affect students in all grade levels (Gomez et al., 2020). These beneficial results can be evidenced by more students participating in decision-making processes and increased opportunities within experiential learning (Gomez et al., 2020). The research reflects that these improvements in SEL skills can be attributed to increased awareness of prosocial behaviors, reduction in problem behaviors, lessened emotional distress, and high academic achievement (Gomez et al. 2020). Additionally, there are many positive benefits of utilizing this approach, including improving academic success by students, the more harmonious their relationship will be with their peers, adults, and family members (Evanovich et al., 2020). When all school community members are provided with social-emotional intervention, this influences all areas within the school, including the

disciplinary referrals, classroom misbehavior, and improving the climate within the school (Haymovitz et al., 2018).

Unfortunately, the benefits of employing a restorative approach to improve social-emotional skill development amongst children do not transfer over to the online education platform (Das et al., 2019). Despite educators' best efforts, inappropriate behaviors still permeate the virtual landscape within education (Das et al., 2019). A possible reason for this expansion into the online learning arena is that educators are not as quickly able to explicitly teach appropriate behaviors to students within a situational context (Macready, 2009). Misbehavior manifested within the school primarily results from students losing their identities through impersonal contexts and situations (Macready, 2009).

Consequently, an underlying assumption with learning social responsibility is that individuals will inherently develop the fear of consequences of engaging in socially irresponsible behaviors (Macready, 2009). However, research does not support increasing rewards and punishments to improve the societal responsibility of individuals lacking social-emotional skills (Macready, 2009). Instead, schools must develop an atmosphere where everyone has the opportunity to express their concerns, a feeling of respect, and value with the presence of clear and realistic expectations; further, schools must provide an opportunity to reintegrate students that do not meet expectations within the group (Macready, 2009). This is the central premise of utilizing a restorative approach: to restore damaged relationships through effective conflict resolution techniques (Haymovitz et al., 2018). Moreover, this process for resolving conflict encourages offenders to "assume responsibility for their actions, activities," and behaviors within the school to repair and restore damaged relationships (Haymovitz et al., 2018).

Classroom Management

According to Graham (2017), "classroom management is a critical teaching component, including teaching for equity and social justice" (p. 494). The challenge for teachers is to create a classroom environment that is conducive to student learning in several areas, including building positive relationships, allowing students to have *guided* freedom, and assisting students in developing a sense of injustice as well as bias and how to oppose these natural reactions (Graham, 2017). Because classroom management is integral to building a better learning community and ultimately improving academic outcomes, educators must be aware of the ramifications of failing to address these potential issues when they arise (Graham, 2017). Additionally, Graham cited classroom management difficulties constitute a significant factor in teacher burnout.

There are currently two views on effectively handling student misbehavior resulting in teachers' classroom management struggles. These two views are democratic and authoritative perspectives. The democratic perspective engages the students as individuals who need to be managed. This classroom management technique, through research, has been shown to exacerbate established cultural, gender, racial, ethnic, and socio-economic orders (Graham, 2017). In comparison, the authoritative perspective is more connected with developing a support structure within the classroom (Graham, 2017). This view/interaction is much similar to the relationship between children and their parents. The intentions in this classroom environment begin with the understanding that children will make mistakes. When this happens, it is up to both parents and teachers to correct their misbehavior and then guide them to the correct choice in the future (Graham, 2017).

In an educational setting, a restorative approach seeks to bring students together to resolve a conflict by reviewing the details to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the incident (Gomez et al., 2020). The in-depth analysis clarifies the participant's role in the conflict and attempts to develop resolutions to the underlying problem (Gomez et al., 2020). When the elements found within the authoritative perspective are appropriately utilized in culturally appropriate means, the potential for positive student outcomes increases dramatically (Graham, 2017). Bondy and Ross (2008) contended this solid parent-child relationship is essential to improving and building capacity within high-poverty communities.

Currently, there is a push to integrate the teaching of a restorative approach into teacher preparation programs (Hollweck et al., 2019). The idea behind this shift is the belief that "teacher education classrooms are communities that ought to offer the right conditions for powerful professional and personal learning experiences" to create an emotionally safe and intellectually engaging arena to investigate fresh ideas and improve on best practices (Hollweck et al., 2019, p. 262-263). When classroom teachers integrate a restorative practices approach with other school-based intervention models, coupled with a robust SEL program, the benefits to students can be amplified (Gomez et al., 2020). These interventions can be layered in such a way to account for tiered levels of support which can assist classroom teachers in managing the most severe cases of student misbehavior or conflict (Gomez et al., 2020).

The benefits of utilizing this framework are exponentially improved when integrated into an urban setting where the need for a culturally responsible intervention is desperately sought after to improve student misbehavior (Caldera et al., 2020). Further, the infusion of relationship importance into the classroom serves as a foundation for future endeavors and a catalyst for developing respect and trust between teachers and students (Hollweck et al., 2019). This

approach differs from long-standing teacher preparation courses due to the over-reliance on strategies and interventions that only address the mainstream's concerns, behaviors, and cultural norms (Caldera et al., 2020).

Additionally, it is worth noting that even the slightest commitment to using a restorative approach has the potential to elicit benefits (Hollweck et al., 2019). For instance, research has shown that merely integrating one course into teacher education programs will directly and positively impact the pre-service internship classroom (Hollweck et al., 2019). Hollweck et al. (2019) contended that embedding a restorative approach into teacher preparation programs could be considered the missing piece in creating the appropriate balance of creating conditions favorable for personal and social change.

To adequately prepare students to handle conflict and resolve differences, education professionals must develop the proper interventions for the appropriate behavior needing correction (Klobassa & Laker, 2018). The integration of interventions will be subject to the contextual situation presented (Klobassa & Laker, 2018). Freire (2010) suggested that pedagogical alignment should provide the proper environment to establish experiences students can draw upon in their time of need. Because life does not happen in a vacuum, creating a real-life practice to sharpen skills and build confidence is essential in effectively managing the classroom environment (Klobassa & Laker, 2018). To fully develop a restorative classroom, four central components must be established: inclusive decision-making, active accountability, repairing harm, and rebuilding trust (Klobassa & Laker, 2018). Hollweck et al. (2019) further emphasize this lived experience point to create a restorative classroom. A restorative approach must be experienced, not taught, within a sterile environment (Hollweck et al., 2019).

Relationships

By utilizing a restorative practices approach, students can develop positive relationships with their peers and adults (Weber & Vereenooghe, 2020). This development is essential in maintaining discourse during times of crisis that individuals may experience. The investment in this approach has been shown to reduce and, in some instances, prevent violence when emphasizing the interconnectedness, development of relationships (and repair), and inclusive dialogue amongst students (Velez et al., 2020). Additionally, students will be more willing to accept assistance correction from adults when they understand that a consequence is not something done to them, but rather a process they experience with loving individuals that have their best interest in mind (González & Buth, 2019).

Without question, the formation of positive relationships for all individuals within a society is beneficial to reaching their full potential in life (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). According to Katic et al. (2020), the use of restorative circles for community-building exercises has improved all students' relationships. Specifically, once a culture of restorative practices has been developed, the classroom can cultivate a "unique classroom identity" (Katic et al., 2020). School leaders must focus on healthy and effective communication across all stakeholders to fully realize the advantages of developing relationships when implementing restorative practices (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). These cheerful, high-functioning relationships must extend from the school's leadership team throughout the campus (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). Additionally, effective communication can strengthen relationships and mitigate social-emotional trauma resulting from adverse childhood experiences (Silverman & Mee, 2018). Once these relationships have been established and strengthened, restorative circles may be utilized to respond to problematic issues that emerge within the classroom (Katic et al., 2020).

Moreover, restorative justice is built upon the foundation that we are all interconnected through an ever-expansive web of relationships (Stewart-Kline, 2016; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). When this web of relationships experiences a transgression, this wrongdoing creates a tear that must be fixed through resolution. According to Stewart-Kline (2016), this web represents our community and the infinite number of relationships that make it thrive. Because the damage inflicted on a link can ultimately affect the community, great emphasis is placed on making things right and repairing the tear in a timely fashion (Stewart-Kline, 2016). Research has shown that by strictly using punishment alone to manage student behavior, the undesired behaviors will not change (Stewart-Kline, 2016). As students develop better skills, they will develop a good conscience, empathy, confidence, and capability to mold them into a prosperous society regulating their behavior (Stewart-Kline, 2016).

Another positive benefit of using a restorative approach is developing and extending deep, long-lasting relationships for all who participate (Pentón Herrera & McNair, 2020). These personal connections can bridge complex topics issues and erode barriers to learning (Pentón Herrera & McNair, 2020). Further, in direct contrast to traditional punitive justice approaches that strictly conceptualize right and wrong, punishment and consequence, a restorative approach seeks to mend the broken relationship rather than solely concentrating on who is at fault (Lohmeyer, 2017). Additionally, research suggested that solutions to misbehavior and inappropriate actions are not fully resolved through increased discipline and control; instead, the shifting importance to focus on values, attitudes, and the social-emotional needs of individuals within the community (Lohmeyer, 2017). Williams and Segrott (2018) posited that when these needs are met through a collaborative framework such as restorative practices, the benefits extend throughout the school, community, and the children's home. The focus on

communication, building stronger relationships, and targeted support to individuals can lead to more successful outcomes for all students (Williams & Segrott, 2018).

Using restorative practices as a conduit via relationships to resolve many of the ills that have plagued society is an area worth noting. These problem regions include racism, integrating blended families, and seeking balance for parenting styles. Integrating the relationship component into eroding community stereotypes of people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities has shown powerful potential (Giles, 2019). By effectively building relationships and concentrating on trust, individuals can successfully attract, sustain, and retain all people who hold diverse perspectives due to different life experiences to handle complex issues within their community (Giles, 2019). Another notable area is the blending of stepfamilies and the disciplinary strategies used primarily by the stepfather (DeGarmo & Forgatch, 2007).

In concentrating on relationships, damage to the family dynamic can be repaired using a restorative approach (DeGarmo & Forgatch, 2007). Specifically, the degree to which the stepfather views his parental self-efficacy (PSE) relates to intervening in misbehavior exhibited by the non-biological children within the relationship (DeGarmo & Forgatch, 2007). The overall goal of developing a positive parental self-efficacy is to foster children's healthy growth within these families (DeGarmo & Forgatch, 2007). This dilemma is not just found within blended families. Jones and Prinz (2005) contended that traditional families also must be mindful of their parenting styles and how these strategies affect interfamily relationships and shape household experiences. The prevalence of increased PSE has demonstrated a more effective parenting style, promoting a healthy lifestyle for all individuals within the family (Jones & Prinz, 2005).

Expectations

One of the overarching restorative practices goals is to cultivate an environment where students are explicitly taught behavioral expectations and held accountable for these social obligations. For students to become familiar with expectations within a school, community, or society, there must be established individuals to model the way. According to DeMatthews (2018), these social leaders serve a useful purpose in their communities despite "a broad range of structural and cultural challenges" (p. 547). These social leaders understand and embrace the fundamental barriers when building more socially impartial schools within an unbalanced culture (DeMatthews, 2018). Social leaders seek to reform disproportionate areas within society, especially in educational settings. These areas include disproportionality within school suspensions, the number of high school drop-outs among minority students, educational opportunities for individual education students, and any diversity needs. One significant strength of using a restorative approach addresses racial disproportionality amongst minority subgroups in discipline practices (Song & Swearer, 2016). Although exclusionary discipline numbers have decreased over time, racial disparities still exist (Katic et al., 2020). Further, the most recent data suggest that implementing alternative discipline measures like a restorative practices approach lessens the effects of disproportionality and assists in dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline (Katic et al., 2020).

With a restorative approach, "stake holding" is discussed to provide an opportunity for all that have a stake in the outcome of the consequence should have their concerns heard before a decision is rendered (Brooks, 2017). This process includes both the victim and the offender having a chance to present their positions for an appropriate outcome (Brooks, 2017). Short et al. (2018) asserted when students are encouraged to examine a recent event or situation, they are

more likely to explore different perspectives and outcomes. Further, the use of asking probing

questions like "what happened, what could have been done differently" (Short et al., 2018, p.

317). This process is structured to elicit a shared understanding for all stakeholders to reach an

"amicable solution and a way of moving forward together" (Short et al., 2018, p. 317).

Moreover, engaging in these practices allows students to learn the desired behavior expected of

them; consequently, this places the importance on education rather than focusing on punishing

misbehavior which is a core belief of the restorative approach (Short et al., 2018).

   According to Quimby (2020), individuals can fully restore relationships in communities

where a transgression has damaged relationships through constructive interventions. Brooks

(2017) contended that individuals may see a significant yield in commitment to the process

(Brooks, 2017). Unfortunately, some victims and offenders will not want to participate in these

proceedings (Brooks, 2017). Brooks contended that some offenses will not be brought before the

stakeholders. In these instances, trust and communication must be at the forefront to hold all

community members accountable (Brooks, 2017). In addition to increased accountability, all

individuals are viewed as stakeholders who play an active role in determining how to disperse

justice within the community (Katic et al., 2020).

   Further, using a restorative approach transitions schools away from the cycle of "offend,

suspend, and re-offend" to engaging in open discussions about why the infraction occurred, to

steps on how to resolve the conflict, as well as creating a healthy list of alternatives that do not

include violence or aggression (Payne & Welch, 2018). When students are unsure about

expectations (behavioral and academic), students will develop anxiety and begin to resent their

current situation (Carter-Andrews & Gutwein, 2020). To mitigate these student perceptions,

educators must develop and implement effective communication techniques that "support all

students' healthy identity development and academic success (Carter-Andrews & Gutwein, 2020)."

When using a restorative approach, the expectation is to reintegrate the offender into the community by repairing (restoring) the relationships that were damaged in the process of the wrongdoing (Quimby, 2020). When utilized effectively, the restorative process catalyzes by inducing a shift in perspective from all stakeholders a more effective and compassionate response may be provided (Ispa-Landa, 2018). Whereas the arcane method of punitive discipline seeks to exclude offenders from their respective communities, the use of a restorative approach is solely focused on mending the damaged relationship between the victim and the offender and the community as a whole (Lyubansky & Barter, 2019). Similarly, it is not uncommon for community members to take an active role in assisting both the victim and the offender in meeting their unmet needs and assisting in the healing process (Lyubansky & Barter, 2019). Additionally, Quimby (2020) suggested that critics of the restorative approach are misguided and ill-informed of the cultural and institutional transformation that can occur when a restorative approach is utilized proactively.

Intended Outcomes

Brasof (2019) research asserted that school leaders should strive to ensure student disciplinary issues do not impede classroom instruction. Unfortunately, the disruptive behavior steals time, energy, and resources from other students in the form of lost instructional time and wreaks an emotional toll on classroom teachers (Rainbolt et al., 2019). In theory, most discipline systems are designed to concentrate on student misbehavior, which is a learning barrier (Brasof, 2019). These punitive approaches are not valid at reducing school discipline trends over time (Brasof, 2019; Sliva & Plassmeyer, 2020). Exclusionary discipline practices erode trust and

decrease the educational environment's quality (Rainbolt et al., 2019). Moreover, research shows that school students who receive harsh discipline consequences have a much greater risk of lower achievement levels future delinquency and are more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system (Gomez et al., 2020). Restorative practices are experiencing an increase in prominence primarily attributed to the realization that inequalities and injustices exist within the school environment and discipline practices (Velez et al., 2020).

Brasof (2019) studied the effects of a school-based, peer-peer discipline program known as youth court and how it reduced the discipline trend and recidivism. Because many schools within the United States have a punish-then-exclude policy when dealing with student discipline issues, students are forced to learn certain expectations without assistance from responsible adults or, most importantly, peers meeting and to exceed these standards (Brasof, 2019). One of the crucial concepts of any discipline program is to present and maintain equity and fairness (Tiarks, 2019). Although this could be a problematic and subjective undertaking, using a restorative approach to drive behavioral outcomes is ideal for ensuring consistency and proportionality across the school for all students (Tiarks, 2019). Further, a restorative approach can be fully realized by enlisting stakeholders' counsel to clarify a decision-making process (Tiarks, 2019). Overall, the preponderance of evidence advocates a downward trend in racial disproportionality and other discipline gaps (Rainbolt et al., 2019). Additionally, implementing a restorative approach improves school culture, decreases exclusionary discipline, and many other positive student outcomes (Rainbolt et al., 2019).

The main goal for any discipline program should be to increase students' capacity to self-regulate their behaviors (Brasof, 2019). When schools overly rely on exclusionary discipline practices, the prevalence of suspended students in the juvenile justice system increases

dramatically (Ross & Muro, 2020; Schiff, 2018). These suspensions are often for "minor" disciplinary infractions that were non-violent (Schiff, 2018). Schiff (2018) contended that "there is no scientific evidence that zero-tolerance or other harsh discipline policies increase school safety or foster academic achievement." The intended outcome of an effective restorative practices program is defined by: (a) a focus on the harm done, (b) understanding that wrongs or harms result in obligations, and (c) the promotion of engagement and participation of affected individuals (Zehr, 2015).

Current research notes that individuals with a growth mindset viewed rehabilitation and education more favorably, whereas individuals with a fixed mindset preferred punishment and consequences (Moss et al., 2019; Ross & Muro, 2020). Unfortunately, sometimes individuals that have been subject to a strict, punitive behavioral model will prefer this process rather than a restorative approach that assists in repairing damaged relationships (Lyubansky & Barter, 2019). Research conducted by Lyubansky and Barter (2019) asserted individuals prefer being punished, as opposed to using a restorative approach, due to the level of comfort and predictability that comes with such a system. Moreover, this ill-advised process displaces responsibility from the offender and has the potential to create a victimization mindset (Lyubansky & Barter, 2019). Consequently, exclusionary discipline practices have been shown to widen further the achievement and discipline gap between Caucasian students and their minority counterparts (Gomez et al., 2020). Further, research has disproven the idea that retributive punishment for infractions equates to law-abiding behavior (Schiff, 2018). According to research by Dhaliwal et al. (2021) a majority of educators (71%) do not believe or believe to a slight degree that punitive discipline policies are effective at maintaining school order and improving student behavioral outcomes.

When individuals commit an infraction against others, reparations must be made to correct the damage done to the relationship (Kirkwood & Hamad, 2019). Although many individuals relate reparations to material goods, the most beneficial restoration comes from the offender offering symbolic restoration, usually in emotional peace (Bashizi et al., 2020). This places the importance on repairing both parties' relationships: the offended and the offender (Kirkwood & Hamad, 2019). This reparation can sometimes extend to larger social and community circles in which the individuals belong (Kirkwood & Hamad, 2019). Juergensmeyer (2020) refered to these social-community circles as webs, and their connections allow individuals to develop meaningful, long-lasting relationships that can be supportive during times of need. Further, Juergensmeyer (2020) contended "the more we build and restore the webs that contain our stories and values," the more we can restore meaningful relationships (p. 177). Research supports the position that restorative justice more comprehensively addresses the victim's needs throughout the reparation process (Bashizi et al., 2020).

Summary

Gordon's (1981) parent effectiveness training theory (PET) and subsequently the teacher effectiveness training theory (TET) provide the framework for the study with professional development or training considered to be the most influential part of empowering teachers with vital professional development on a wide range of topics to improve relationships and student behavior. PET and TET's overall aims are to cultivate a mutually inclusive democratic experience for students and the adults in the current setting (Gordon, 1981). Restorative practices further this position by repairing the damage done to relationships when conflict arises (van Alphen, 2015). After reviewing pertinent literature on restorative practices, the PET/TET

theoretical framework developed by Gordon (1981) was determined to align with teacher experiences within the alternative education setting.

To establish a reliable restorative approach within an educational setting, explicit professional development must be present (Garnett et al., 2020; González et al., 2018; Vaandering, 2019). This professional development must provide examples teachers can employ within their classrooms to elicit buy-in to the restorative approach (Garnett et al., 2020). This research is further affirmed by Cook et al. (2018). Using professional development in a focused manner will result in a greater appreciation of the restorative process from all stakeholders. Additionally, Fronious et al. (2019) contended that when schools take intentional initial steps during the implementation period, these investments will pay off with an increased restorative approach efficacy. Perhaps, the most beneficial of these intentional steps include reviewing all available student discipline data (Reed et al., 2020); when using a data-informed approach to make an informed decision, a more comprehensive discipline policy can be drafted (Reed et al., 2020).

Often an overlooked factor in building cohesiveness and buy-in within a school is the personnel decisions and hiring practices that comprise these choices. Laura (2018) posited that when school administrators are eyeing personnel decisions, an emphasis should be placed on how well the prospective candidates will mesh with the school's initiative and the surrounding community. However, before being employed as professional educators, many pre-service teachers receive vital training on restorative practices to meet their future students' needs (Silverman & Mee, 2018). During these preparation courses, future teachers are provided with specialized training to address their students' social and emotional needs first instead of their academic needs (Silverman & Mee, 2018).

When schools provide investments in a restorative process, the teachers have a better outlook on implementing and carrying out the intended goals (Winn, 2018). The teacher experience in utilizing this approach is directly transferred to the students they serve (Ingraham et al., 2016). Further, when teachers arrange their classrooms into a student-friendly environment, Van den Berg et al. (2017) contended that students will have better grades, improved mental health, and positive behavioral outcomes. Improving academic and behavioral outcomes is due to increased empowerment within students due to restorative practices implementation (Lohmeyer, 2017; Van den Berg et al., 2017). When schools shift away from traditional, arcane discipline tactics that focus on exclusion to a more caring, nurturing, supportive approach, individuals will display tremendous success and achievement (Lohmeyer, 2017).

After reviewing literature related to a restorative approach, a gap has been identified. Although much research can be found regarding the merits of using a restorative approach in bringing forth change on several issues, including disproportionality and the presence of a "school to prison pipeline," this study does not investigate these concerns. Instead, this transcendental phenomenological study explores teachers' experiences as a result of receiving professional development in utilizing a restorative practices approach within their classroom. Since there is scant research concerned with professional development surrounding implementing a restorative approach, this study will provide necessary information to teacher experiences and the needed professional development to ensure successful implementation.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological research was to investigate the experiences of alternative education teachers using restorative practices to manage student behavior. This chapter presents the research methodology utilized to explore teacher experiences while employing a restorative approach in managing student behaviors at an alternative public school in a rural northern Florida school district. The sections found within this chapter include the research design, research questions, setting, research participants, and the procedures for conducting the research. Data collection items and analysis were conducted with the Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) *ATLAS.ti 9*. Further, the findings' trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, and transferability are located within this chapter. This research will guide future classroom management training opportunities in the host school district.

Design

For this research, a qualitative study utilizing the phenomenological design investigated alternative education teachers' experiences using a restorative approach to addressing student behavioral needs. Check and Schutt (2012) contended qualitative research is designed to capture reality by studying participants' experiences. In this study, the alternative school teacher experiences in using restorative practices was encapsulated through interviews, focus group interviews, and observations. A hermeneutical phenomenological research design was chosen for this study because the researcher was concerned with interpreting the lived experiences of the people involved in the shared phenomena of using restorative practices within an alternative school (van Manen, 2014).

Researchers are posed with three options to structure their research design when conducting research. These options are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), quantitative research is concerned with answering questions using observable and measured data to examine a sample population's effects. In contrast, qualitative research provides an interpretive lens to human experience or situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study's research design was phenomenological design to investigate the shared phenomenon of using restorative practices within an alternative setting.

For a few reasons, the phenomenological research design was most appropriate for understanding the lived experiences of alternative education teachers using a restorative practices approach in managing student behavior. First, phenomenologists are concerned with removing all prejudgments and biases to openly and honestly view the lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). This research was designed to understand alternative education teachers' authentic experiences using the restorative practices approach in their classroom. Second, Moustakas (1994) suggested within transcendental phenomenology, "all objects of knowledge must conform to experience" (p. 44).

Further, van Manen (2014) contended that phenomenology is a process for intelligent questioning, not a method to answer, discover, or draw "determinate conclusions" (p. 29). More specifically, transcendental phenomenology attempts to bring about a deeper human understanding of the shared experience (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, I used the transcendental phenomenological research design to understand alternative education teachers' experience using a restorative approach to manage student behavior.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are alternative teachers' experiences in using a restorative practices approach for addressing student behavior?

Sub-Question One

What are the perceptions of alternative education teachers regarding professional development on restorative practices?

Sub-Question Two

How have teacher perceptions shaped the teacher-student relationship?

Sub-Question Three

How have teacher-student relationship experiences shaped teacher expectations of future student behavior?

Participants

The participants in this research study were volunteers who are currently part of the instructional staff at Peaceful Transitions School (a pseudonym). The researcher utilized the purposive sampling type for this study and selected 10 instructional members of Peaceful Transitions to participate or until saturation is reached (Polkinghorne, 1989). This sampling of participants satisfies Creswell and Poth's (2018) requirement of interviewing between 5 and 25 individuals when conducting a phenomenological research study. Patton (2015) contended that purposive sampling techniques center on selecting individual cases robust in information to understand the research questions within the study better. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), when conducting phenomenological research "it is essential that all participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied" (p. 157).

These individuals were selected by convenience because they represent the entire instructional personnel at this school. They each have experienced the phenomenon of using a restorative approach to addressing student behaviors (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each participant received financial compensation in a gift card for their participation in the study. The participants that volunteered are 11 instructional members at Peaceful Transitions School. Amongst the participants in this study, 64% (7 of 11) were female, and 36% (4 of 11) were male. A slight majority of participants held master's degrees (55%) compared to 45% with bachelor's degrees. The majority of participants are relatively new to the teaching profession with 0 to 5 years of experience (36%),and 27.3% of participants hae either 6-10 years of experience or 11-15 years of experience. Only 9% of the participants had more than 15 years of experience.

Setting

Peaceful Transitions School was chosen for this study based on several reasons. First, Peaceful Transitions is a stand-alone alternative educational facility designed to support the academic and behavioral needs of roughly 100 students in special education and general education environments (Pleasant Valley School District, 2020, pseudonym for school district). Second, this school contained students in all grades, kindergarten through twelfth grade, with several teachers providing instruction for elementary and secondary populations (Pleasant Valley School District, 2020). Third, this school has been using a restorative practices approach to improving student behavior for the past three years (Pleasant Valley School District, 2020). According to the Pleasant Valley School District website (2020), the leadership team within this school consists of the principal, behavioral resource teacher (B.R.T.), staffing specialist (that is trained in developing behavior plans), as well as a school resource deputy. Additionally, 11 teachers provide a traditional format (brick and mortar) as well as a hybrid (online) piece of

instruction.

Procedures

In a letter, I requested permission from the district superintendent to conduct phenomenological research at Peaceful Transitions School to understand alternative teacher experiences using a restorative approach to managing student discipline. Further, I requested the superintendent notify me of their decision by letter prepared on district letterhead (See Appendix B). Once I received the superintendent's decision letter (See Appendix C), permission was gained from the school's principal (See Appendix D). The school administration for Peaceful Transitions School is on the district website (Pleasant Valley School District, 2020). After receiving approval from the principal (See Appendix E), I sought permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University. After receiving IRB approval (See Appendix A), I provided a list to the principal of Peaceful Transitions School of the criteria for the selection of the prospective participants (See Appendix G). Next, these potential participants were contacted and given the consent forms (See Appendix H) needed to participate in the study.

Before interviewing the participants, I consulted with several educational experts to review each interview question. These experts were employees of the same school district, and all have earned doctoral degrees within education. Each participant involved in this study completed a research demographics questionnaire (See Appendix I). This questionnaire was intended to gather specific demographic information for the study participants. The absence of such information could have potentially caused researchers to develop absolutism, which believes that observed phenomena are uniform across all cultures, races, and ethnicities (Scheffner-Hammer, 2011). According to Kanim & Cid (2020), this added step ensures the data collected during research "fairly represents the research target." Moreover, Does et al. (2018)

argue that research demographics are vitally crucial to the overall efficacy of the study and have significant psychological implications. These social groupings influence how research participants view themselves, interact with others, and shape thoughts and behaviors (Does et al., 2018).

At this stage in the study, questions were edited and reworded for clarity and pointedness (Check & Schutt, 2012). Once this was completed, I began the interviews. At this time, I reminded participants that their participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that they were free to remove themselves from the study without fear of penalty or retribution. The two focus group interviews were conducted in the succession of one another on the same day in the school's cafeteria after dismissal for the day. Each group was composed of six randomly assigned participants by placing slips of paper with their names on them, putting these slips in a bag, and then drawing names.

Each participant was allotted 30 minutes to answer ten interview questions for the interviews. These interviews were conducted in an office located inside the school library, where participants will be free from distractions. Before both interview sessions, the focus group and interviews, participants were informed regarding their confidentiality and the presence of an audio recording device that will be strictly used to transcribe the interview sessions, code the audio data, and complete a data review. The researcher's cellular telephone served as the audio recording device by utilizing the audio recording feature for this study. When the cellular phone was utilized, the device was put into airplane mode, notifications disabled and placed face down on the table to ensure the environment is conducive to collecting data. After each interview session, participants were thanked for their voluntary participation in this study and the

confidentiality of the information they provided. After all interviews, the recording was uploaded to for coding, organization of themes, and audio data analysis.

The Researcher's Role

As the human instrument, the one collecting data, interviewing participants within this study, and analyzing the collected data, it is imperative that I acknowledged and expressed my biases as well as assumptions concerning the phenomenon of alternative teachers using a restorative approach to managing student behavior (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My bias with this research is that restorative practice is a practical approach to reducing students' behavioral issues. Further, this bias extends to initially using the restorative approach rather than going straight to previously used exclusionary discipline practices like suspension.

For this research, I utilized a qualitative design, specifically a hermeneutical phenomenological study, to capture alternative education teachers' experiences and shape their relationships with their students. According to van Manen (2014), "hermeneutic phenomenology is a method of abstemious reflection on the basic structures of the lived experience of human existence" (p. 26). Further, van Manen (2014) contended that phenomenological analysis should gather relevant empirical information such as memories of experiences instead of perceptions, beliefs, or views to investigate a question within phenomenology. Additionally, researchers using a phenomenological design should concentrate on the "lived experience descriptions (L.E.D.s)" to gather material to answer the research question (van Manen, 2014, p. 298).

My role in this phenomenological research study was to observe classroom teachers' experiences in an alternative setting using restorative practices. I did not have any relationship with the participants within this study. According to Punch (1998), the researcher should closely guard against becoming a research group member. Although I am employed within the same

district as Peaceful Transitions School, I did not have any authority over the principal's decisions at this campus. Further, my professional relationship with the principal was not a factor due to their exclusion from the study as an administrator.

During the study's data collection and analysis phase, my bias was limited due to the audio recording of interviews (both individual and focus group) and the protocol used to record notes. The most important aspect of conducting qualitative research with a phenomenological design is to capture participants' lived experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Providing transcripts of the audio recordings ensured bias is limited for the research's data analysis portion (Sutton & Austin, 2015). To establish trustworthiness in the findings, I solicited another researcher's assistance to code the notes generated from the classroom observations (Sutton & Austin, 2015). For the interviews (individual and focus group), I used the data analysis software ATLAS.ti 9 to organize data and assist with coding the data for themes.

Data Collection

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), interviews are critical in the data collection process in phenomenological research. This study utilized both the individual interview and focus group interview formats. Additionally, a third data point, observations, were used to triangulate the findings.

Archival

According to Cypress (2018), "observation is one of the important methods for collecting qualitative research data that provides here-and-now experience in depth. It is noting a phenomenon through the five senses and recording it for scientific purposes" (p. 306). In conducting observations, the researcher can observe the participants in their natural environment provide firsthand knowledge of what is happening in the field (Cypress, 2018). Further, these

experiences should be described in a factual, accurate, and thorough process (Cypress, 2018).

The purpose of collecting observation data is to provide an additional point for triangulation and

establish credibility with the findings.

Although conducting in-person observations to collect data is desired, sometimes this is

not feasible due to various factors. In recent years, archival data has been experiencing a surge in

usefulness (Corti, 2007). The secondary analysis has proven beneficial to qualitative researchers

for two main reasons: coding software has improved to more closely mine for additional data and

the potential to compare archival data to more current observation data (Corti, 2007). This

secondary analysis or re-analysis allows researchers to comb through previously analyzed data

with the intent to maximize total benefits from all sources (McLeod & O'Connor, 2020).

Fortunately, Pleasant Valley School District had previously conducted classroom observations

and captured data through audio recordings of restorative practices at Peaceful Transitions

School. This was due, in large part, to Pleasant Valley School District conducting an extensive

review of discipline practices to ensure disproportionality numbers remained in check. For this

study, the researcher utilized the archival data collected by Pleasant Valley School District.

This study utilized archival audio recordings collected by the Pleasant Valley School

District to understand the interaction between teachers and students when using a restorative

approach to managing student behavior. These archived recordings were collected to reduce

student discipline referrals, improve behavior, and assist in positive teacher-student interactions.

According to Hammersley (1997), archival data serves to main functions that are beneficial for

research. First, archival data provides an opportunity for reanalysis of data by additional

researchers that were not involved in the original study; second, the archival data provides

researchers with an additional set of data to supplement their study or conduct an individual

historical, comparative meta-analysis (Hammersley, 1997). A copy of the archival data provided by Pleasant Valley School District was used for this study.

Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with each participant. An audio recording device was used during each interview to record the answers for future transcription (Appendix J) and analysis with the ATLAS.ti 9 Qualitative Data Analysis Software. These interviews lasted thirty minutes and were comprised of ten interview questions. Each participant was asked the same ten items in chronological order.

1. Please introduce yourself to me and state your grade band (elementary or secondary) and your years of experience. (Central Research Question)

2. What prompted you to teach at an alternative school? (Central Research Question)

3. How many years of teaching experience do you have? (Sub Question 2)

    a. At this school?

    b. In an alternative setting

4. Tell me about the first time you heard the term restorative practices. (Sub Question 1)

5. Describe the professional development or training you have received on the topic of restorative practices. (Sub Question 1)

6. Tell me about the first time you used the restorative practices approach to address student behavior. (Sub Question 1)

7. Please describe any unpleasant or encouraging experiences with students using restorative practices. (Sub Question 3)

8. Tell me about your typical day in your classroom, managing student behaviors. (Sub Question 3)

9. How have restorative practices shaped your relationships with your students? (Central Research Question)

10. Overall, how would you describe your experiences using restorative practices to manage student behavior? (Sub Question 3)

The first three questions were not phenomenological questions but rather general research questions designed to gather information (van Manen, 2014). Additionally, these questions allowed the researcher to develop rapport with the participants during the individual interview stage to improve comfortability to elicit more detailed responses (Moustakas, 1994). According to Check and Schutt (2012), interview questions should be relatively short and straight to the point. Further, van Manen (2014) posited that phenomenological questions do not seek opinions or beliefs; instead, this research focuses on items that elicit teacher experiences using restorative practices. These initial questions provided vital information to assist in understanding each participant's background within the study (Gall et al., 2006).

According to van Manen (2014), question four is essential in that it is "trying to elicit the beginning of the experience of restorative practices" (p. 299). Questions five through nine examine the participant's vulnerability with the shared experience of using restorative practices to address student behavior. These questions were presented to capture participant experiences with the phenomenon of restorative practice use within an alternative setting. As for question 10, this question prompted the participant to examine their understanding through reflection (van Manen, 2014).

During this study, interviews were conducted with each of the participants. These structured interviews lasted around 30 minutes and consist of a predetermined list of 10 questions. Each participant was asked the same 10 questions. Moustakas (1994) contended the

researcher must develop a pre-set list of questions to guide the interview session, which is focused on a bracketed topic and question. During the individual interview sessions, data was collected by an audio recording device to create a file loaded into the Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) (See Appendix L).

Focus Groups

This research phase is specifically conducted to elicit maximum cooperation with the participants because the researcher will have interviewed and conducted classroom observations of each individual. Focus group interviews lasted 30 minutes in duration. The second focus group interview commenced immediately following the first focus group interview to limit group questions. For this portion of the study, the 10 participants were randomly assigned to two focus groups consisting of four participants each and one group comprised of three participants. These groups were formed by placing their names in an envelope and drawing four names each time. The first four names selected were assigned to focus group one, the second four chosen names will be assigned to focus group two, and the three names that remained in the envelope was assigned to focus group three. All three groups were given the same questions during their focus group interview. Data collected through the focus group (Appendix M) interview was loaded into the QDAS for analysis and coding into the specific themes of materiality and relationality (van Manen, 2014). The information captured from the focus interviews was analyzed separately from the individual interviews and then compared for similar themes to be categorized.

1. Describe the interactions between teachers and students *before* using restorative practices at Peaceful Transitions School. (Sub Question 3)

2. Describe the professional development experience surrounding restorative practices. (Sub Question 1)

3. How have these interactions changed *after* using restorative practices? (Sub Question 2)

4. Based on your experiences, what advice would you offer to others considering a restorative approach to student behavior? (Central Research Question)

5. In what areas of the professional development process could the experience be improved? (Sub Question 1)

During the study's focus group portion, the researcher divided the 10 participants into two groups of three participants each and one group of four. These focus group interviews were 30 minutes in duration. These interviews consisted of three to five open-ended questions (same questions for each focus group) specifically designed to elicit maximum participation in the discussion. The selection of these focus group questions were based on previous data collected from interviews and classroom observations. Further, Rosenthal (2016) stated "focus groups are structurally similar to in-depth interviews in the sense that they are comprised of open-ended questions designed to capture the in-depth experiences of respondents" (p. 510). These interviews were audio-recorded, and the raw data was loaded into the software for coding into themes (Appendix M).

Data Analysis

To achieve a successful phenomenological data analysis, van Manen (2014) contended two critical components must be completed. First, an appropriate phenomenological question must be asked. This question should have the correct clarity, point, and power for analysis or risk failing to lack a reflective focus (van Manen, 2014). Second, the question must elicit enough "experiential material" to conduct reflection (van Manen, 2014, p. 297).

Moustakas (1994) believed that researchers must first set aside their biases and preconceptions before analysis within phenomenological research. This process is known as

Epoché. Next, the researcher used phenomenological reduction to examine both the phenomenon being observed and the researcher's connectedness to the experience. Next, the researcher examined different perspectives of the lived experience and the possible meanings as a process known as imaginative variation. At this time, themes in the data began to emerge. Once this was completed, the researcher used the collected and refined information to synthesize the explored phenomenon.

Flick (2013) furthered this position and contended that several steps should be followed to analyze data within a phenomenological study to ensure collected information is evaluated correctly accurately. These steps consist of the following elements: (a) Bracketing. This technique consists of researchers outlining biases, assumptions, and predispositions about the presence of a particular interest phenomenon to remain impartial to the collected information results; (b) Hermeneutic Circle. This process entails the reflection of the collected data. During this process, researchers examined the parts of the whole data and back again. This zooming in and out allowed the researchers to understand how components are interconnected; (c) Horizons of Meaning. This involved reviewing the information to distinguish between the meaning of individual components of the lived experience investigated; (d) Writing. Researchers have analyzed the collected information and began writing the findings during this stage. There was an extensive amount of writing and rewriting during this stage.

Moustakas (1994) furthered this phenomenological analysis with modifications of van Kaam and the Stevick, Collaizi, and Keen Methods of Analysis Models. The main goal of these modifications was to formulate both individual textural and individual structural descriptions; generate composite textural and structural descriptions. In the end, the researcher synthesized all the textural and structural meanings generated from the recorded experience.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), researchers working in qualitative data analysis often conflate the analysis process with specific approaches used to analyze text and image data. However, this process was much more complicated because appropriate data analysis required organizing the data, coding and arranging the themes, making representations of the data, and forming preliminary interpretations of the collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data collected from interviews, observations, and focus group interviews allowed different aspects of the same phenomenon to be captured and further analyzed during this research process.

According to Saldaña (2021), the first phase of analyzing data should utilize open-ended coding because this technique is most appropriate for nearly all qualitative research studies. The data was reviewed for recurring themes for this qualitative research study. Saldaña (2021) contended that themes that assist in answering research questions are the primary criteria for their place in the data analysis process. Further, the development of themes reflected the descriptions of behavior within the context being studied, iconic statements, and morals originating from participants' stories (Saldaña, 2021). Moreover, themes derived from the data analysis process received further examination during the interview process (Saldaña, 2021).

Archival

Since I am an employee of the Pleasant Valley School District, I was granted access to audio recordings that were previously used to improve instruction and educator quality. These archival recordings were captured at Peaceful Transitions School to provide quality educational training materials. Additionally, the staff at Peaceful Transitions School used these recordings to review their interactions with their students to improve relationship building. The archived audio recordings from Pleasant Valley School District was transcribed and analyzed through the Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) (Appendix I). The transcription and subsequent data

analysis developed themes coded into categories for deeper analysis (van Manen, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). These themes were utilized to identify recurring patterns.

Interviews

The QDAS is a sophisticated software specifically designed to assist researchers in arranging, reassembling, and managing qualitative data sets in various formats, including audio and text and several graphic and graphic video formats (ATLAS.ti GmbH, 2020). The themes explored during this data analysis were coded into categories for further investigation (van Manen, 2014; Moustakas, 1994).

Focus Groups

The focus group data corroborated and develop patterns and themes that emerge during raw data analysis (Patton, 2015). Moreover, this raw data allowed the researcher to develop a textural description of the participants' lived experience and generate a structural description of the condition, situation, and conditions experienced during the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

According to Nickasch et al. (2016) and Cope (2014), trustworthiness can be achieved to establish the research findings' integrity and usefulness. Further, Guba and Lincoln (1989) contended that the "method is critical for ensuring that the results are trustworthy" (p. 245). To establish trustworthiness in this research study, the researcher implemented several processes to ensure confidence in the data, interpretation, and methods used. More specifically, the researcher ensured the study is conducted correctly. The trustworthiness elements in this study's credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability will be addressed below.

Credibility

According to Polit and Beck (2014), a study's credibility refers to having confidence the findings represent the study's truth. Further, credibility is described as having the capacity to which a research process can generate results that will bring about a belief and trust (O'Leary, 2007). The researcher conducted an audio recording of all individual and focus group interviews for transcription and maintain observation notes that were reviewed by participants prior to data analysis to ensure this study's credibility. This procedure allowed for member checks of captured raw data to safeguard the integrity of the information collected. The process of member checking involved the primary researcher sharing the anonymous, unidentifiable collected data from the current study with their colleague(s) to review the findings, receive feedback, and create a discussion with someone within the field being studied (Rose & Johnson, 2020). It is essential to understand that multiple data collection forms are needed to achieve triangulation (Polit & Beck, 2014). Therefore, several forms of data were utilized to improve this study's credibility. To achieve triangulation of data, archival data, interviews, and focus group interviews. These processes assisted in providing accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Dependability and Confirmability

Polit and Beck (2014) contended that dependability is contingent on two factors. These factors are the constancy of the data over time and the context in which the study occurs. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), research dependability is concerned with how the same methods used within the same situation with the same participants will render comparable findings. To ensure this study is dependable over time, the researcher will keep the raw data from focus groups, interviews, and archival data from the audio files. In keeping a record of this data,

other researchers will have the ability to conduct an audit of the collected information and replicate this study in the future.

Further, participants were allowed to complete a member check of the collected raw data before any completed analysis. Adhering to this process, coupled with the researcher's data analysis, established the findings' confirmability and dependability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, an unbiased external auditor will provide an objective evaluation of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transferability

According to Polit and Beck (2014) and Cope (2014), transferability is essential in qualitative research due to readers' ability to apply the information reported to their situation. Cope (2014) contended that "researchers should provide sufficient information on the informants and the research context to enable the reader to assess the findings' capability of being "fit" or transferable" (p. 89). To achieve transferability, detailed transcripts of the raw data from individual and focus group interviews were provided to readers with extensive information to associate the findings with their own experience (Cope, 2014).

Ethical Considerations

Before beginning this study, the researcher applied to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to gain permission to research human subjects. Before beginning the data collection process, ethical issues and primarily qualitative research was considered. According to Mauthner et al. (2012), ethical problems arise throughout the research process. Because of these issues, researchers must be cognizant of and adhere to strict protocols in handling data derived from the study (Mauthner et al., 2012). Before commencing research, the investigator must

understand and decide how to handle all study elements, including data collection, storage, analysis, and personally identifiable information (Mauthner et al., 2012).

This study is keeping audio data from the individual and focus group interviews secured through encryption embedded within the coding software. The raw observation data is kept in a notebook containing pseudonyms of participants (and the setting) within the study. This notebook, along with the observation data notebook, is being kept with the researcher.

After permission was granted, individuals at the selected site were given the informed consent document, which outlined their participation in this study was entirely voluntary (See Appendix G) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were notified of the study's general-purpose (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Before participating in the study, a signed consent form was obtained from all participants. Peaceful Transitions School's pseudonym was given to the alternative school to be utilized for this study's purpose. Further, the participants' interviews, observations, and transcripts will continue to remain anonymous. While analyzing data, all perspectives generated from the research process were presented (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This labeling only saved the audio file to upload later into the coding software. Another precaution was password protection for the audio recording device and the coding software. Additionally, there were no further personally-identifying information during this course of the research.

During the focus group portion of the study, participants were assigned to three groups. Two groups contained four participants and one group contained three participants. This had the potential to present a confidentiality challenge in that members of each respective group were privy to the information shared during that focus group session. The researcher discussed the importance of respecting the opinions discussed during the focus group interview session to

address this potential issue. Further, conversations from the focus group interviews were recorded using an audio recorder and then uploaded into the coding software.

In all phases of this study, the participants were treated with dignity respect, and no deceptive tactics were employed by the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, participants were compensated for their voluntary involvement in this research. Further, the researcher did not collect nor store personally identifying information for this study; any data collected is stored securely on a personal computer with password protection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This collected data will continue to be kept in a secure place for five years from now; once this period expires, the data will be destroyed according to proper procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Summary

This chapter provided the primary methodological components of a phenomenological research design that attended to the essential need for empirical research on providing professional development to alternative education teachers to fully implement a restorative approach to address student behaviors. Moreover, this study used the phenomenological approach to research teacher experiences using a restorative approach to resolving student behaviors (Mayworm et al., 2016). The information gleaned from this study helped to better understand the professional development needed to implement a restorative approach effectively in an educational setting. This chapter also addressed the researcher's role, the context of the study, and the participants. Additionally, this chapter provided the measures of ethical protection implemented to ensure participant protections were strictly adhered to consistent with the I.R.B. requirements at Liberty University. The research collection method of private, individualized interviews, observations, and focus group interviews followed the hermeneutical guidelines

discussed by van Manen (2014) when conducting a phenomenological research design. The data

collected during this study was analyzed to achieve triangulation, which involved developing

themes through coding.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter examines the experiences of the 10 participants interviewed for this study. The questions asked were derived from a phenomenological foundation within Gordon's (1974, 2003) framework of TET and the reliance on cultivating meaningful relationships to form bonds that strengthen all members within the community. Although the experiences captured from this phenomenological study are exclusive to each individual, similar concepts and themes emerged regarding relationship development.

Participants

Each participant learned of the study by directly contacting me by signing the consent form. Participants were all from Peaceful Transitions School and are instructional faculty members for this study. For this research, no administrative personnel were included as prospective participants. This study's phenomenological study results were developed through archival audio recordings from Pleasant Valley School District, individual interviews, and focus group interviews from the faculty members at Peaceful Transitions.

By design, I specifically included only individuals from Peaceful Transitionsl that: (a) were faculty members located at Peaceful Transitions, and (b) had reached at least the age of 18. This sample of participants consisted of six female faculty members and four male faculty members ranging in age 33-61 years old. The teaching experience of these participants ranged from new teachers with zero years of experience to more than 15 years of teaching experience. Further, these participants had bachelor's and master's degrees.

Table 1.

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	Highest Degree Attained	Years of Teaching Experience
John	Male	51	Master's	6 to 10
Sally	Female	33	Bachelor's	0 to 5
Joan	Female	38	Master's	6 to 10
Fran	Female	57	Bachelor's	6 to 10
Mark	Male	64	Bachelor's	15+
Dawn	Female	61	Bachelor's	11 to 15
Mike	Male	33	Bachelor's	0 to 5
Annette	Female	40	Master's	0 to 5
Deborah	Female	46	Master's	11 to 15
Alan	Male	59	Master's	11 to 15

Participant Narratives

John is a 51-year-old white male that is a teacher after retiring from a corporate job. Currently, John has less than 10 years of teaching experience, all within an alternative setting, but only two years at Peaceful Transitions. He has experienced many students, fellow teachers, and school administrators pass through the school. Despite not receiving training from an educational college, John has a keen sense of what students are faced with daily and how to reach them:

> I'll be honest with you. Utilizing restorative practices makes your job so easy. … when you don't take the time to invest in the relationship, you're killing yourself because I promise you there are more dividends to be gained in the student relationship …

Sally is a 33-year-old African-American woman. Although her teaching experience is limited to less than five years, Sally makes up for this with prior law enforcement experience.

Just like working in law enforcement, Sally is committed to building solid relationships with her students to maximize their abilities and ensure that she understands the pulse of her classroom. Sally recalled a time in which one of her students brought an inappropriate object to school:

> I had a student that, you know, brought something to school that he wasn't supposed to. … All the other kids thought that it would be just a whole big deal. Oh, he couldn't come to school and he [about] blow up on you. And when he came back to school, and the students brought it up, he corrected them and shut down the discussion.

Joan is a 38-year old Caucasian female with eight years of teaching experience. Before teaching at Peaceful Transitions, Joan taught in an elementary school in an adjacent county. Her love for teaching has grown over the years and has earned her a master's degree in instructional leadership. During her time as an elementary school teacher, Joan had encountered students with severe behavioral and emotional issues and was intrigued by how to assist them in reaching their full potential. After a few years teaching in a traditional elementary school, Joan decided to be employed at Peaceful Transitions to learn techniques to improve behavior with struggling students.

Fran is a 57-year old Caucasian female with 10 years of teaching experience in Florida. Before teaching in Florida, Fran taught in several places in the north and Midwest, including a long-term substitute in Indiana. Fran has been teaching at Peaceful Transitions for the past eight years. Before coming to Peaceful Transitions, Fran taught at another school within the district for one year. Fran mentioned that she likes the small, close-knit community at Peaceful Transitions for faculty and students. Fran believes that the use of restorative practices at Peaceful Transitions is a significant factor in the strength of her relationships with her students.

Mark is a 64-year old Caucasian male with over 15 years of teaching experience. Mark has approximately 34 years (maybe more by his account) of teaching experience in several stated, including four years in Texas and at least one year in Michigan. During his time at Peaceful Transitions, Mark has amassed 14 years of teaching and has 19 additional years teaching in south Florida. Mark admitted that he has enjoyed his time at Peaceful Transitions, but his opportunity to teach there began as a fluke. His wife was looking for a job when they moved up from south Florida, and during the interview process, it was discovered that Mark was also a teacher. Word spread, and Mark accepted a job at Peaceful Transitions. Mark has enjoyed his time and will finish his teaching career within this alternative school setting.

Dawn is a 61-year old Caucasian female. At this time, she has over 20 years of teaching experience. Dawn has taught at all levels and subject areas during her teaching career. However, she has spent much of her time working in special education classrooms with elementary-aged students. Dawn likes the atmosphere at Peaceful Transitions primarily due to balancing being proactive with behavioral issues and then using restorative measures to reintegrate students once the situation has been resolved. Dawn especially believes that students can change their mindsets by implementing restorative measures.

Mike is a 33-year African-American male. Although Mike has limited teaching experience (0 to 5 years) in the traditional setting, he has practical experience from when he was enrolled in college. Before working at Peaceful Transitions, Mike served in various capacities with several different community groups while in college. Being a minority male and a student-athlete offered Mike a unique perspective to assist others that may need additional help.   Mike chose to work at Peaceful Transitions because he was born and raised in this area and had a personal relationship with the current principal. The current principal was one of his teachers,

and when Mike returned from college, "it [was] the best fit for me at the time" to join the faculty at Peaceful Transitions.

Annette is a 40-year old Caucasian female with a master's degree. Annette is a trained counselor specializing in elementary-aged children's mental health, unlike the other faculty members at Peaceful Transitions. At Peaceful Transitions, Annette has experienced several uncomfortable situations with staff and students alike. Annette facilitated a restorative circle to resolve a mutually positive outcome for both individuals in one specific occurrence. Annette worked with the school administration to ensure these practices were implemented throughout the school.

Deborah is a 46-year old African-American female with more than 10 years of teaching experience. Since Deborah arrived at Peaceful Transitions, she has been primarily focused on working with elementary-aged students in a self-contained ESE classroom. In this capacity, Deborah has worked very closely with students to modify their behavior when it impedes their learning. Fortunately, Deborah has additional staff members to assist her in providing academic improvements and behavioral interventions. Deborah feels the restorative aspect used at Peaceful Transitions allows students to discuss what is going on when they have a meltdown from a behavior incident.

Alan is a 59-year old African-American male.Alan has a very diverse experience compared to that of the faculty members. First, Alan has only three years of teaching experience. Before coming to Peaceful Transitions, Alan served over 20 years in the United States Army and was a community pastor in several inner cities in the Midwest. Since he arrived at Peaceful Transitions, Alan has provided a valuable mentoring service. Additionally,Alan has been instrumental in establishing a restorative approach to student discipline at Peaceful Transitions.

Further, Alan has created a grass-roots system of support to assist students in managing their behavior.

Results

The results of this study yielded three themes: relationships, experiences, and understanding. These themes emerged through the analysis of archival audio recordings and both the collective and individual voices of the faculty members at Peaceful Transitions. Further, the information gathered through this research provides a profound perspective into their lived experiences as educators within an alternative learning facility. Research methods designed explicitly for phenomenological research steered data collection and the subsequent analysis. To study teachers' experiences in utilizing a restorative approach to improving student behaviors, I formed my research framework on the central research question "What are alternative education teachers' experiences in using a restorative practices approach for addressing student behavior?"

Theme 1: Relationships

Most of the participants in this study establish strong relationships with their students. Additionally, participants reported having a tight bond between the students and the school was one of the primary reasons restorative practices were beneficial. Further, the focus groups reported that building connections through relationships had made the school stronger and improved relationships between the adults and the students. One participant from Focus Group One commented on the importance of listening to students:

> And it's talking to them is building those relationships with kids and being willing to talk through their issues. … a fight that was going on all night long, and then all that emotionally deal with that, or they see the explosiveness of their mother or their father or their step-daddy or the man living in the house.

Further, another participant explained the importance of establishing strong, healthy relationships with their students:

> [T]hey have always worked based on relationships and, you know, trying to work with each child and transition them back to a regular school if they can. … our prevention is teaching them social skills to try and teach them how to express themselves before they get to the point of a blow-up.

After reviewing the transcripts, several other faculty members mentioned the necessity of forging strong relationships with students. These sentiments are further supported by the research of Pentón Herrera & McNair (2020), which indicates that building relationships are critical to students' overall success. Developing deep, robust connections has positive implications for student behavior and subsequent discipline, school culture, and community building.

Sub Theme 1: Effective Communication.   The first subtheme concerned effective communication. Several participants mentioned that once administration focused on having all stakeholders on the same page with a common language, vocabulary, and expectations concerning the implementation of restorative practices change began to occur. Specifically, one participant in Focus Group 1 mentioned that communication and student expectations were lacking prior to implementation of restorative practices. Once all stakeholders were on the same page, implementation was much improved and communication between stakeholders increased exponentially. The participant noted that through increased communication staff were able to "better deal with" anything that was presented to them.

Theme 2: Negative Interactions

For some of the faculty participants in the study, sharing their lived experiences assisted in providing a more positive result in their use of restorative practices. This same belief was

discussed during the focus group interviews. The audio transcripts from the individual and focus

groups revealed that individuals at the Peaceful Transitions relied heavily on prior occurrences to

resolve behavioral issues amongst students. Further, the previous negative interactions of the

study participants provided a basis for building personal capacity by using restorative practices.

Additionally, the participants acknowledged that prior undesirable experiences in addressing

student misbehavior affected their use of restorative practices. For instance, one participant noted

they must constantly be aware of the demographics of students they are serving. The participant

stated "I think it's something that we've always used in ESE because you're working with some

student populations that can be highly volatile." Thus, the presence of an effective method to

reduce volatility is an imperative component of successful behavioral intervention program.

Moreover, the same participant described how they picked up the pieces following an

explosive outburst from a student. These insights provide a valuable glimpse of how educators

trained in restorative practices view student misbehavior. These individuals have shown the

capacity to learn from prior negative interactions with student misbehavior and adjust how they

resolve situations with students after episodes. Further, these educators have developed skills to

assist students in becoming aware of their behavior through explicit skills being taught. Another

participant mentioned:

> So, you're dealing with that kind of population, not people who are purposely breaking
>
> rule and purposely doing that. … the best thing you can do is give them space and give
>
> them time and walk away from it.

One comment above is very telling to the reformed mindset of the teacher using

restorative practices compared their peer that uses traditional behavior reduction methods: "You

know, you just basically know that the best thing you can do is give them space and give them

time and walk away from it." Historically, the use of traditional discipline methods would have continued to have the teacher question the student for the behavioral outburst and proceed to back the student into a corner which, in turn, would more than likely lead to further disrespect and insubordination from the student. Unfortunately, this would trigger additional consequences for the student.

Sub Theme 2: Personal and Professional Experiences.

Participants noted that during the limited professional development they were thinking back to instances in which they dealt with either their personal children or students in their classroom over the years. One participant mentioned in the focus group that during the professional development training, they were asked to think of encounters with children over time. Further, individuals in the training were asked how they would have improved their encounter in hindsight now after knowing the outcome. Participants commented this exercise during the training led to a healthy discussion on how the use of restorative practices can decrease frustration while improving dialogue with students.

Theme 3: Understanding

All participants in both the individual interviews and the focus groups reported that having a better understanding of the antecedents for student behavior has improved overall outcomes at Peaceful Transitions. Participants contended that understanding gained through restorative practice exercises provided effective insight into potential causes of why students engage in certain behaviors. Once teachers understand possible reasons, they could assist students in working through issues and establishing positive outcomes. Unfortunately, it has become commonplace for our students to come to school distracted by a plethora of issues that had previously been reserved for adults. During Focus Group 1, one of the group members

discusses how many children come to school and have a difficult time just being a student and leaving the adult issues at home:

> … developing relationships and understanding what's going on with the child. Did he get any sleep last night? Does he have any family issues? You know, and they're like, can I, can I just lay my head down for like 20 minutes? … we have the ability on an individual basis to say, okay, it's okay to put your head down.

The other group members mention that utilizing a restorative approach provides an individualized behavioral intervention plan centered on each student. In this sense, equity in options is chosen over equality. After the conflict ends, teachers can pick up the pieces and assist the struggling student with restorative strategies. Further, this opens the door for the teacher and all students, not just the struggling student, to have difficult conversations regarding antecedents to behavior. Through these conversations, greater understanding can assist the next time.

Sub Theme 3: Empathy.Another participant in one of the focus groups commented that by reaching out and building relationships with their students, they were able to increase communication. The ensuing conversations provided a glimpse into the trials each student faces that result in barriers to their behavioral and academic success. Further, participants noted the increased compliance and vulnerability displayed by the students. Specifically, one participant stated that students also develop a conscious and self-awareness for their situation "I have seen [students] realize that, okay, I'm the cause of this problem and [I] can correct that." That is why this approach is effective: it leads to self-discovery and correction.

Sub Theme 4: Tolerance. In one particular focus group, participants discussed the importance that restorative practices have placed on improving dialogue and the flexibility to deal with situations that arise amongst students. With this new awareness of the challenges and improved

dialogue, participants noted they were more conscious of the tone to which they spoke to students as well as more likely to give students grace for minor infractions while at school. One participant stated "once we started the process of implementation, the faculty and staff began to be more accommodating to all students and more receptive to their individual needs and circumstances." This seemingly innocuous act has shown to increase acceptance and responsiveness of students to comply with requests.

Research Question Responses

One central research question and three sub research questions were developed to guide this phenomenological study to better understand how to manage student behavior through a restorative approach.

Central Research Question

What are alternative teachers' experiences in using a restorative practices approach for addressing student behavior? Participants noted that although they had not received formal training prior to teaching a Peaceful Transitions, they had previously informally utilized some principles of a restorative approach. One participant mentioned they had always "used some elements of a restorative approach over the years, but did not know these techniques had a specific name." Once this participant began teaching at Peaceful Transitions, a formal professional development training allowed for this understanding to be transformed into daily practice. The knowledge and experience gained through negative interactions in dealing with unruly students has prepared several participants on how to handle a multitude of situations that may arise. Using these interactions, coupled with the desire to increase understanding, has provided opportunities to develop stronger relationships between teachers and students.

Sub-Question One. What are the perceptions of alternative education teachers regarding professional development on restorative practices? Overwhelmingly, participants felt as though they did not receive adequate training to implement restorative practices prior to coming to Peaceful Transitions. During the course of interviews, the topic of gaining specific skills to increase insight and improve understanding in the plight of their students. This desire to seek understanding to possible reasons students may act out and misbehave was of primary importance to participants. By seeking understanding, teachers have the opportunity to increase their empathy and tolerance when students are going through a crisis with the intent on gaining insight. Regrettably, participant attitudes towards this training did not meet expectations in regards to improving their skills in this area. One participant stated "the training was virtual and I really don't remember who provided it." It seems as though the frustration lies within the inability to connect the training with classroom situations as well as the opportunity to ask follow up questions with the trainer. Unfortunately, participants were left with feelings of inadequacy from the insufficient trainings they were provided.

Sub-Question Two. How have teacher perceptions shaped the teacher-student relationship? The effective use of restorative practices has strengthened the bond between teachers and their students. Participants overwhelmingly commented on the importance of establishing strong relationships with their students to improve behavior. Cultivating strong bonds and relationships is paramount to maximizing all benefits of restorative practices. This sentiment was captured in the subtheme of effective communication amongst all stakeholders. One participant, PTS4, strongly believes the use of a restorative approach at Peaceful Transitions is directly responsible for having a strong relationship with her students. Another participant, PTS1, feels that emphasis

on cultivating relationships with students provides a positive experience with future dividends to be reaped through this investment.

Sub-Question Three. How have teacher-student relationship experiences shaped teacher expectations of future behavior? PTS6, research participant, credits the use of restorative practices as providing an efficient way for students to be reintegrated into the classroom environment with dignity after their behavioral issue has been addressed. Additionally, PTS6 considers a restorative approach as a significant factor in students developing self-regulation techniques that will assist them in steering clear of future misbehavior. Similarly, another participant, PTS9, insisted the exercise in having students talk their way through a behavioral outburst allows for faster rebounding and provides students with vital strategies that can be utilized in the event another situation arises.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological is to examine teachers' perceptions of using a restorative approach to address student behavior within an alternative setting. According to Vaandering (2019), a restorative approach has been shown to promote a safe and caring school environment specifically designed to support academic success for all students. The researcher outlined the participant experiences using restorative practices within Peaceful Transitions throughout this chapter. Within the individual and focus group interviews, the researcher explored the teacher's teaching experience and their knowledge and use of restorative practices. Through these interviews, alternative educators used restorative practices in their classrooms to build relationships and manage student behavior issues. Further, the following themes emerged through these interviews: relationships, experiences, and understanding. Additionally, the

subthemes effective communication (relationships), personal and professional experiences

(experiences), empathy and tolerance (understanding) materialized during data analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore teacher experiences in utilizing a restorative practices approach for classroom management at an alternative public school located in a northern Florida school district. This chapter provides conclusions derived from the study findings offered in Chapter 4. More specifically, Chapter 5 summarizes the research questions, discussion of themes, connections to the theoretical framework for the study, implications for practice, and provides recommendations for future research. The data collected through the study contains each participant's perceptions and unique individual experiences in using a restorative approach to address student behavior within an alternative learning center. Moreover, a restorative approach to managing student behavior has been shown to reduce exclusionary discipline practices within schools.

Discussion

The data collected from this study allowed this researcher to gain insight into the lived experiences of alternative education teachers in using a restorative approach to managing student behavior. Overall, the experiences from the twelve participants from Peaceful Transitions School had similar but different knowledge levels in utilizing a restorative approach. As a result of these unique experiences, the data collection methods of individual and focus group interviews provided for healthy discussion. Further, the healthy dialogue during the focus groups allowed group members to ask questions to adjust their thinking compared to their prior knowledge. These vigorous discussions yielded many positive benefits, including understanding through the shared experience of being an educator in an alternative learning center that uses a restorative approach to manage student behavior.

Interpretation of Findings

This section discusses three thematic findings from the collected data. The interpretation of findings includes relationships, experiences, and understanding. Through the development of themes, subthemes emerged during data analysis. For example, the theme of relationships included the subtheme of effective communication between all stakeholders. The theme of experiences included the subthemes of use of personal and professional past experiences of the teachers. The theme of understanding included the subthemes of empathy and tolerance. After reviewing the data, the importance of building strong relationships with all stakeholders, especially students, is paramount to successful implementation. To maximize benefits, special importance should be placed on building these relationships to seek understanding through empathy and tolerance.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The first theme that emerged from data analysis was relationships. The teacher participants mentioned their appreciation for the presence of strong student-teacher and student-student relationships. Additionally, the presence of pleasant, healthy adult relationships was central to implementation effectiveness of a whole-school restorative approach. The importance of these healthy relationships was specifically clarified into the subtheme effective communication between all stakeholders. When the adults on campus and in the building are polite and courteous to each other, the example is set for students to model their behaviors. Drawing upon past experiences is the second theme and is a desirable prerequisite for teachers to successfully navigate through challenging student behaviors. During data analysis a subtheme regarding the importance participants placed on both personal and professional experiences was revealed. The participants that had more teaching experience expressed the capacity to

effectively handle any current or future misbehavior from their students. This comfortability and belief of being prepared for challenging situations provided for increased time to devote to instructional planning and delivery of materials to students. Participants specified that when some of their students begin to get agitated and irritated, they immediately jump into action by employing a variety of countermeasures to quell the behavioral outburst. This extra sense to properly know exactly how and when to diffuse a situation can only be gained through going through these taxing situations. The third theme was the power of understanding. Within this theme, the subthemes empathy and tolerance developed during analysis. Participants detailed the primary advantage of gaining understanding from their students was the ability to better assist them in getting the help needed to reach full potential. Overall, participants stated the benefits of having a better understanding of what their students encounter beyond the school fencing allowed them to have more compassion when they misbehaved and, subsequently extend grace to even the most difficult of children. In the end, all three of these themes are so tightly interwoven that to remove one from the mix would not produce as desirable of an outcome for everyone.

Interpersonal Interactions. Many of the participants mentioned the need for effective communication to reach all of their students. Sometimes, age differences between teacher and student can be great; however, some participants commented that by showing mutual respect for each other and having the conversation in a semi-private to private area can assist in clear communication. Clear and effective communication has several desirable benefits to improve relationships with all stakeholders, but most importantly with the teachers and students in classroom. This subtheme emerged during data analysis. First, interpersonal interactions serve as the conduit to which expectations (academic and behavioral) can be expressed. Second, clarity in

communication provides an opportunity for students to speak their needs and for their teachers to discuss possible intervention measures to improve the situation. The findings suggest communication serves a vital role in the early stages of relationship development to increase awareness and buy-in.

Patience. Most participants stated their ability to rely on previous experiences with behaviorally trying students allowed them to better resolve situations in their current classrooms. Through the lens of experience, participants expressed the belief that they can handle any future events with students in their classrooms with the appropriate level of response. Moreover, displaying patience with students during their most troubling and challenging episodes has a two-fold effect. For the student in the midst of a breakdown, it serves to diffuse the situation and promotes a faster resolution to the situation at hand. As for the other students in the room, the patience demonstrated by the teacher provides an opportunity for the other students in the room to witness the level of care that will be afforded to them if they were to find themselves in a similar predicament. Patience is forged through experience and the ability to effective draw upon past situations begets wisdom which is invaluable to manage the most difficult of situations with poise and confidence.

Strategic Sensitivity. The use of strategic sensistivity within any environment provides a neutralizing effect to improve the quality of any relationship. In conjunction with patience, this strageic sensitivity, commonly referred to as empathy, increases understanding and improves the development of stronger partnerships. Similar to a therapist working with a patient, building a therapeutic alliance through developing strategic sensitivity assists teachers reaching the most difficult students to get them the assistance they need. Further, empathy allows for teachers to relate to their students on a more personal level and as some participants described, anticipate the

needs of their students prior to being asked. Despite the lack of attention paid to this key skill, the presence of empathy within any relationship has the potential to transform it to reach new heights.

Implications for Practice

Through forging durable relationships, teachers can understand their students as individuals. Once teachers have insight into the baggage, stressors, and anxieties that students come to school with every day, the easier it will be to address their individual needs. Once individuals, especially, students, have their needs met, they are more likely to be cooperative, improve all areas, including behavior, relationships, academics, and be more adaptable to life's challenges. Therefore, this study extends the research on teacher effectiveness training (TET) by Gordon (1974, 2003) by revealing that understanding is foundational to healthy relationships.

As supported by previous research conducted by Mayworm et al. (2016), utilizing an effective restorative practices program can yield greater positive responsiveness to behavioral interventions than simply using the exhausted intervention of exclusionary discipline practices like out-of-school suspension. Based on the data collected for this study, the participants in both the individual and focus group interviews mentioned the importance of working with students to resolve their conflicts at school without sending them home for suspension. This finding supports previous research regarding the frequent use of punishment as ineffective for controlling student discipline. Moreover, nearly all participants mentioned using effective relationships to ease this process. Previously at Peaceful Transitions, when a student misbehaved for any reason, they were quickly met with a suspension from school. The faculty, staff, and administration at Peaceful Transitions School seek to keep students in school actively. When students remain in

school, they are presented with more opportunities to improve their social and coping skills through restorative practices.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

Gordon's theory of teacher effectiveness training (1974, 2003) provides the theoretical framework in which this study was designed. According to Gordon (1974, 2003), the explicit teaching of skills promotes students' development, independence, and growth. Further, these skills assist in building resilient relationships through student-student and teacher-student. The foundation for these robust relationships lies squarely on effective communication. The findings from this study substantiate Gordon's work (1974, 2003) on utilizing relationships to influence change in student behavior.

The collective shared experiences of the 10 participants confirmed previous research Regarding the use of a restorative approach within an educational environment. All 10 participants provided detailed experiences in which they have utilized elements of restorative practices within their classrooms; however, a large contingent of the participants reported not having adequate professional development prior to implementation and while using a restorative approach. The findings from this study aligned with previous research regarding the effectiveness of implementation is directly related to the quality and frequency of professional learning opportunities (Cook et al., 2018; Garnett et al., 2020; Gilzene, 2020; González et al., 2018; Gregory et al., 2020; Reed et al., 2020; Vaandering, 2019; Winn, 2018). Further, this study substantiated prior research on the most effective learning opportunities center on the development of improved relationships among all stakeholders within the school (Katic et al., 2020; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013; Velez et al., 2020; Weber & Vereenooghe, 2020). Additionally, this study validated the use of prior experiences in developing a tailored classroom

environment based on the prior experiences of teachers (Carter-Andrews & Gutwein, 2020; Hollweck et al., 2019; Klobassa & Laker, 2018; Short et al., 2018). Moreover, this study revealed the importance of educators to gain understanding in understanding the possible reasons for student misbehavior which is corroborated by previous research (Haymovitz et al., 2018; Kehoe et al., 2017; Macready, 2009; Silverman and Mee, 2018; Velez et al., 2020).

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The 10 participants validated the use of Gordon's theory of teacher effectiveness training (1974, 2003) provided the suitable theoretical framework in which this study was designed. Each participant mentioned the importance effective professional development is needed to make implementation more efficient and impactful. Participants mentioned the importance in building resilient relationships amongst all stakeholders especially the between the students and the adults within the school. The foundation for these robust relationships lies squarely on effective communication to gain understanding as to potential factors for the students' misbehavior. Consequently, participants cited their reliance on past experiences were very useful in navigating situations in which a students' behavior reached a critical level.

Limitations and Delimitations

Both the district and school used for this phenomenological study were delimitations. Because the school used for this study, Peaceful Transitions, is the only alternative learning center within this district, the perceptions and experiences from this research are pertinent to these participants. Additionally, the individuals who participated in this study had to be at least 18 years old and a certified teacher in Florida. The selection pool for this study did not include school administrators or supplemental school personnel.

There were several limitations to this study. First, since this study was located within a single school, Peaceful Transitions, generalizations cannot be made. The information collected from these participants is specific to their experiences while at this school. Therefore, any future replication may be challenging and yield different results. Additionally, all participants utilized for this study served in different roles and capacities within this school, including teaching different subjects and different grade levels. Thus, their experiences and perceptions may be diverse regarding both the implementation and the use of a restorative approach.

Recommendations for Future Research

Before writing this dissertation, scant literature existed that focused on professional development for building capacity amongst educators in the implementation of restorative practices. This research concentrated on understanding the perceptions of alternative education teachers in restorative practices and how these experiences shaped relationships between teachers and students and future behaviors. Future research should examine the relationship between implementing restorative practices on students who struggle in behavior regulation and academic success to improve their situation. Further research has been completed on the effects of exclusionary discipline practices on minority students. Still, very little has been researched on how these same practices affect all students from lower socioeconomic levels.

Although this research concentrated strictly on teacher perceptions of restorative practices, future research could explore students' perceptions in working through a restorative practices approach. Future research should also examine the attitudes, feelings, and perceptions of the "victims" and how their relationship with their offenders altered their lives. This would include academic success, personal relationships, and future goals. Moreover, future research could further investigate the sustainability and capacity building needed to implement a restorative approach successfully. This study specifically examines teacher attitudes and perceptions in using a restorative practices approach to manage student behavior within an alternative educational setting. This capacity-building would also include the development of a comprehensive district-wide K-12 implementation plan for restorative practices.

Several recurring focus areas began to arise upon analyzing the data collected for this study. The most prevalent of these areas is the relationships and the amount of weight placed on ensuring strong bonds are created amongst all stakeholders, especially the teacher-student

connection. In focusing on robust relationships, educators can fully understand a student, their actions, mannerisms, and overall disposition throughout a year. If an event or situation arises, teachers will be more adept at intervening more expeditiously before getting completely out of hand. Further, these events are mitigated through the active use of teachers relying on previous experiences to intercede before the situation goes awry hastily. The data from this study revealed that when educators have previously been exposed to certain events, they are more aware of precursors leading up to a situation unfolding and will deploy measures to diffuse the incident before full escalation. Once the situation has stabilized, educators are then tasked with employing restorative elements within the setting. These measures provide an opportunity for understanding on all sides and a chance to build or reinforce coping skills the next time a similar situation emerges.

Conclusion

Based on the findings from this study, the implementation of a successful school-wide approach requires a commitment by all stakeholders to cultivate positive relationships with one another. The forging of strong bonds is even more important for the teacher-student relationship. Overwhelmingly, nearly every participant in this study mentioned that having a positive relationship with each other, especially their students contributed to a more peaceful, less disruptive school environment. Further, the results indicate that understanding and acceptance are more likely to exist when strong relationships are present. Many participants commented that when they consciously sought building relationships with their students, they saw them as individuals with specific needs, wants, and desires. This understanding contributed to more positive outcomes and successful interventions when events unfolded that required action and restorative practices. When educators are in-tune with their students and the individual quirks

that make them unique, they can leverage this knowledge to diffuse potentially catastrophic

situations with limited damage.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 9, 2021

Michael Christie
Matthew Ozolnieks

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-240 MANAGING STUDENT MISBEHAVIOR
THROUGH A RESTORATIVE APPROACH: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Michael Christie, Matthew Ozolnieks,

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
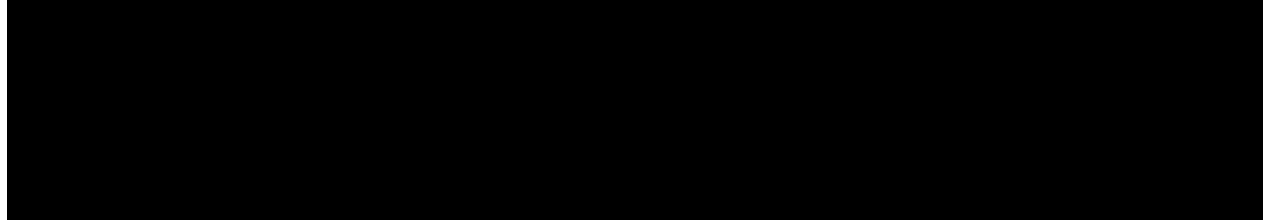submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

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 B: PERMISSION LETTER TO DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT

September 17, 2021

Dear ███████████████,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate of education degree. The title of my research project is Managing Student Misbehavior Through A Restorative Approach: A Phenomenological Study, and the purpose of my research is to explore teacher experiences in utilizing a restorative practices approach for classroom management at an alternative public school.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at ███████████. I am requesting to solicit voluntary participants from teachers at ███████████ to participate in this study. Additionally, I am requesting the use of any data collected by/for participants in this study.

Participants will be asked to complete the attached questionnaire. Further, I will schedule initial individual interviews, classroom observations, and focus group interviews at a time to be determined. The data will be used to identify patterns and themes related to teacher experiences managing student misbehavior. Participants will be presented with informed consent information before participating. Taking part in this study is entirely 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.

Sincerely,

Michael P. Christie
Doctoral Candidate/Lead Researcher

APPENDIX C: PERMISSION LETTER FROM DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT

Office of the Superintendent

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

SUPERINTENDENT

ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENTS

September 23, 2021

Dear Michael P. Christie,

I give you permission to conduct research as part of the requirements for a doctorate of education degree. The title of your research project, Managing Student Misbehavior Through A Restorative Approach: A Phenomenological Study, and the purpose of your research to explore teacher experiences in utilizing a restorative practices approach for classroom management at an alternative public school could bring additional insight into our School System.

I am giving you permission to conduct your research at ⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛. I will allow you to solicit volunteer participants from teachers at ⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛ to participate in this study as long as the principal agrees. Additionally, I give permission for you to use of any data collected by/for participants in this study.
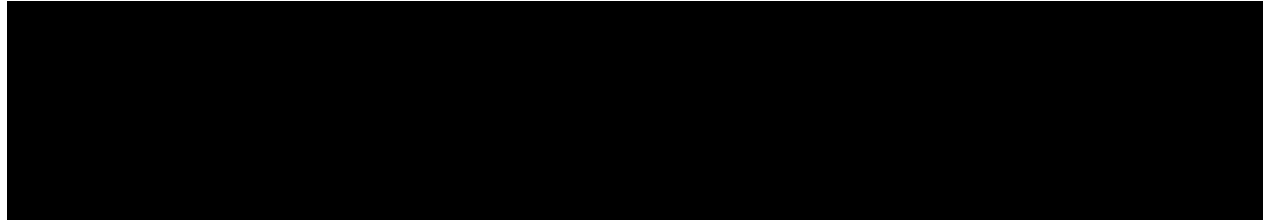
Thank you for your work in this field and I look forward to seeing the results of your study.

Sincerely,

Superintendent

APPENDIX D: LETTER TO PEACEFUL TRANSITIONS PRINCIPAL REQUESTING

PERMISSION

September 17, 2021

███
███
███
███

Dear ███████████,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate of education degree. The title of my research project is Managing Student Misbehavior Through A Restorative Approach: A Phenomenological Study, and the purpose of my research is to explore teacher experiences in utilizing a restorative practices approach for classroom management at an alternative public school.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at ███████████. I am requesting to solicit voluntary participants from teachers at ███████████ to participate in this study. Additionally, I am requesting the use of any data collected by/for participants in this study.

Participants will be asked to complete the attached questionnaire. Further, I will schedule initial individual interviews, classroom observations, and focus group interviews at a time to be determined. The data will be used to identify patterns and themes related to teacher experiences managing student misbehavior. Participants will be presented with informed consent information before participating. Taking part in this study is entirely 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.

Sincerely,

Michael P. Christie
Doctoral Candidate/Lead Researcher

APPENDIX E: PERMISSION GRANTED-PRINCIPAL PEACEFUL TRANSITIONS

SUPERINTENDENT

ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT

ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT

PRINCIPAL

T O A

September 23, 2021

Dear Michael Christie:

I give you permission to conduct research as a part of the requirements for a doctorate of education degree. The title of your research project, Managing Student Misbehavior through a Restorative Approach: A Phenomenological Study, and the purpose of your research to explore teacher experiences in utilizing a restorative practices approach for classroom management at an alternative public school could bring additional insight into our School System.

I am giving you permission to conduct your research at ███████████ where I serve as Principal. I will allow you to solicit volunteer teachers to participate in the study.

Sincerely,

Principal

APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT CRITERIA

To be included in this study, participants must:

- Be employed by the ███████████████████████ as a teacher (instructional personnel) at Pathways Academy (alternative learning facility).

Therefore, the individuals selected will be at least 18 years of age.

APPENDIX G: PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Consent

Title of the Project: Managing Student Misbehavior through a Restorative Approach: A Phenomenological Study
Principal Investigator: Michael P. Christie, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be employed as instructional personnel (i.e., as a teacher) within the ███████████████████████ at ██████████████. You must also be at least 18 years of age. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The study aims to explore teacher experiences in utilizing a restorative practices approach for classroom management at an alternative public school located in a northern Florida school district. The information discovered through this research will be used to design specialized professional development for all education professionals.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Complete a Demographic Questionnaire (In-person). This questionnaire should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.
2. Participate in a private, individual interview. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes and will be recorded with an audio-recording device. The interview will be held in-person on the ████████████████ campus.
3. Participate in a focus group interview with two other study participants. The focus group interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes and will be recorded with an audio-recording device. The focus group interview will be held in-person on the ████████ ██████████████.
4. Participants will be asked to review their individual and focus group interview transcripts following transcription to ensure accuracy.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include an increased body of knowledge on restorative practices within an alternative educational setting.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports 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. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Individual interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Focus group interviews will take place in the presence of other study participants.
- Electronic data will be stored on a password-locked computer. Physical data will be kept inside of a locked document-storage container. The data may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Further, audio-recordings will be deleted, and transcriptions and paper copies will be shredded.
- Both the individual interviews and the focus group interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Both the password-protected computer and the locked document-storage container will be with the researcher or securely locked inside of a closet inside of the researcher's home.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other focus group members may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. After all procedures are completed, all participants of this study will be compensated with a $10 gift card from Chick-Fil-A. The gift card will be hand-delivered to participants.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and not included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Michael P. Christie. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ███████████ or ███████████████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, ███████████
███████████████████████████.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

Suppose you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher. In that case, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensures that human subjects research will be conducted ethically as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

 The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

APPENDIX H: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Gender _____

2. Age _____

3. Highest Degree Attained (Please circle one):

> High School diploma
> Associates
> Bachelor's
> Master's
> Doctorate

4. Years of Teaching Experience (Please circle one):

> 0 to 5 years
>
> 6 to 10 years
>
> 11 to 15 years
>
> 15+

APPENDIX I: PLEASANT VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT ARCHIVAL DATA

(TRANSCRIPTION CODED)

APPENDIX J: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Each participant will be asked the same 10 items in the same chronological order.

1. Please introduce yourself to me and state your grade band (elementary or secondary) and your years of experience.

2. What prompted you to teach at an alternative school?

3. How many years of experience do you have?

    a. At this school?

    b. In an alternative setting

4. Tell me about the first time you heard the term restorative practices.

5. Describe the professional development or training you have received on the topic of restorative practices.

6. Tell me about the first time you used the restorative practices approach to address student behavior.

7. Please describe any unpleasant or encouraging experiences with students in using restorative practices.

8. Tell me about your typical day in your classroom, managing student behaviors.

9. How have restorative practices shaped your relationships with your students?

10. Overall, how would you describe your experiences with using restorative practices to manage student behavior?

APPENDIX K: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Because the participants of each group are familiar with each other and the researcher, the traditional get to know your questions are not needed. The following questions will be asked to both focus groups:

1. Describe the interactions between teachers and students *before* using restorative practices at Peaceful Transitions School?

2. How have these interactions changed *after* using restorative practices?

3. Based on your experiences, what advice would you offer to others considering a restorative approach to student behavior?

These questions will focus on the specific, shared experience of using restorative practices to address student behavior. According to van Manen (2014), it is essential to keep questions "focused on a single and concrete moment that the experience was lived through or took place" (p. 299).

APPENDIX L: INTERVIEWS (CODED DATA)

APPENDIX M: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS (CODED DATA)