

EXAMINING THE INCORPORATION OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES WITH
TRADITIONAL DISCIPLINE POLICIES IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH: A CASE STUDY

by

Anna Elizabeth Bryson

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

2023

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Abstract

The purpose of this single embedded case study was to describe the way in which restorative discipline practices are implemented alongside traditional discipline policies by the faculty and staff in one public school district in the American South. The theories that guided this study were pragmatism and Bandura's social learning theory, as they explain how discipline policies can be co-mingled to offer the best support for all stakeholders. The methodology for this study followed the single embedded case study design and included maximal purposeful sampling of faculty and staff from across the district. Data collection took place through individual interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Thematic and content analysis was used as a means of identifying three themes which are building relationships, professional development, and empowerment. The results of the study were that the implementation of restorative practices must begin with district and school leaders, as stakeholders look to them for leadership and guidance. Fidelity and consistency were also identified as key components necessary for full implementation. The findings of this study contribute to the body of research concerning implementation strategies for restorative practices and fill a gap in the literature that describes how a semi-rural school district in the American South has chosen to implement restorative practices to best suit the needs of those at all levels of the school system.

Keywords: restorative discipline, case study, alternative discipline practices, student support

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Acknowledgments

To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, I am so thankful for your grace and mercy throughout my life. It is only through You that I have made on my life's journey.

To my family, without your support, encouragement and understanding, the completion of this dissertation would not be possible. I am forever grateful.

To my chair, Dr. Breck Perry, and committee member, Dr. Sarah Pannone, your guidance, support, and instruction not only laid the foundation for my work, but also helped me achieve at a level that I never thought possible.

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List of Abbreviations

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Restorative Justice (RJ)

Restorative Practices (RP)

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

School Resource Officer (SRO)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Concerns about school discipline practices have come to the forefront of education as the need for more innovative discipline strategies continues to grow (Bailey, 2019). Long-term consequences of punitive discipline and zero-tolerance policies produce unintended impacts on diverse populations in the school setting (Welch & Payne, 2018). Out of those concerns, an interest in restorative discipline practices as an alternative discipline method has spurred educators to find solutions to mitigating student behavior issues while attempting to provide support for students and teachers (Payne & Welch, 2018).

Implementing restorative discipline practices is often carried out through a whole-school approach, thus attempting to affect the entire school community positively (Augustine et al., 2018). Organizations will often choose methods for the implementation process deemed suitable for the context and environment in which they will be used (Sopcak & Hood, 2022). Additional factors to consider when implementing restorative practices include the community, stakeholders, and discipline needs of the school system (Gomez et al., 2021).

Chapter One of this dissertation is focused on the historical, social, and theoretical context needed to understand the foundation of this study. Relevant background information was also provided to enhance the connection to the context in which the study will take place, as well as provide insight into my motives for conducting this specific investigation. The problem and purpose statement were included to direct the reader to the focus of the study. The significance of the study and key terms and definitions were also provided to promote clarity for the reader.

Background

Concerns over student discipline have evolved and changed along with society. Early in American education, physical forms of discipline, such as corporal punishment, were not only accepted but expected. Later, as corporal punishment was phased out, exclusionary measures were implemented to increase safety and subordination (Hwang et al., 2022). However, those punitive forms of punishment have shown to have long-lasting consequences for students on the receiving end, particularly students from diverse populations (Karanxah et al., 2020). To promote equity and balance in discipline practices, many states have restricted exclusionary measures altogether (Camacho et al., 2022). This leaves schools and education systems scrambling to fill a void and searching for effective methods to curtail challenging student behavior and the negative impacts that it has on a school environment (Augustine et al., 2018). As such, alternative forms of discipline, like restorative discipline practices, have increased in popularity due to their theoretical abilities to reduce negative behaviors, support behavior changes long-term, and positively impact schools and communities through conflict resolution, problem-solving, and building and repairing relationships (Butterfield, 2019).

Historical Context

The pedagogical roots of the American education system stretch back to the nation's founding. Victorian concepts shaped teaching, learning, and disciplining children at home or in a formal school setting (CEP, 2020). Initially, formal schooling was provided only to children of means. At the same time, large swaths of the American population went without access to a standardized education, resulting in illiteracy and the inability to escape poverty (Neem, 2017). However, after the American Revolution, societal attitudes around freedom, citizenship, and education all become increasingly progressive, thus planting the seeds for the formal education

system in America (Garte, 2017). Instruction in good citizenship meant a strong emphasis on students' moral and character development; this emphasis led to the creation and implementation of discipline policies designed by those in charge of the school (CEP, 2020).

The history of school discipline in America is deeply rooted in strict and stringent standards that often required the use of corporal punishment as a means to maintain order in the classroom setting, as poor behavior was viewed as a character flaw (Jewett, 1952). Many people felt a significant purpose of formal schooling was to provide instruction for children in the area of morals, thus the support of rigid practices that demand compliance or risk physical and potentially psychological harm (Jewett, 1952). Teachers were the sole disciplinarians at this time because schools typically consisted of one class with students that spanned multiple ages. They were free to apply discipline and punishment as they found appropriate (Allman & Slate, 2011).

By the mid-nineteenth century, some educators started to examine European education models, namely the theories of Philip Von Fellenberg, a Swiss educator and reformer (Elliot & Daniels, 2006). Von Fellenberg and his contemporaries felt that people's spiritual consciousness and awareness could be raised through education. Children could benefit from more supportive approaches to learning with less punitive elements (Elliot & Daniels, 2006). As progressive thinking slowly permeated the educational philosophy of the U.S., reformers like Horace Mann began to influence education policies through their leadership in the political arena, which focused on the needs of the learner as well as the long-term benefits to society that come from education (Finklestein, 1990). Further, Mann is credited with the advent of the common school concept, which altered how teaching and discipline were handled. As schools grew in population, children were stratified into classes with individual teachers, which necessitated a change in the teachers' roles to focus on teaching a standard curriculum and implement less discipline

themselves and rely on the principal as the primary source of discipline and punishment (Kafka, 2009).

The mid-twentieth century ushered in progressive discipline measures that had become more mainstream in the American education system, but discipline was still primarily applied punitively (Allman & Slate, 2011). Kafka (2009) stated that disciplinary decisions regarding what discipline measures were applied to students and to what extent was still at the discretion of the administrators of the school. However, court cases such as *Dixon v. Alabama*, 1961, and *Goss v. Lopez*, 1975, challenged the practice of suspending or expelling without due process. These cases set the precedent that students' rights are to be respected and protected, even though school-aged children are not considered adults, thus spurring educational systems to transition to become more student-centered and cognizant of the rights of students as individuals (Shier, 2019).

During the 1980s and 1990s, communities across the U.S. started to see a rise in drug use, mainly crack cocaine, which led to more crime outside of schools, and raised concerns that more crime would filter into them (Crews, 1996). In 1994, the Clinton administration passed the Gun-Free Schools Act, which laid the groundwork for the zero-tolerance policies present in schools today (Whitford et al., 2016). Skiba and Knestling (2002) stated that policies of this type are intended to give students stiffer penalties for lower-level infractions, hoping that the fear of harsher punishment would deter inappropriate behavior. An additional intention of these policies was to provide administrators with clear parameters to utilize to mitigate any bias present in the individual that is determining the consequences for the offender and ensuring that discipline could be implemented equitably; however, inadvertently caused disproportionate impacts in groups of marginalized students (APA, 2008).

Social Context

The public's expectation of the education system is to educate and shape students, which was done through discipline and corrective measures (Foucault, 1977). Also, there is a general agreement among most of society that a long-term goal of school attendance is to support the growth and development of student's academic and moral areas (Goodrum et al., 2017). Methods like corporal punishment and public admonishment were accepted methods of punishment in early society, but as society changed, so has the willingness to accept the harsh methods of discipline in the school setting (Jewett, 1952). Recently, however, the need for safety and security at school has sparked debates about what measures can and should be taken by school administrators to ensure that students are safe while on campus; this embodies the perpetual societal concern about behavior and its handling, or mishandling in some instances (Rainbolt et al., 2019). As the expectations of society change, the school system's ability to adapt to current trends and demands is contingent mainly upon training and support provided to the employees working within the schools, which directly impacts their ability to effectively work with students and families (Gordon et al., 2017). Additionally, an administrator's core knowledge and continued training contribute to their capabilities to lead and guide their decision-making when implementing discipline policies, which can directly impact the students and staff in their care (Whitford et al., 2016).

Also, society could potentially benefit from the implementation of restorative practices in educational settings, as youths that are involved in more supportive programs for behavior management that also involve relationship-building components may experience more favorable outcomes related to school and be less likely to end up in the juvenile or even the adult criminal justice system (Cole & Heilig, 2011). Communities could benefit from the implementation of

restorative practices in schools because the mitigation and reduction of undesired behaviors in schools may translate into an increased amount of community safety through fewer school-aged children experiencing exclusionary discipline practices and encounters with juvenile justice, which allows for more students to be at school accessing the educational opportunities afforded to them (Johns Hopkins, 2017). Cornell et al. (2017) described the benefits schools can experience through consistently implementing restorative practices as fewer behavior issues to manage, an increased feeling of connection among the faculty, staff, and students in the school, and a reduction in recurrence of problem behaviors that require adult intervention, which can lead to an improvement in the overall culture present in the school. Stakeholders may experience more satisfaction and have a more positive outlook and investment in the school community.

Theoretical Context

Often when conflict arises or an incident occurs, there is a swift movement to assign blame and victimhood without attempting to understand the underlying context in which the event occurred; this leads to punitive consequences without understanding (Ryan & Ruddy, 2015). Without understanding, there is no closure for the wronged party and no proper accountability for the perpetrator outside of the punitive consequences assigned to them (Gavrielides, 2007). To combat the rising level of disciplinary issues in schools, educational leaders have sought alternative ways to effectively resolve conflict and reduce the need for exclusionary discipline measures (Klevan, 2021). Restoration is often seen as an alternative to traditional methods because the focus is less adversarial and less concerned with blame, with the understanding that punishment alone does not act as a deterrent (McCloskey et al., 2008). Restorative practices are centered on relationships built among the organization's stakeholders, which are used to attempt to repair any harm that occurred due to an offense (McCloskey et al.,

2008).

Implementing restorative practices in schools often requires a cultural shift among stakeholders, as the focus becomes more about restoration and reconciliation and less about retribution and punishment (Llewellyn & Howse, 1998). One way this change in mindset begins is through using common vocabulary when working with those involved in the process (Klevan, 2021). Mediation is often a strategy used during conflict resolution; this can happen in restorative circles, restorative conferences, or student conferences, with the intended outcome to provide accountability where it is needed and attempt to repair the relationship that was damaged so that the conflict ceases (Allman & Slate, 2011). Repair in this context means that the perpetrator is allowed to attempt to make amends with the victim, society, or both, which can increase the possibility that there can be a transition back into society and reduce the isolation that can come from being seen as a perpetrator (Gavrielides, 2007). Wilson et al. (2017) provided a theoretical support for the use of restorative practices, asserting that due to an infraction, damage to relationships can occur, thus creating the need to make amends, or attempt to repair between the victim and the perpetrator.

Problem Statement

The problem was that most schools do not consistently implement restorative discipline practices when dealing with complex and problematic behavior issues in schools, which require decisive and intentional action by schools and districts (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019; Butterfield, 2019; Kennedy et al., 2019; Song et al., 2020; Velez et al., 2020). This was a problem because traditional, more punitive forms of school discipline are ineffective or unsuccessful as the discipline needs of schools and districts change (Armour, 2016). Pressure from state and local education policies dictates that education systems adopt new, more proactive methods for

dealing with student behavior that reduce the need for punitive discipline practices. Therefore, studying how a specific school district has attempted to mitigate student behavior issues while providing support and interventions can provide insights into the implementation process. Effective behavior management in schools can significantly affect many areas, including student achievement, safety, and the school's overall climate, which is why school officials spend much of their time working on behavior management issues (Wiley et al., 2018).

Traditionally, schools utilize discipline policies that conform to strict sets of consequences that result in the use, and in some cases, the overuse of exclusionary techniques designed as a deterrent (Yang & Anyon, 2016). However, over time, American education systems have explored restorative discipline practices. School systems in California, Colorado, Florida, and Texas consistently include restorative techniques and punitive practices in school discipline plans (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). Therefore, studying how restorative practices are implemented can lead to a clearer understanding of these concepts and to developing proactive solutions that could effectively mitigate current school discipline issues that can impact student achievement and school safety (Evanovich et al., 2020). Garnett et al. (2020) echoed the sentiment that restorative discipline practices are best implemented with a whole school approach where the administration demonstrates consistency with support and implementation, thus providing the teachers and staff of a school with a clear understanding of restorative practices as a concept.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this single embedded case study was to understand how restorative discipline practices have been incorporated into traditional discipline policies in a public school district in the American South. At this research stage, discipline policies were defined as the

policies used within schools to provide correction and consequences to students and were set forth by the school board that governs the district where the study occurs. Additionally, restorative discipline practices were defined as methods used in conjunction with consequences to restore or repair a relationship, resolve conflict, or provide restitution for a perpetrated act.

Significance of the Study

This single embedded case study was significant because the results may theoretically, empirically, and practically add to the body of knowledge. It contributed to a deeper understanding of how the case of study incorporates restorative discipline practices alongside traditional discipline policies. Additionally, this study could provide educational researchers with a supplementary resource to support their search for viable additions or alternatives to traditional discipline methods and policies.

Lustick (2020) stated that examining the implementation process of restorative practices can lead to new ideas and processes that can engage multiple stakeholders, including other administrators, district administrators, parents, and safety officers. The theoretical application of this study's findings could be used to support other educational organizations in their search for innovative ways to mitigate and reduce challenging behaviors and the need for more punitive and exclusionary discipline practices while building community within the school (Anyon et al., 2017). Kehoe et al. (2018) theorized that just as academic learning occurs through social interaction; the acquisition of behavior skills is also a result of the interactions one has with environment in which an individual finds themselves. This study was designed to closely examine the way in which the case of study uses restorative practices, therefore, the results can provide significant findings to support the application of Bandura's (1969) social learning theory to behavior skill development. The results could also illustrate another way to support student

development: the restorative process exposes them to conflict resolution, problem-solving strategies, self-management strategies, emotional regulation strategies, and empathy development (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). Each is valuable as students transition through the stages of their lives and approach adulthood.

This study contributed empirically to the literature because it examines a case in the American South that has not been thoroughly studied regarding the research topic. The current research is in Colorado, California, Texas, and Florida in the U.S. However, twenty-one states have policies for implementing restorative practices within state systems (Georgetown Law, 2020). Other countries like Canada, Austria, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and Australia have all been studied extensively on how restorative practices are implemented in school systems because each has adopted some form of nationwide requirement for implementing restorative practices (Sliva & Lambert, 2015). However, empirical literature based on the specific geographic location in which this study took place is currently lacking. The addition of this study to the empirical research in this geographic region furthered efforts to understand the dynamics of school systems, discipline, and restorative practices. According to Lustick (2017, 2020), very little qualitative data shows whether restorative practices impact a shift in school culture; therefore, the findings of this study could extend the body of knowledge in that area.

For practical purposes, the results could be incorporated into this school district's data collection plan and used to gain a deeper understanding of the areas of strength and growth in the implementation process. Kuo et al. (2010) stated that when examining the implementation of restorative practices, there are three procedural activities to look for: relationship building, dialogue, and the communication of values. Latimer et al. (2005) stated that the effectiveness of restorative practices can be measured qualitatively and quantitatively by collecting data on

victim and offender satisfaction with the process, recidivism, and perceived fairness.

Investigating these areas could assist district personnel when planning for professional development opportunities for the district staff and contribute to the internal evaluation processes necessary to determine changes and next steps within district policies and procedures. More broadly, this information could produce generalizations that other educational organizations could use to help facilitate the implementation and evaluation of restorative practices in other cases.

Research Questions

The purpose of this single embedded case study was to describe how restorative practices are incorporated into traditional school discipline policies in a school district in the American South. Through the examination of this case, the gap that currently exists in literature was addressed. This study posited and answered the following research questions:

Central Research Question

How are restorative discipline practices incorporated with traditional discipline policies in a public school district in the American South?

Sub-Question One

How are restorative practices implemented in this case?

Sub-Question Two

How are discipline policies, including restorative practices, applied to specific demographic groups in this case?

Sub-Question Three

How does the environmental context influence the implementation of restorative and traditional discipline practices in this case?

Definitions

1. *Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports* – a framework of supports and strategies designed to teach and reinforce desired behaviors, while reducing the occurrence of negative or non-desirable behaviors (Kittleman et al., 2019)
2. *Restorative Discipline Practices* – a non-punitive behavior intervention and support method designed to reduce negative student behavior, repair harm caused by negative behaviors, and increase desired student behavior (NVDOE, 2022).
3. *Social-Emotional Learning* – an educational method designed to support the development of social and emotional skills through practices embedded throughout the school's curriculum (CASEL, 2022)
4. *Traditional Discipline Policies* – punitive, typically exclusionary measures used to deter and control negative student behaviors (Garnett, 2020).

Summary

As schools encounter more challenging and complex behavior issues, searching for solutions becomes increasingly necessary. Viable options and alternatives to punitive behavior management systems are needed to provide mitigation and prevention strategies to help potentially reduce the need for punitive measures and support a positive climate within the school, all of which can increase the likelihood of desired outcomes. This study examines one case's efforts to implement restorative practices alongside their standard discipline policies and the level to which the case study can show success based on the case's pre-determined criteria. Developing an understanding of the functionality of this case's implementation plan and its execution can provide a way for the case to receive feedback for future use, as well as add to the body of knowledge, filling a gap in the literature for studies in the geographic location in which

the case is located as well as demonstrating whether alternative discipline methods, such as restorative practices can be utilized concurrently with more traditional, punitive methods.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to examine the concepts and components of restorative discipline practices within the framework of Bandura's social learning theory. This chapter will review current literature related to the topic of study. In the first section, the social learning theory associated with Bandura will be presented as the theoretical framework for this study. The next section will be a synthesis of recent literature which examines the connection between the theoretical framework, the factors that influence school discipline, the components and concepts associated with restorative practices, and their implementation. Lastly, a gap in the literature will be identified, presenting a likely need for the current study.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's social learning theory serves as the theoretical framework for this study. The tenets of this theory focus on factors that can influence learning, such as behavior, environment or context, and unique personal characteristics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Further, Bandura (1969) hypothesized that experiences with an individual's environment shape the learning process and that individuals tend to model the behavior observed in the other members of their surroundings. This theory fits well within this study as the acquisition of behavior skills is a learning process that develops through socialization, exposure to the modeling of behaviors, and the consequences and rewards experienced by an individual that is directly related to the behaviors displayed. Additionally, the ideas contained in this theory, combined with an understanding of the implementation strategies used by the case study, can further the education profession because the application of its components could provide ideas for other school districts that are searching

for information and research to potentially support a similar transition to the use of restorative practices as an additional discipline option.

Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura first established the social learning theory in the mid-twentieth century. A psychologist by trade, Bandura was interested in understanding how humans learn and what factors can influence one's learning experience (Bandura, 1977). He theorized that learning could take place directly and indirectly. Therefore, one can learn from experiences with a stimulus, mainly when an individual receives the desired outcome, thus increasing the likelihood of the antecedent behavior (Bandura, 1969). Further, modeling the behaviors present in one's environment that are learned through observation can also contribute to the replication and perpetuation of both desirable and undesirable behaviors within an individual and group context, creating a cyclical phenomenon that can impact an individual's learning process (Bandura, 2001).

Advancement of Theory

As this theory gained popularity, many theorists saw the social learning theory as an intermediary between the philosophies of behaviorist and constructivist (Nabavi, 2012). In 1961, Bandura conducted his now famous Bobo Doll experiment, in which he was able to theorize that observation is a powerful teaching tool, and individuals will likely imitate the behavior of those in the environment in which they are located (Newman & Newman, 2007). This fundamental understanding of how humans learn changed the landscape of psychology at that time (Nabvi, 2012). Further, O'Kelly (2019) stated that this social learning theory can be applied to the workplace and schools, as the motivation to perform behaviors in the environment, such as those related to safety, can impact individuals and the group learning experiences. Therefore, understanding how the environmental context and behaviors influence outcomes can help further

understand what type of teaching and modeling is needed to increase the likelihood of displaying desired behaviors and reduce the likelihood of negative or less-than-desirable behaviors in individuals.

Application of Theory

Bandura's social learning theory (1969) fits well within this study because the goal is to examine how one school district is implementing restorative discipline practices in addition to traditional discipline policies. This theory states that behavior is often learned through modeling and imitation, and the tenets of this theory support the understanding that behavior is impacted by one's goals, the expectancy of outcomes, the environment in which one finds themselves, and the reinforcement received for exhibiting behaviors, all factors that need consideration when constructing and implementing discipline policies (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, the social learning theory principles are fundamental when creating and implementing discipline policies in school systems. As the interaction of an individual's experiences and environment impacts how behavior is developed, these same factors should also be considered when searching for behavior modification and management strategies (Cilliers, 2021). Further, one must understand the function of behavior to provide support and redirection when needed. In a school setting, understanding how behaviors are influenced can lead to a deeper understanding provide proactive approaches to behavior management to modify behaviors when necessary (Akers & Jennings, 2019).

Using the social learning theory provides a lens through which to view the collected data, wherein, the environmental factors provide context for the observation and reproduction of human behaviors. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge by offering first-hand knowledge regarding one school district's attempt to incorporate restorative practices with

existing discipline policies. Further, a thorough examination of the implementation strategies may provide ideas and content for future use and study. Theoretically, restorative practices can be used effectively while adhering to the exclusionary discipline practices designed to protect the safety and security of those in schools. Restorative practices could also provide proactive strategies that produce short-term and long-term benefits for communities, schools, and individuals. Therefore, understanding how restorative practices are implemented within the case study can shed light on the processes used and provide potential topics or context for extending this study or future studies information in this study can improve professional development and training for educators and administrators.

Related Literature

School-based discipline is not a new concept. Discipline practices have evolved to keep up with a changing society and the need for strategies that increase safety in schools and reduce negative behaviors overall (Lustick, 2021b). This literature review will explore school discipline, factors influencing its implementation, and alternatives to traditional discipline policies and procedures.

Factors that Influence School Discipline

Discipline practices do not operate in a vacuum, and their implementation is influenced by factors such as the views of school administration, society, and changing school and community demographics (Oldham et al., 2020). As such, discipline must be viewed in a larger context, focusing on long-term benefits rather than short-term compliance (Short et al., 1993). Therefore, understanding how these factors interact can better support policymaking and implementation (Oldham et al., 2020).

Discipline Policies

According to the Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, any area not specifically outlined under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government is the responsibility of state governments, therefore, discharging and overseeing public education policies is the task of state governments (USDOE, 2022). Through that governing process, local school districts must follow state guidelines and regulations when crafting school discipline plans (Curran, 2019). School districts must adhere to state law requirements while creating and implementing discipline policies suited to the school district's community (Welsh & Little, 2018). Therefore, the intent of school discipline policies should be to promote a safe and effective learning environment while providing structure and support for the development of self-regulating behaviors and personal responsibility (NASP, 2018).

The introduction of zero-tolerance policies has changed the landscape of school discipline (Curran, 2019). To curtail perceived school violence and crime issues, policymakers created strict policies that provide little negotiation for consequences regarding certain offenses, such as fighting, weapons, or drug possession on campus (Fissel et al., 2019). Typically, an automatic suspension pending an exclusion hearing is considered due process for high-level offenses. Further, the accumulation of more frequent, less severe offenses, such as too many tardies to class or absences from school, can also result in the use of exclusionary measures with little flexibility in applying these consequences (Obadire & Sinthumule, 2021). However, when discipline policies are implemented, there can be unintended and unforeseen consequences, such as the disproportionate representation of African American males or special education students in documented discipline incidents, resulting in extended absences from school and a loss of learning (NASP, 2018).

Stakeholder Views

The context in which administrators develop their personal and professional perceptions about the principalship and discipline policy implementation and the micro-context in which administrators operate also influence how they provide discipline to students (Oldham et al., 2020; Whitford et al., 2016). Angelle (2017) stated that the decision-making and behavior of the principal influences the overall school culture and climate, as well as their ability to implement discipline effectively. Students and parents are more receptive to administrators that demonstrate that they are trustworthy and possess the ability to follow through on best practices and responsibilities, which can increase the likelihood of successful execution of new discipline policies or changes to policies currently in place. (Angelle, 2020; Rainbolt et al., 2019). Gordon et al. (2017) asserted that personal experiences influence an individual's capacity to successfully execute a school administrator's duties, including discipline policies. Lesh et al. (2021) also found that administrator beliefs heavily influence implementing of discipline practices.

Jarvis and Okonofua (2019) stated that principals play a vital role in setting organizational and procedural norms for a school, including effectively managing conflicts among the stakeholders. Conflicts can arise when there are changes in discipline policies, and the administrators' views, perceptions, and background experience can impact their ability to effectively manage the intended and unintended consequences of the changes (Ryu et al., 2020). Dewi et al. (2019) concluded that due to the heterogeneity of the components that an administrator must manage, a leader must draw upon their knowledge and experience to resolve conflict effectively and be aware of the influence their views and attitudes will impact how they carry out their duties.

Teacher views of school discipline can influence discipline practices and vary widely, mainly depending on the training, experience, teacher's philosophy (Amemiya et al., 2020). In many cases, teachers' views can be opposing regarding handling behavior issues and implementing policy and the severity of discipline issues (Ingersoll et al, 2018). Valente et al. (2018) theorized that teachers' emotional intelligence and perceptions about classroom management also impact their ability to carry out discipline policies. Amemiya et al. (2020) asserted that the trust between the teachers and administration also impacts teacher views, which can impact how students are managed and how policies are implemented. Griffin and Tyner (2019) concluded that teachers often view discipline systems as broken and want sustainable changes to incorporate more modern approaches. However, they also see the value in traditional exclusionary measures in some cases.

The community in which a school system is located impacts how discipline policies are created and carried out (Girvan et al., 2021). Over time, community sentiments around school discipline have changed in cycles, ranging from the demand for punitive punishments, such as corporal punishment and zero-tolerance policies, to looking for alternative methods that support positive behaviors while reducing incidences of negative behavior (Warnick & Scribner, 2020). Further, Sondah (2019) noted that the religious and moral leanings of the community can influence school policies, including those relating to discipline and how those policies are executed. Gonzalez et al. (2019) affirmed that community beliefs, expectations, and economic status can influence the school environment, impacting discipline, health, safety, and academic situations.

Environmental Context

A school's and community's environmental context is an influential factor that can facilitate positive and negative outcomes related to discipline needs, policies, and practices. Marcucci (2019) stated that school discipline is influenced by many factors, including the individuals and groups inside and outside the school. The author goes on to say that the manifestation of the beliefs of these stakeholders often results in discipline practices that impact students, families, and school personnel differently (Marcucci, 2019). Issues present within the community often become issues within the school setting and can cause unrest and create safety concerns, including civil, political, and economic instability (Senjaya et al., 2020). However, supportive, or protective factors include parental and community involvement in the students' lives, economic stability within the community, and perceived equity and safety among stakeholders (Girvan et al., 2021).

Changing Demographics

At present, the United States is comprised of roughly three hundred and thirty million people, with approximately 60% of the total population reporting as White or non-Hispanic; 13% reporting their race as Black; 18% reporting their race as Hispanic, and 9% of the population reporting Native American, Pacific Islander, or Asian as their race (U.S. Census, 2022). This is a significant change in demographics from the first U.S. Census in 1790, which showed approximately 90% White, non-Hispanic, and 10% of the population as enslaved Africans. Population changes can be seen in cities and schools across the country. The influx of diverse populations present in American schools necessitates the leadership within school systems to adjust discipline policies and practices to changing demographics (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). The states in the South and West are showing rapid increases in diverse populations, with many

public-school students identifying as non-white (Mordechay & Orfield, 2017). For children, the changing populations of the United States create melting pots in schools, where they learn and develop socially, emotionally, and academically while navigating a landscape of diversity (Cruz et al., 2021). For the adults working in schools, changing demographics means new and challenging obstacles that must be navigated to ensure safety and success for all involved (Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2017). Conflicts or challenges manifest in the form of disagreements or negative interactions among students from different groups. However, the primary source of conflict comes from adults in the school that are resistant to change and perceive a loss of power when asked to modify academic or discipline strategies to accommodate diverse populations (Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2017). Welsh and Little (2018) asserted that leadership and diversity are interconnected to bridge gaps between old and new paradigms, as it is the responsibility of school administrators to ensure that students receive equitable treatment concerning academics and discipline.

Changing Disciplinary Issues

Changes in society often necessitate how structures within society function, and school systems frequently require adjustments to ensure their ability to continue to perform effectively. However, school systems are often slow to make changes, often geared towards more control over student populations and less discretion when applying school discipline policies (Rocque & Snellings, 2018). For example, the advent of zero-tolerance policies in schools was ushered in to combat fears that the crime and drug problems of the 1980s would seep into schools and disrupt the learning environment (Karanxah et al., 2020). Zhang (2019) asserted that due to increases in safety concerns related to weapons, fighting, and drugs in schools, many school systems have employed school resource officers, armed security guards, and safety officers to help maintain

peace and order, particularly in secondary schools. In addition to increased policing, many school systems have started to engage in trauma-informed practices related to discipline policies, intending to become more supportive of students with behavior and mental health issues directly related to their trauma (Thomas et al., 2019).

However, unforeseen consequences of zero-tolerance policies and exclusionary discipline measures have become apparent in school systems' academic and discipline data collected across the country. Karanxha et al. (2020) stated that students of color experience more extreme school discipline measures at a far greater rate than their white counterparts while simultaneously achieving lower academic success. Bacher-Hicks et al. (2019) cited other ramifications of exclusionary practices, including poor class attendance, poor school attendance in general, feelings of isolation from the school community, a lack of belonging, poor peer and adult relationships at school, and less access to educational opportunities.

Restorative Discipline Practices

Punishment is an accepted construct of Western culture, wherein a perpetrator has committed a transgression and must be held accountable for their actions by the justice system (Garland, 2018). Discipline in school systems follows a similar punitive model, where students commit an offense and are given a punishment by the administrator in charge (Klevan, 2021). Interestingly, restorative discipline practices are gaining popularity in their application to school systems, even though they are adapted from the restorative justice ideology that has emerged within the last fifty years in the criminal justice system. These practices are intended to offer an alternative to traditional punishment to reduce recidivism and provide the ability to learn from one's behavior choices (O'Reilly, 2019). Silverman and Mee (2018) asserted that restorative practices are more than just an alternative to punishment; they are an opportunity for amends to

be made, lessons to be learned, and conflict to be resolved so that the parties may learn more about others and themselves. It should be noted that restorative practices may not be able to restore relationships to their original state. Many factors influence the restoration of relationships, such as the willingness of parties to participate in the mediation process, the level of the transgression, and the comfort level of the transgressed (Gregory et al., 2021).

Components

Some components of restorative practices are prescribed, such as restorative circles. However, organizations can choose which strategies to utilize implement based on the needs of the stakeholders and the schools (Butterfield, 2019). Often, schools and districts will choose to implement Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), elements of social and emotional learning, and preventative as well as responsive care options into the daily operations of the school to provide support for all students, not just the ones with known behavior concerns (Green et al., 2019). However, choosing which aspects to focus on is primarily influenced by the environmental context in which a school or district is located, impacting an organization's specific needs (Breedlove et al., 2020). Therefore, using data and working with stakeholders to determine the needs of the school and community could increase the likelihood of success when implementing strategies and supports.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, or PBIS, was created to provide educators and administrators an alternative way to approach school discipline (Clemons et al., 2021). The four main components of PBIS are data collection to drive decision-making, clearly defined intended outcomes that are measurable and linked to data, evidence-based practices, and effective systems and procedures that support (Noltemeyer et al., 2019). PBIS is not a behavior management system but rather a shift in

thinking about the way discipline and punishment are addressed in a school setting, with an emphasis on teaching and increasing the likelihood of desired behaviors while providing support for students that struggle to display appropriate behaviors (Petrasek et al., 2022). The PBIS model can also be considered a framework of tiered strategies and supports that provide direct instruction and modeling emphasizing the importance of practical self-management skills, decision-making, and problem-solving (Weist et al., 2018).

PBIS uses a three-tiered structure in which students are identified based on the level or intensity of the support needed. Tier one is classified as the least intense level and utilizes universal behavior supports; typically, 85% of a population will fall into this category and benefit from positive reinforcement for desired behaviors and redirection to encourage behavior modification (Clemons et al., 2021). Tiers two and three are designed to provide more structured supports that target specific behavior concerns and address individual student needs. These tiers typically support 15% of the student population and will require more in-depth data collection and targeted support (George et al., 2018).

According to Petrasek et al. (2022), PBIS is often effective because it focuses on building social and emotional intelligence in the same way students are instructed in academic skills. Further, PBIS provides reteaching and interventions to support behavior modification and reinforcement. Eiraldi et al. (2021) echoed that through the daily implementation of universal support, all students have access to the skill-building process, remediation, and resources tailored to their immediate and long-term needs.

In the wake of zero-tolerance policies, many in education have sought alternatives to exclusionary practices that are more supportive and less punitive because the rate at which students are involved with discipline often impacts other areas of the student's life, such as

academics and social and emotional development (Green et al., 2019). Restorative practices are often intertwined with the interventions used in tiers two and three as an added layer of support when implementing PBIS and restorative discipline practices (Green et al., 2021). Breedlove et al. (2020) posited that when restorative practices are used in conjunction with PBIS principles, the resulting impacts can also be positive for students with a documented history of adverse childhood experiences, which can often cause students to exhibit behavioral as well as academic issues. Further, Petrasek et al. (2022) specified that using restorative strategies and PBIS principles can lead to increased student motivation due to increased access to academic opportunities, relationship development, and belongingness to the school community.

Social and Emotional Learning. Social and emotional skill development begins immediately after birth (Mahoney et al., 2018). Environment, caregivers, culture, and experiences heavily influence how individuals develop (Madden, 2020). Emotional regulation, empathy, and the ability to establish and maintain relationships with others are essential skills that require support and intervention to acquire, improve, and master (Allen et al., 2018).

Social and emotional learning is a way in which the development of social competencies can be supported (Corcoran et al., 2018). The development of social and emotional skills is the process by which individuals gain knowledge and skills needed to regulate emotions, set goals, feel, and show empathy to others, make positive behavior choices, and create and maintain relationships with others (Mahoney et al., 2019). This learning process is a life-long endeavor; however, the earliest developmental periods are the most important, particularly the elementary years, because this time spans many developmental stages for children (Ahmed et al., 2020). However, Durlak et al. (2018) theorized that social and emotional learning can occur at any developmental level if the content and focus are appropriate for the target population.

Supporting social and emotional skill development across grade levels can be challenging (CASEL, 2022). Furthermore, SEL can promote social and emotional skills at any age. Much research focuses solely on the early years and have yet to fully consider the impact of social and emotional learning at the secondary level. Ross and Tolan (2018) found that social and emotional needs do change for secondary students but are still present and supporting them through this time of development is vital. These skills can be supported by conflict resolution, attention to relationships, and creating a sense of belonging and inclusion (Hamedani & Darling-Hammond, 2021). These focus areas are essential for adolescents with social and emotional disabilities. The struggle to acquire social and emotional skills for these students impacts their ability to develop at the same rate as their non-disabled peers (Zweers et al., 2021). Thus, providing them with extra support through an emphasis on skill development and interventions supports the extra processing time needed by these students.

In the short term, providing social and emotional skills instruction can strengthen areas where students are lacking and increase social competency and self-regulation (Bierman, 2021). These short-term improvements can immediately impact behavior and may influence factors such as discipline referrals, office visits, and exclusionary discipline measures, each of which can impact the time a student spends in class and learning. Additionally, improved peer relationships could begin with improved social competency, which may translate into increased feelings of belonging, self-esteem, and acceptance (CASEL, 2022).

Long-term social and emotional skill development impacts can go far beyond academic achievement and school success. Students that become proficient in managing themselves and utilizing coping skills can experience an increased amount of post-secondary success (Domitrovich et al., 2017). This success can contribute to healthy adult relationships, job

satisfaction, and overall satisfaction with life (Corcoran et al., 2018). Further, using strategies learned in SEL programs, an individual could experience an increase in self-awareness, accountability, and responsible decision-making, which may decrease involvement in the justice system (Hamedani & Darling-Hammond, 2021).

Through the evaluation of 213 school-based social and emotional programs, Mahoney et al. (2018) identified a strong correlation between effective programs and positive student outcomes. High-quality SEL instruction gives students the tools to participate in their classes in schools and communities effectively. Positive experiences with SEL can also increase the likelihood of experiencing satisfaction, belonging, and motivation to do well (Corcoran et al., 2018). Shafalt et al. (2021) discovered that when students are supported with increasing their emotional intelligence, they can better navigate stressful situations and gain knowledge and wisdom to be applied in future situations. Further, Villegas and Raffaelli (2018) stated that the experience gained from positively managing emotions increases the ability to problem-solve and think across contexts, such as at home and in the workplace. In addition, Yang et al. (2019) also indicated a connection between teaching social and emotional competencies and positive student outcomes. Through the analysis of multiple studies, they concluded that when SEL strategies are implemented with fidelity, students can experience an improvement in achievement, motivation, school attendance, and morale, each of which is typically an area where improvement is desired due to their interaction with one another and impact on success (Yang et al., 2019).

Integrating SEL and restorative practices can provide students with universal support in the general education setting, which gives all students access to social and emotional development (Weisberg, 2019). Students with more urgent needs could receive increased support through a tiered system designed to address specific social and emotional needs (Ahmed et al.,

2020). Durlak et al. (2018) posited that outcomes for students that participate in social and emotional learning that is embedded into a school's culture and climate are typically expected to be more favorable than those that do not, which supports any assertion regarding the importance of social and emotional learning in the classroom.

Supportive Care Measures

Supportive care measures are often dictated by the environment and target populations, and what works for one school or district may not be feasible or workable for another (Madden et al., 2020). Further, supporting the development of the student's skills in areas that directly impact or are directly impacted by non-academic skills can serve as preventative and responsive care strategies. The support and development of soft skills or non-cognitive skills can help students sharpen problem-solving skills, workplace skills, and functional skills necessary for success in their transition to the post-secondary world (Allen et al., 2018).

School can be considered a social setting where students develop non-cognitive and academic skills. Mastering academic skills and content is a single aspect of the learning process in which students engage while at school; students are also expected to develop behaviors and habits that promote life-long learning (Merchant et al., 2018). Like academic skills, non-cognitive skills may be malleable and enhanced with instruction (Carter et al., 2019). Interventions can be used at any stage of development and can include problem-solving practice, social and emotional learning, and conflict resolution. (Mahoney et al., 2018). Further, mentoring, vocational training, and school-based support programs can enhance skill acquisition in adolescents and young adults (Vittadini et al., 2022).

Skill development is not limited to the academic setting. Vocational experiences can develop many skills, such as language, planning, cooperation, and job-specific skills. Individuals

in the labor market are beginning to take an interest in developing non-cognitive skills, as those appear to be foundational and can also be used to predict vocational success (Cunningham & Villaseñor, 2018). Therefore, supporting non-academic skill development can positively influence the effectiveness of school-based support interventions, creating an environment in which proactive behavior and academic strategies are at an increased likelihood of success. Instruction that supports non-cognitive skill acquisition can have an immediate impact.

According to Smithers (2018), early instruction in non-cognitive skills can support school readiness, physical health, and academic achievement. Further, success in these areas may increase the likelihood of success in areas directly tied to one's readiness for school, academic ability, and health. Frank (2020) listed that the short-term effects of skill building in this area can improve academic work and achievement due to increased grit and responsibility assumption. Additionally, the author notes that an increase in social skills could support the successful navigation of the social environment and increase satisfaction with the quality of one's social experience.

Exploring the long-term effects of non-cognitive skill instruction is relatively new; however, employers are increasingly interested in their impact on the workforce (Merchant et al., 2018). For example, Penderson (2020) examines which skills are necessary for vocational success. This author's research determined that the ability to persevere, complete tasks, and adjust to new demands are essential skills for an employee. These skills can be taught and reinforced in a school setting and contribute to success in the labor market. Jacobs et al. (2021) assert that instruction in non-cognitive skills also supports future success when pursuing post-secondary education. Coping skills can also significantly impact future success and one's ability to manage the demands of challenging tasks and emotional regulation when faced with adversity

(Bolli & Hof, 2018). Instruction targeting these areas could support an individual's ability to meet demands and navigate difficult situations in their personal and professional life.

The influence of cognitive and non-cognitive skills can be seen throughout an individual's life. One's ability to excel in academic and non-academic settings could determine the likelihood of a future positive outcome, including academic and vocational success. Wanzer et al. (2019) extended research regarding outcomes, stating that the current study suggests that non-cognitive factors influence academic success. Carter et al. (2019) built upon previous research, asserting that an increased emphasis on non-cognitive skills, particularly social skills, contributes educationally, vocationally, and socially to an individual's progress. Additionally, Carter et al. (2019) noted that non-cognitive skills can significantly impact future outcomes, even more so than cognitive skills. Educational institutions should consider this when attempting to make curricular or organizational changes designed to address student success, as the relationship between cognitive and non-cognitive skills is observable.

Vocationally, cognitive, and non-cognitive skills can impact future accomplishments. Sabbir and Taufique (2020) stated that they found evidence to indicate that the jobs available today demand more mastery of non-cognitive skills than in the past. Further, when schools provide non-cognitive development, students' achievement improves long-term economic opportunities. (Borghans et al., 2018). Korthal et al. (2022) affirmed in their research that there is a direct correlation between social skills and job acquisition, which further demonstrates the value of providing support for the development of non-cognitive skills and their influence on future success and independence.

Stakeholder Roles

School district personnel includes the school board members, the superintendent, and the individuals employed at a district or central office. Each group plays a vital role in creating and implementing school discipline policies, as they are tasked with balancing the requirements of state laws and policies with the needs of the local school district (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2019). These individuals and groups work together to ensure that the policies they create are implemented at the school level and that the district's vision is carried out (Epstein, 2018). Schiff (2018) stated that school district personnel are typically the change agents in school systems, as they oversee programs and make changes necessary to ensure that positive outcomes are attainable. Further, George et al. (2018) specifically addressed the role of the central office in the implementation of discipline practices and state that district office personnel are not only in charge of creating and implementing policies, but it is also their responsibility to allocate appropriate resources and ensure that programs are adequately supported and evaluated to ensure proper functionality and effectiveness.

Administrators play a critical role in establishing safe, inclusive, and equitable schools; therefore, it is the responsibility of those in leadership to ensure that policies and procedures are in place and followed (Farr et al., 2020). To carry out those duties, the tone must be set for the climate and culture of the school, with adequate training provided to the faculty and staff to ensure that all stakeholders are trained and prepared to work together to accomplish common goals. Encouraging teacher buy-in is an integral part of the training process, helping them see what they are gaining by making changes rather than focusing on what they may feel they are giving up. The Minnesota Department of Education (2022) stated that administrators should set an example and model the desired behaviors to implement restorative practices successfully.

Another role that administrators play is that of a manager. Payne and Welch (2018) acknowledged that the faculty, staff, students, and parents will be keenly observant of the administration's behavior, particularly when new discipline policies are implemented that could be perceived to upset the status quo. Therefore, a role that the principal must play is that of a manager. Administrators are tasked with managing the conflict that arises when there are changes in a school system; their skills, abilities, and attitudes have a significant impact on their ability to not only quell conflict but ensure that the resolution promotes an environment conducive to continued collaboration and growth (Dewi et al., 2019). An additional part of their managerial duties is to evaluate the fidelity and effectiveness of policy implementation, as systems and policies must be examined to determine what needs to be done to promote success (Ryu et al., 2020).

In the context of restorative practices, an administrator is the cornerstone of the process because the skills and beliefs they possess directly impact outcomes for stakeholders (Ryu et al., 2020). To effectively utilize the benefits of restorative practices, an administrator must buy into its purposes and practices, which come from proper training and research into best practices (Tonich, 2021). With appropriate training comes the ability to carry out restorative practices when managing student behaviors. Wiezorek and Mandard (2018) stated that administrators are typically called in to handle significant disruptions and incidents among students and between students and teachers. In those moments, an administrator should use research-based strategies to restore order and repair any relationships damaged by the incident (Mansfield et al., 2018).

Teachers play an essential role in the implementation of strategies and programs at the school level as they are directly responsible for meeting the needs of the students, and training teachers in the use of restorative practices can facilitate the teachers' work to meet students where they are both behaviorally and academically (Sandwick et al., 2019). Those in the classroom are

the individuals tasked with executing the directives given by the state, local, and building-level administration (Dhaliwal et al., 2021). As such, teachers' role in implementing restorative practices is vital to its success. Forsberg and Leko (2021) stated that not only is the role of the teacher influential in the implementation of policies but also in the development of relationships with the students and their families, which can be used to open lines of communication and support school and district initiatives. Silverman and Mee (2018) asserted that teachers also play an integral role when attempting to initiate a culture shift within a school, as they are in direct contact with students and can model behaviors and attitudes that will support a shift within the culture of the school. Further, Gray (2021) highlighted the importance of veteran teachers in the role of mentor for those new to the profession to help guide novice teachers with school policies, which can include implementing restorative practices.

The support of parents, caregivers, and guardians is a key component related to successful implementation of restorative practices in the school setting (Grant & Mac Iver, 2021). Warin and Hibbin (2020) noted that often, a lack of parental involvement is a barrier to successfully implementing changes in a school; therefore, it is imperative to increase communication between home and school to ensure that all stakeholders are informed and feel engaged in the processes at school, particularly regarding discipline practices and any changes that are necessary based on the needs of the students in the school. Kennedy et al. (2019) also emphasized the value of including parents and families in the decision-making process to increase buy-in and support for the school's efforts. This can increase positive responses and outcomes for all stakeholders through a unified understanding of processes and intentions.

Skryzpek et al. (2020) stated that in addition to parents, students are potentially one of the most significant contributing factors to the success or failure of the implementation of restorative

practices. Song et al. (2020) asserted that students are the individuals that are experiencing the effects of restorative practices, and the implementation process should be a school-wide effort, paying particular attention to the feedback from the student population. Augustine et al. (2018) stressed the significance of prioritizing student input and inclusion in the decision-making process, validating concerns, and consistently and equitably applying discipline measures and interventions.

School resource officers (SROs) are often involved in executing a school's discipline policies, even though most school districts report that SROs are not technically part of discipline policies (Curran et al., 2019). However, Curran et al. (2019) also emphasized that how these officers are involved in school discipline is often shaped by the school's context, particularly the school's grade levels, meaning elementary, middle, or high school. Therefore, when properly trained, SROs could serve in a supportive role when using restorative discipline techniques. In addition to school resource officers, Smith et al. (2021) contended that school counselors are also vital in implementing restorative practices because it is the counselor's job to support the student academically, socially, and emotionally. Counselors can work with students on conflict resolution strategies, peer mediation strategies, and support the development of self-regulation techniques, all of which are necessary for success in present and future endeavors.

For many communities, schools are the center of most activities in an area and can include sporting events, clubs, organizations, volunteering, and academic ceremonies. According to Gomez et al. (2021), the community that a school or school system serves plays a vital role in successfully integrating alternative discipline systems, including restorative practices. Mohammad (2020) stated that the role of the community in implementing restorative practices in an education system of an area influences acceptance and integration of the practices across settings. Assadullah

and Morrison (2021) further asserted that community involvement and buy-in are at the center of successful implementation; however, it is often considered the peripheral focus of those in charge of implementing discipline policies and practices.

Implementation Strategies

Implementation strategies for restorative practices are often dictated by the context in which they are to be applied (Klevan, 2021). Students of various grades and skill levels need different types and support when restorative practices are introduced initially and as the implementation process continues (Evanovich et al., 2021). In addition to the students, administrators, teachers, staff, and parents also require support at all levels through all phases of the implementation process of restorative discipline practices (Gregory & Evans, 2020).

State Level

To curtail the use and consequences of exclusionary practices, some states have limited school districts' abilities to use them as methods of discipline (Gregory & Evans, 2020). Rafa (2019) stated that within the last five years, most U.S. states have enacted laws restricting exclusion and expulsion as discipline practices, hoping that those actions will encourage states to seek alternative discipline methods. Education policies such as these, as well as others, typically come from state lawmakers, as they are the governing body that creates and changes education laws and policies, which affects all districts within the state's borders (Rafa, 2019). However, school districts can enact policies not required by states to meet the needs of the stakeholders and the community in which they are located. Implementing restorative discipline practices is an example of such policies (Fronius et al., 2019). Diaz Gude and Navarro Papic (2020) argued that even when states have not enacted provisions as education law or policy, states can, however, support the implementation of restorative practices by fully funding public education to provide appropriate

school districts with the financial ability to stabilize intervention programs such as restorative discipline practices.

District Level

District-level personnel can enact policies and implement necessary and adequate programs to meet the stakeholders' needs for which the school district is responsible and accountable (Fronius et al., 2019). Gregory and Evans (2020) suggested a comprehensive approach to implementing restorative practices involving training at all district service levels. The authors go on to suggest that districts seeking alternative discipline methods should involve all stakeholders in the process to increase the likelihood of buy-in and effective implementation.

To begin the implementation process, issues within the district must be identified and are typically related to concerns with school safety and the effectiveness of discipline policies (Lodi et al., 2021). Lodi et al. (2021) asserted that restorative practices are not programs but more strategies that can support positive student behavior outcomes. Therefore, training in implementing restorative practices should be tailored to meet the needs of the district and the community so that each stakeholder feels considered when making choices regarding solutions that may have a direct impact inside and outside the school system (Payne & Welch, 2018). Further, Rafa (2019) stated that a school district can implement restorative practices as a means of showing dignity to those involved, thereby supporting relationships, displays of positive behavior, and reducing the need for punitive behavior measures, all of which should be modeled by the highest employees in a district.

School Level

It is well-documented that school-level implementation of restorative practices should be undertaken as a whole-school event (Gonzalez et al., 2018; Lustick, 2021a). The initial step in

the implementation process is training the administration and gaining their buy-in to ensure that the administrators' influence over the faculty and staff is such that the implementation process is supported (Lacoe & Steinberg, 2019). Identifying key staff members is needed so that training can be provided to them to ensure a solid foundation of knowledge and understanding before parents and students are looped into the process (Griffin & Tyner, 2019). Parents, students, and community members should also be involved in the implementation process through workshops, training sessions, and feedback sessions to provide accurate information to those stakeholders and increase their awareness and understanding of the reasons and processes that accompany such a change in discipline plans. Further, stakeholders should be provided the opportunity to give feedback to the school's leadership to ensure that all voices are heard (Sondonah, 2019).

Velez et al. (2020) stated that the effective use of restorative discipline practices is often shaped by the context in which they are implemented, which can cause challenges with the process. Further, a school's environment, people, and culture should be carefully considered when choosing implementation strategies (Velez et al., 2020). Lodi et al. (2021) warn that implementation strategies are often unique to the context, restorative practices are not set firm strategies or procedures, and modifications will likely be necessary to promote the successful implementation of the strategies chosen by the school. Zakszeski and Rutherford (2021) indicated that a critical component of implementing restorative practices is building relationships among students, staff, and parents as a means of creating a support system. A strong support system is crucial when attempting to repair a relationship that has been damaged due an infraction. If preservation is not possible, some form of conflict resolution should be attempted. Lustick (2021a) echoed the importance of those relationships as a foundation for successful

implementation and highlighted the impact of strong bonds and relationships among stakeholders.

Potential Benefits

The traditional goal of behavior management is to reduce negative behavior. The traditional way to accomplish this is through punitive means, such as exclusionary discipline methods, which can lead to students missing class and reducing time spent in an academic setting (Farr et al., 2020). Additionally, exclusionary discipline methods disproportionately affect students of color, especially black males and students served by special education services (Payne & Welch, 2018). Conversely, the goals of implementing restorative practices are to reduce this disproportionality, reduce the incidences of behavior issues, and increase the student's capacity for accepting responsibility for behavior choices and the natural consequences of those choices (Hashim et al., 2018). Spending more time in the classroom and being engaged in learning can provide students with the academic foundation needed to be academically successful. Using the skills embedded in restorative practices can lead to a calmer school environment that is safe, productive, and inclusive (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Augustine et al. (2018) argued that using restorative practices provides parties with a way to keep dignity intact, acknowledgment and validation of feelings, and conflict resolution skills that can be used at home and in the community to de-escalate conflict, reduce stress and promote repair when needed.

Community

Implementing restorative justice practices in schools can have long-term effects that benefit communities (Weber & Vereenoghe, 2020). The use of these practices can impact how youths resolve conflicts both inside and outside of school and improve their ability to work

through challenging situations with family and community members, while increasing the likelihood of resolving conflicts peaceably with less violence and escalation of adverse events and incidents (Green et al., 2019). Further, increased positive involvement in the school system could lead to more students possessing the skills needed to support themselves and contribute to the community in a positive way (Augustine et al., 2019). More skilled and socially competent workers could lead to a reduced need for government support, as the youths that enter the workforce are not only capable of getting jobs but also keeping them due to the skills they developed while attending a school that has effectively implemented restorative practices (Acosta et al., 2019).

Communities may also experience short terms benefits of the implementation of restorative practices in a school system, such as a decrease in students that are left unattended at home during school hours due to discipline incidents at school, which may result in idle time and an increase in crimes and incidents within the community (Gomez et al., 2021). Thus, an increase in the immediate safety of those in the community and perhaps a greater feeling of security. However, friction in a community is evitable; therefore, equipping students with necessary conflict resolution and de-escalation skills supports a healing process rather than a retributive one, leading to a safer community experience (Kennedy et al., 2019).

School

Schools can experience long-term benefits from the effective implementation of restorative practices (Acosta et al., 2019). An increase in student achievement often results when the emphasis on a safer and more productive learning environment is in place and supported through effective behavior management strategies (Mitchell et al., 2019). Stronger bonds within the school community can also occur over time and continue as the restorative practices are

maintained due to the paradigm shift in thinking resulting from effective implementation (Brown, 2017). Additionally, the number of severe discipline issues may be reduced, and the need for more punitive discipline methods (Weber & Vereenooghe, 2020).

In the short term, schools could expect to see issues worsening before they get better as the focus on the administration changes and the responses to student behavior (Glenn et al., 2021). Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) stated that this is not uncommon when transitioning from one discipline method or focus to another. Schools and districts must be prepared for this immediate effect and work to continue implementing restorative discipline practices with fidelity. After the initial potential increase in behavior issues, schools could expect to see a reduction in minor behavior incidents, such as tardies and minor infractions that can compound and result in suspensions over time (Green et al., 2021).

Individual

Youths participating in restorative school practices can experience long-term benefits such as increased social and emotional development, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution skills (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). Development in these areas can provide an individual with the skills necessary to navigate challenging situations later in life that could negatively impact employment, peer, and familial relationships (Vittadini et al., 2022). Further, equipping youths with these skills can also increase confidence and self-esteem, as they may feel better prepared to overcome friction and resolve conflicts they encounter (Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). The ability to effectively solve problems that arise in the workplace and one's personal life can also be impacted by using restorative discipline practices due to the increased focus on not only personal accountability but also decision-making and problem-solving (Borgen et al., 2020).

In the short term, using restorative practices in schools can provide students with an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of their accountability concerning their behavior choices and empathy for others (Lodi et al., 2022). Understanding personal accountability and empathy can lead youths to make different behavior choices, thus decreasing their involvement with administrators and punitive discipline practices because the likelihood of choosing a negative behavior over a positive one may be reduced (Weber & Verneenooghe, 2020). A reduction in suspensions and expulsions may translate into more time in class, more opportunities for learning, and an increased likelihood of academic success because, for some students, the cycle of infraction and discipline is a never-ending cycle of experiences fueled by a lack of knowledge due to absences from class and separation from the school setting (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019), which can create more significant gaps in learning, less integration into the school community and more negative interactions with teachers, administrators, and possibly school resource officers.

Common Misconceptions

Restorative practices have roots in the criminal justice system and its definitions vary widely in American society. Common misconceptions around restorative practices can interfere with the implementation of the restorative process (Molloy et al., 2020). Abraham (2020) described one example of a misconception as the idea that the use of restorative practices equates to a lack of punishment or consequences, when, in fact, the practice of restoration is used after punishment. Fosse (2020) asserted that the basis for this misconception stems from a punitive mindset in which punishing the offender is the most important aspect of justice. However, focusing solely on the punishment of the offender does not provide any resolution for the victim or opportunity for the offender to practice empathy, nor does it facilitate the development of

personal accountability for the harm the victim experienced (Fosse, 2020). Another common assumption is that the perpetrator must be forgiven by the wronged party and absolved of all misconduct for the restorative process to be complete (Moore, 2018). When restorative practices are used, reconciliation and forgiveness among parties is not always possible, and depend on factors such as the offense and safety of the participants (Gonzalez, 2020). Llewellyn (2021) articulated that an inaccurate assumption often made about restorative practices is that the expectation after implementation there is a return to the status quo. However, returning relationships to an original state is not the goal of restorative practices, but working towards the ability to relate to one another in a just way, with the hope of avoiding or mitigating future conflicts (Molloy et al., 2020). Llewellyn (2019) discussed that misconceptions can also lie within the parties involved, and typically relate to the ways that individuals experience an event, which emphasizes the importance of developing a mutual understanding when conflict arises.

Implementing restorative practices in school systems is a challenging task. Schools typically mirror the communities in which they are located, and this mirroring effect has caused an intertwining of school discipline and the justice system because offenses that tend to occur outside of school have found become present inside of schools (Woods & Stewart, 2018). As incidents in schools increase in number, school systems seek alternatives to punitive discipline practices, and many education systems choose restorative justice as a means of reducing offenses and keeping students in school (Stewart & Ezell, 2022). Winslade (2018) described the need for restorative justice a way to provide context for behaviors and combat misconceptions regarding race, gender, and socio-economic status. However, to successfully implement new discipline methods, Moore (2018) asserted that stakeholders must be shown that restorative practices are

more than just a means of enforcing discipline, which can be a common misinterpretation when changes are made to discipline policies.

Summary

It is evidenced in the literature that educational organizations are continually seeking effective strategies to manage student behavior with the hope for direct and indirect improvement of the overall climate of a school, increasing student achievement, and providing long-term skills for students that can be utilized after their time in public education is finished. Further, increasing concerns about the severity of behavior infractions and criminal activity that occurs on campuses, as well as the consequences of punitive and exclusionary discipline policies, are pushing some state, and many district leaders, to look for alternative means of behavior management that are both proactive and support growth for the stakeholders. Restorative practices are just one option for those seeking alternative discipline methods, as they can encompass many strategies and methods, each of which should be chosen for the environmental context and the school community's needs.

However, the literature lacks evidence of implementing restorative discipline practices in specific geographic locations in the United States, mainly a large swath of the American South. Additionally, there is little documentation of cases implementing restorative discipline practices as a compliment or companion to traditional discipline policies. In many areas, the implementation process is either traditional or alternative, but not both. This study examines how a particular school district in the American South attempted to implement restorative practices concurrently with traditional discipline policies. Therefore, the information gathered from this study supports an expansion of literature in this area and can provide practical knowledge for the

development of training strategies for educators, administrators, and other stakeholders that are the makeup of school communities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This single embedded case study aimed to understand how one school district in the American South implemented restorative practices and traditional discipline policies. This approach allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the implementation process of restorative practices in a typical school district. The results of this study could provide an avenue to develop theories based on the data, which support the development of generalizations regarding implementation that may be of interest to other researchers in the field of education. Additionally, this chapter contains the research questions, research design, setting, participants, researcher positionality, interpretive framework, philosophical assumptions, researcher's role, procedures, data collection and analysis plans, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and a summary of this study, with comprehensive descriptions in all sections that are sufficient to ensure the ability to replicate this design in various settings.

Research Design

The chosen qualitative research method for the study was a single embedded case study approach, which was described as the study of a case, that can include a person, group, organization, profession, or department (Yin, 2018). It is appropriate for this study because I sought to understand the how or the process by which one school district in the American south has implemented restorative practices as a compliment to the traditional discipline policies that are currently used.

Qualitative research is a means of gathering data that related to the qualities or characteristics of a process or phenomenon (Patton, 2002). The purpose of qualitative research is to examine the reality of an individual as it relates to their experiences, perceptions, and

interactions within a specific context (Merriam, 1998). Another way to describe the purpose of qualitative research is it is used to facilitate an understanding of the how or why of an experience or phenomenon as it relates to the context in which each may occur (Marshall & Roseman, 2015). These understandings are garnered through the analysis of non-numerical data, which is subjective, but provides the researcher with insights about attitudes and beliefs held by individuals (Pathak et al., 2013).

Case study research is rooted in medicine, social sciences, and case law (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Its earliest origins can be traced to studies by Malinowski and LePlay in the early twentieth century, which sought to understand anthropological and sociological phenomena related to defined groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These foundational case studies were conducted using loose methods and drew criticism from the scientific community due to a perceived lack of validity and rigor (Harrison et al., 2017). As the concept of case studies evolved, Yin (2018) asserted that blending scientific approaches with naturalistic inquiry could increase the creditability and validity of case studies and increase acceptance of their results and generalizations.

Case study research methods seek to understand a process, event, or phenomenon within a specific context related to a specified case, which is then used to gain insight, generalize, or build a theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Stake (2005), a predominantly educational researcher, stated that the design of a case study is less about methodology and more about the capture the complexity it contains; thus, focusing on the interaction of the phenomena within the context of the case is of utmost importance. Merriam (2009) adds to the description of a case study by emphasizing the focus on the case itself (the bounded system) as the topic of analysis, from

which the product of the investigation should be descriptive and fully expound upon the findings of the research.

To begin the case study process, a researcher must identify a specific case to be described or analyzed in context using real-time data collection strategies to capture the most accurate information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case must have established parameters that define the case, which is identified as a bounded system. These parameters can include the location, time, and in some instances, the people involved in the case. Yin (2018) asserted that case studies can be used to understand something specific, like an issue, problem, or concern; therefore, multiple types of data collection methods are used to provide the researcher with access to subjective and objective material to be used to generate descriptions of the case. The type of data analysis chosen by the researcher depends upon the study's overall goal, which includes an analysis of themes in the case context (Yin, 2018). Ultimately, a report is created using the study's findings to include assertions written so that a reader can clearly understand the study's purpose, methods, findings, and results (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Case studies are often used by qualitative researchers when attempting to examine a case, or cases, in a natural or real-life setting to understand a relationship, process, or event (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Yin (2018) described case studies as a method that uses in-depth data collection from multiple analyzed sources to create descriptions and themes unique to the case itself, thus allowing the researcher to construct meaning from the data. This process allows researchers to gain insight into phenomena, or in the case of this study, gain insight into how restorative discipline practices were implemented.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the way in which one school district has incorporated restorative practices in conjunction with the current discipline policies. This study posits and answers the following questions as a means of data collection designed to examine implementation methods through document analysis and perceptions of those involved through the interview process and focus groups.

Central Research Question

How are restorative discipline practices incorporated with traditional discipline policies in a public school district in the American South?

Sub-Question One

How are restorative practices implemented in this case?

Sub-Question Two

How are discipline policies, including restorative practices, applied to specific groups in this case?

Sub-Question Three

How does the environmental context influence the implementation of restorative and traditional discipline practices in this case?

Setting and Participants

The setting for this study, a school district in the American South, was chosen because there is a lack of empirical evidence of research taking place in this geographic location. This study's participants were selected to ensure that the collected data represent an accurate cross-section of the case study population, a school district in the American South. Further, the case

setting was chosen because the implications of the results of this study can provide more relevant and actionable research for those interested in the content of the study.

Setting

The site for this study was a school district in the semi-rural American South. This school district serves approximately 17,594 students and employs approximately 2500 teachers and staff. Of the students, 49% are female, and 51% are male (SCDOE, 2021). With regards to student population diversity, approximately 42.8% of the students are white, 40.1% are Black, 9.7% are Hispanic, 4.7% are multiracial, 1.4% are Asian, 1.2% are Native American, and 0.2% are Pacific Islander, with 60.3% of district students receiving free lunch (SCDOE, 2021). The district consists of three high schools, five middle schools, and 15 elementary schools. In addition, there is also a newly created virtual academy and alternative programs for elementary and secondary students and adult education. The leadership structure consists of the superintendent, associate superintendents, and directors of various areas (transportation, testing, elementary/secondary education, a school board, building principals, assistant principals, teachers, and staff.

This district was selected due to its location, which provided me with ease of access to participants, and limited research conducted in the region regarding restorative discipline practices. Additionally, this school district recently partnered with a local university and receives ongoing training and support from trained professionals specializing in restorative discipline practices. Administrators as well as selected school personnel at each school site were provided with professional development to promote the use of restorative discipline practices within each school, which gave this school district unique characteristics compared to other districts in the region.

Participants

The participants for this study were selected based on their employment within the case, a school district that has elected to implement restorative discipline practices. Gender, race, age, and ethnicity were not influential factors regarding participant selection, as those areas are not the focus of the study. To ensure that minimum participant thresholds were met, I recruited from multiple levels within the case, including but not limited to school and district-level employees, 15 participants were selected.

Researcher Positionality

I believe that humans view the world through lenses. These lenses are developed throughout one's life through experiences, education, and training; and influence how information is processed and interpreted. From an educational perspective, teaching and learning are impacted by the lenses through which the teacher and the student filter information and make meaning; therefore, it is reasonable to state that interpretation is individualized and impacted by free will and outside influences. In school, the focus is on modeling procedures and behavior, with a significant emphasis on "how" to do things, but I might argue that sometimes we miss the mark on the "why" of those focus areas. Additionally, consideration should be given to the varied learning experiences children experience in their home environment. To provide support, it may be necessary to build the background or fill in the gaps that students may have while simultaneously moving them forward.

Interpretive Framework

The interpretive framework for this study was based in is pragmatism. The basic tenet of pragmatism is focusing on outcomes and consequences, looking for what works and what does not when examining a process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this case, implementing restorative

discipline practices alongside traditional discipline policies. Humans construct meaning based on experience and, in turn, will continue to interpret the meaning of new experiences through the lens of the previously constructed schema (Qutoshi, 2018). Single embedded case study research seeks to understand a particular issue, problem-solve, generalize, or build theories, which could, consequently, also provide an understanding of another topic or concept (Yin, 2018).

Philosophical Assumptions

Core values of research are expressed in philosophical assumptions. These assumptions are typically present throughout the life of a researcher and tend to be the driving mechanism for a researcher's motivation and interpretation of information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, the methodology chosen by a researcher can reflect both personal as well as professional philosophical assumptions. For this study, case study research provided a philosophical framework to help me understand "what works" and is useful in terms of the case of study, using multiple data sources, which can be a combination of subjective and objective tools (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ontological Assumption

Ontological assumptions refer to what can be known or understood about a concept or phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A researcher should be willing to accept that reality is often what is valuable and practical and is primarily based on individual experiences. Thus, the researcher must report findings and themes with as little undue influence as possible. Although variations among perspectives are inevitable, it is essential to remember that what is considered beneficial should be filtered through the lens of the Christian worldview. As a Christian researcher, I am called to use God's word to provide understanding through Him and thus not lean on my understanding.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemological assumptions refer to the knowledge of individuals and examine how knowledge is justified and the relationship between the researcher and the topic of said research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Knowledge is gathered through the experiences of others, which provides context to the researcher and gives additional insight into the views of individuals. To gain full access to a subject or participant, the researcher must become enmeshed in the community where the participants reside. For the Christian researcher, it is necessary to remember that being in the world but not of the world will protect both the research and the researcher from negative influences. As I begin to study the implementation of restorative practices, in this case, it will be vital for me to note my perception of this topic and consider, without judgment, the perceptions of others.

Axiological Assumption

In qualitative research, axiological assumption refers to the values and biases of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is the disclosure of the lens through which the researcher processes and interprets information. This acknowledgment provides the research consumer with the necessary information to evaluate the researcher's intentions and the purpose of the research itself. In this study, I acknowledged my biases towards restorative discipline practices because they influence my interpretation of the information gathered. I am a high school special education teacher who works with many students who experience consequences related to their behavior issues, both inside and outside school. As such, my feelings regarding restorative practices and their ability to potentially prevent recidivism among my students will likely not be shared by all the participants in my study. Therefore, I acknowledged my own biases and worked to set them aside as I collected and analyzed my findings, so those biases

were not a factor that influences the outcome of my study.

Researcher's Role

The role of the researcher in case study research is to understand how the case study is implementing restorative discipline practices in addition to traditional discipline policies, as well as how success is measured and determined. As the human instrument in the study, my role is to collect, interpret, and disseminate information without the interference of any preconceived notions or personal opinions about any aspect of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I will be transparent about my experiences with restorative discipline practices and freely acknowledge any biases that may interfere with the collection and interpretation of the data. Additionally, I do not have any authority over the participants in this study, as I am currently a classroom teacher.

Procedures

After all necessary permission were granted, I emailed all potential candidates to determine their level of interest in participating in the study (see Appendix B). I worked through the superintendent of the school district in which the case study was based, to gain any additional support or permissions as the need arose. Potential participants were given the criteria for participation via the consent form and asked to return the form via email to indicate interest in participating in the study. Based on responses, 15 participants were chosen to contribute to the study via the interview and focus group process. Informed consent forms (see Appendix C) were provided to each participant prior to the data collection process. An additional data collection method was the collection and analysis of documents. Upon completion of the data collection process, analysis was performed, and the emergent themes documented to answer the research questions of the study. Through the data synthesis process, trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, and confirmability were established to promote validity. Ethical considerations

were outlined and implemented throughout the research process. The researcher adhered to the processes of the IRB, to ensure the safety of the participants and the integrity of the research stays intact.

Permissions

Before beginning any data collection, approval was granted from the IRB at Liberty University (see Appendix A for IRB approval). This process began with application submission to the IRB, which included any necessary permissions granted by the site for data collection. Per IRB determination, no official permission was needed from the site as all participant contact information is accessible to the public and no confidential information was requested by the researcher. Once approved by the IRB, I started the process of securing participants. Permission to work with the individuals within this school district was sought from the individual participants themselves. However, an email was sent to the superintendent detailing the study, including the purpose and procedures for collecting data, and any, additional requirements set forth by district leadership were met prior to soliciting interest from the participants themselves.

Recruitment Plan

Employees in the school district of study were considered potential candidates for the sample. Currently, the pool of participants is 2500, with an approximate sample size of ten to fifteen needed for this study to ensure saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Saturation in qualitative research is often undefined but can be indicated when no new codes appear during the analysis portion of a study (Saunders et al., 2018). Purposeful maximum sampling was used to identify participants. This type of sampling involves selecting various samples to ensure that a wide range of perspectives is represented in the data regarding the topic of study (Suri, 2011). In this case, the requirements needed for consideration in the study was employment in the case,

which is a school district and having received training in the implementation of restorative practices. Each candidate was sent an email detailing the study's purpose and what was required of them if they chose to commit. Each candidate was informed that participation was strictly voluntary, collected data would remain secure, and the participant's permission to participate could be revoked at any time with no fear of penalty.

Data Collection Plan

Data collection for this study occurred through three different methods. The first was semi-structured interviews. This type of interview is designed to elicit narrative responses from the participant(s) regarding their lived experience with the phenomenon that is the focus of a study (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). For this study, the interviews were conducted via an electronic medium (Zoom). Each interview was recorded and transcribed prior to analysis. The second method of data collection was focus groups. Like the interview questions, the focus groups' questions were based on the central and research questions; however, unlike the previous method, the participants engaged with one another in a conversation where the researcher acted as a neutral moderator. The focus groups' questions were used to provide additional data to establish the presence of the participant(s') perceptions and attitudes toward restorative discipline practices and their potential impact on students. The final data collection method was archival documents. Once all data is collected, the analysis started with an examination of each data set to determine the presence of any significant statements (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The patterns within the data were compared across collection methods to produce themes through horizontalization (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews are typically defined as a one-on-one interaction in which one individual asks probing questions of another to gain information and collect data for analysis. Yin, (2018) stated that formal and informal interviews are designed to extrapolate the experiences of others through first-person accounts. Therefore, the questions should be open-ended and evoke full, rich descriptions from the interviewee. This data collection approach was appropriate for this study because the researcher sought to understand the participants' lived experiences in their own words. These interviews were conducted electronically via Zoom. Each interview is planned for forty-five minutes to an hour; however, the schedule was piloted on the first two to three interviews to ensure that the timing was appropriate for the purpose and allowed for adjustments for subsequent interviews.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your position in the school district. CRQ
2. Please describe your knowledge of how discipline policies are implemented in this school district. SQ1
3. Please describe how the implementation of discipline policies impacts you in your current position. SQ1
4. Please describe your experience with implementing discipline policies in your current role. SQ1
5. Please describe your experience using restorative practices in your role. SQ1
6. Based on your experience, please describe how discipline policies, including restorative practices impact different demographic groups. SQ2

7. Based on your experience, please describe what factors influence the use of restorative practices in your role. SQ2
8. Please describe your feelings about how the environment of the school district impacts the way in which discipline policies are implemented? SQ3
9. Please describe how the implementation of district discipline policies impact the environment in which you work. SQ3
10. What else would you like to add to our discussion today?

These questions were included in the interview protocol as the primary data collection method for this single case study because it is a research-supported method to gather subjective data regarding the research questions and the study case. According to the conceptual framework of Yin (2018), human perceptions are viewed as a primary source of knowledge; therefore, an appropriate way to gain access to the perceptions of the participant(s) is to ask open-ended interview questions.

The purpose for this line of questioning was to provide the researcher with the background information for each interviewee, as well as their personal perceptions of the topic. Question one was designed to build a rapport and to establish the background experience of the participants. Questions two, three, and four were intended to elicit responses that detail the participants' perspectives on applying discipline policies and restorative practices in general. Questions five and six were included to ascertain the participants' perceptions of applying discipline and restorative practices regarding specific demographic groups. Questions eight and nine were designed to prompt responses that show how each participant believed the context and environment influence discipline practices. Question ten was included to provide the participant with the ability to give further details, description, or clarification in a less structured manner

than the previous questions. The opportunity to give information more informally could reveal new insights into the thought processes and beliefs of the participants.

The information gathered from the interviews was used for comparison purposes, from which themes and common concepts emerged. These emergent themes and concepts were used in a variety of ways to contribute to the body of research in this area. For this study, the candidate's committee member(s) will reviewed and approved any interview questions before data collection.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

To facilitate the analysis, each interview was recorded and transcribed word for word. The purpose of the transcriptions was to provide me with a clear understanding of thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions related to the central and sub-research questions. After transcribing the interviews, I started the thematic content analysis process, where emerging themes were coded (DiCocco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This type of analysis was appropriate for this data set because I looked for patterns in the interview responses that were pertinent to how this school district implements discipline policies and practices. Further, I used this type of data analysis to make sense of the data collected through the interview process, which led to additional connections in the data set.

After the data was transcribed, I read and re-read the interviews to become familiar with the content. Next, I used open coding and quickly organized the data to detect patterns (Saldana, 2021). Once the patterns emerged, they were used to categorize the data, and then aligned with the research questions to produce the phenomenon's essence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To assist with the analysis process, I used data analysis software called Atlas TI to manage and organize

large amounts of data; however, I manually coded the material to ensure an accurate analysis of the content.

Focus Groups

A second method of data collection for this study was executed using focus groups; the data collected through this method assisted with triangulation. It was appropriate for this study because the researcher sought to understand the beliefs and attitudes of the participants regarding the topic of study. The use of a focus group allowed the researcher to observe group dynamics, and non-verbal communication, which gave the researcher further insights into the attitudes and beliefs of the participants (Gill & Baillie, 2018). Greenspan et al. (2021) confirmed that the use of focus groups can provide a researcher with more in-depth information which can be used to help direct current and future research endeavors. Further, focus group data can diversify findings, and lead the researcher to new conclusions that would not be possible using any other method of data collection (Richard et al., 2020).

To conduct this method of data collection, individuals were chosen from the participant pool based on the job they do within the school district. A minimum of six individuals were assigned to each group, comprised teachers and staff or administrators. This leveling was done to support a feeling of safety among group members, as a perceived or actual place of authority could impact the answers given by the participants. The focus group was facilitated online through Zoom. Each session was recorded with video and audio and took approximately forth-five minutes to an hour to complete. A transcription of the sessions was completed to provide an additional tool to aid in the analysis process.

Focus Group Questions

1. How has your perspective of school discipline over the course of your career in education? (SQ1)
2. Please describe what supports could help you with the implementation of restorative practices in your current position. (SQ1)
3. In your current position, please describe any challenges you have experienced when utilizing restorative discipline practices with different demographic groups. In what ways have those challenges changed the way you feel about alternative discipline methods? (SQ2)
4. Please describe your beliefs about the potential impacts restorative discipline practices can have on students, schools, and the community. (SQ3)
5. Are there any additional comments that anyone would like to add to this discussion of discipline policies and restorative practices?

Questions one and two were included to gain insight into the factors that have influenced the participants' perspectives over time, as well as their reflections on the training they have received to support their ability to implement restorative practices. Question three was asked to gain an understanding of any challenges the participants face or have faced when implementing discipline policies and practices across different demographic groups. Question four was included to cause the participants to reflect on their beliefs about the potential impact of restorative practices on the students, schools, and communities. Question five was intended to be a concluding question which allowed the participants to add any additional information or feedback that they felt was beneficial to the discussion.

These questions were included in the focus group protocol as a means of extrapolating additional data as an accompaniment to what was recorded during the interview process. According to Robinson (2020), the questions used for the focus group's discussion should seek to uncover new information or insights that could not be gained from another data collection source. As such, these questions were designed to be neutral and open-ended, which promoted longer, more detailed answers without the interference of bias or peer-related pressure to conform answers to reflect what an individual perceives to be a desired response. For this study, the candidate's committee members reviewed and approved any questions prior to data collection, or any necessary changes to the focus group methods if the need arose.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

Once the focus group data was collected and transcribed, I utilized open coding to sort and categorize the findings into groups. This first order coding method was intended to construct an initial compilation of the data (Saldana, 2021). A second order coding method I used is pattern coding. Saldana (2021) stated that this type of coding is designed to group previously coded data into themes for analysis. The multiple sessions can be compared to one another and other collected data sources, which may reveal common themes across focus groups, interviews, and archival documents. As the analysis phase began, I organized the data and looked for major themes to emerge, then worked toward interpreting the themes within context (Yin, 2018). Additionally, I examined the data to detect any general trends and outlier responses not shared across settings. Once all coding and categorization of the data was complete, the final strategy I used was thematic analysis to help identify themes across data sets to facilitate a more thorough interpretation of the data (Yin, 2018).

Document Analysis

According to Yin (2018), document analysis is a means of supporting the primary data collection strategies and is a viable way to collect qualitative data and assist with triangulation. Documents such as job descriptions, training materials, publications, and state and local education policies were collected and analyzed. Additionally, this method is less time-consuming and demanding than other forms of open-ended data collection and provides another objective source of information, which can add to the overall validity and credibility of the study (Yin, 2018). Further benefits of this type of data collection are that it contains exact details rather than the memories and interpretations of participants. Document analysis can also provide information about a case across time. (Yin, 2018).

Document Analysis Data Analysis Plan

Transcription was not needed to analyze this data set as the documents themselves are already in written form. I evaluated each item using content analysis and open coding, wherein I identified and categorized concepts based on the results of the data set (Kohlbacher, 2006; Saldana, 2021). I examined the context, social practices, individuals, and institutions that gave legitimacy to the assumptions made regarding the phenomena (Hodge et al., 2008) and knit together the overall perceptions of the case through connecting categories in which the data points were organized. This type of analysis was appropriate as it was designed to provide me with the ability to analyze the meaning of the language used in each data set, as well as the social cues present in the language that gave insight into how the case presented information about the topic of the study (Hodge et al., 2008). Often, the researcher can surmise what the case believes to be true because this type of analysis focuses on the shades of meaning and what was behind the language choices of the respondent (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). As the final data collection

tool, the analysis of the documents and reports were compared to each of the other tools to facilitate triangulation.

Data Synthesis

The data synthesis process after started the results of the three research methods were triangulated into themes present in each data set, thus using the parts to create an illustration of the whole data set, in which the reader was given a clear description of the central features of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, through the synthesis process, key elements of the findings were highlighted to show the processes used by this school district in the implementation process for discipline policies and practices, as the goal of single case study research is to examine processes and activities that occur in real-life situations (Yin, 2018)

Electronic data analysis software, Atlas ti, was used to assist me in tracking, organizing, and visualizing the data sets, which enabled patterns in the data to be more clearly seen. However, I also carried out manual data analysis as the main means of data extraction and interpretation. The synthesis served to create an initial vignette, designed to provide the reader with the basic details of the study and will detail the context, setting, and history of the case (Yin, 2018). Additionally, the goal of the synthesis process was to produce a final vignette, which served as a cautionary measure for the reader, this section asks the reader to consider the context of the study and acknowledges that the study was a single account of their experience with the specific case (Yin, 2018).

Trustworthiness

Addressing the trustworthiness of qualitative research is necessary to ensure that results and findings were considered valid and scholarly. While qualitative methods lack the concrete numeric validation of quantitative work, measures can be taken to reassure consumers of

qualitative research that the content found within a given study is as reliable as possible, given the subjective nature of qualitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The standards by which qualitative studies are evaluated to determine trustworthiness are described in the foundational work of Lincoln and Guba (1986). Their work provides qualitative researchers with a list of areas where a study needs to meet rigorous standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the perceived integrity of a research study's results and conclusions as they relate to the insights and descriptions of the participant's experience with the phenomena of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). I achieved credibility in three ways: triangulation, peer debriefing, and member-checking (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). To acknowledge my own biases, reflexivity occurred in which I reflected upon my views regarding restorative practices and the potential impact those biases may have on the interpretation of the data (Shenton, 2004). Care was taken to bracket, which means I acknowledged any previous experiences and preconceived notions regarding restorative discipline practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To that end, it was crucial to refrain from passing judgment on the data collected; reporting factually based conclusions also increased credibility (Yin, 2018).

In this study, triangulation was attempted through the analysis and comparison of multiple data sources, including personal interviews, archival material, documents, and reports; method triangulation was used to correlate themes and patterns in each data set (Carter et al., 2014). All data collection methods were directly tied to the central research question, as well as the three sub-questions, which sought to understand the process by which the case has implemented restorative discipline practices in conjunction with traditional discipline policies

and how the case determines if the implementation of restorative practices is successful in context.

I employed peer debriefing to ensure this study's credibility through discussions with colleagues with experience with restorative discipline practices. Peer debriefing is a technique in which the researcher shares raw data and the final report with a peer for review to ensure that the proper conclusions have been drawn (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Additionally, current literature from the field was utilized to corroborate the study's findings.

I have experience working in secondary schools and implementing discipline practices at the classroom level. Therefore, I can understand the nuances of the language used by the participants as well as the jargon and job-specific language used in the interview, focus group, and document analysis data sets. This was important because I was able understand what the participants state or write (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Additionally, after the transcriptions were complete, they were returned to the participants for evaluation; providing each participant the opportunity to determine if the data summary accurately reflected their input.

Transferability

Transferability is part of the evaluative criteria created by Lincoln and Guba (1986) to enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1986) define transferability as the ability to apply results or finding across contexts. The goal of a researcher is to collect and analyze enough data to provide future researchers with a substantive description of the case to support future studies in a different setting or context (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). However, it is the responsibility of the future researcher to determine if the findings of this study will appropriately transfer to the context to which they intend to apply it.

Dependability

Dependability demonstrates that the study findings are consistent and can be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The procedures of my study could be replicated in different settings because the methods I have chosen were supported by literature and follow the framework for a single case study. My committee thoroughly reviewed these procedures and deemed them sufficient to demonstrate mastery of the method as I designed it.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree to which neutrality can be established regarding the level of influence the researcher has over the outcome of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I utilized two techniques to ensure that my biases, interests, and motivation did not unduly influence the results. Those techniques include audit trails and triangulation. Audit trails include documenting and describing the research process in detail from start to finish; this method could also be described as mapping a study from its inception to reporting the results (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). As described in a previous section, triangulation was used to ensure confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles in research should be implemented throughout the process, from the initial contact with the site or participants to physically publishing the study. An ethical research approach is intended to create norms that direct the research methods, promote the use of knowledge, and provide a framework to reduce errors (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a safeguard, the IRB, or Institutional Review Board, is designed to ensure that research is conducted ethically and must approve all proposals prior to conducting any data collection or study. Each step in the process should be closely monitored to protect the safety and well-being of the participants and the integrity of the researcher and the study.

Informed consent was an essential step in the research process. Participants were provided with consent forms that outlined exactly what information was collected, its intended use, and how their identity was protected upon publication of the study. Pertinent demographic information was also collected in addition to the participants' thoughts, feelings, and impressions of restorative justice discipline practices. The data was compiled and coded so that themes emerged, upon which theories can be built. Pseudonyms were used as identifiers rather than the participants' actual names. The data was stored in a password-protected computer, to be destroyed within three years of the study's publication. Further, each participant was allowed to opt-out or withdraw their consent at any time. As to the matter of compensation, no participant was compensated or incentivized through a monetary means; however, participants did benefit from their participation through the reciprocity of learning and gaining knowledge from the study process.

Summary

This chapter outlined the specific research methodology used to answer the research questions. A pragmatic perspective and single embedded case study methods were used to understand the case's implementation of restorative discipline practice in addition to traditional discipline policies. The procedures, participants, data collection and analysis plans, specific interview questions, focus group questions, and document collection, and analysis are also discussed in this chapter. All participants contributed to this study by sharing their perspectives and beliefs, which allowed me to further my understanding of the implementation of restorative discipline practices in this case. Chapter four aims to provide the study's results and demonstrate that the methodology outlined in chapter three was followed.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of Chapter Four is to describe how restorative discipline practices are implemented in conjunction with current discipline policies in a school district in the American South. The problem is that most schools do not consistently implement restorative discipline practices when dealing with complex and problematic behavior issues in schools, which require decisive yet consistent action by schools and districts (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019; Butterfield, 2019; Kennedy et al., 2019; Song et al., 2020; Velez et al., 2020). This chapter describes the findings of this study. The chapter includes participant descriptions; the data in the form of narrative themes and subthemes indicated in the data, revealed outlier data; and individual research question responses. A summary is provided at the conclusion of this chapter.

Participants

Identifying information about the participants was protected using pseudonyms and codes as replacements for real names. The identity of the site setting was also protected using a pseudonym. These measures ensured confidentiality for all participants and the site setting. The IRB approved the plan to recruit participants as described in Chapter Three. Purposeful maximum sampling was used to identify potential participants. This type of sampling involves selecting potential participants from a larger pool to ensure that various perspectives are represented in the data (Suri, 2011). Demographics such as race, gender, age, and ethnicity were not influential factors for participant selection as those areas were not the focus of the study. However, employment in the school district of study and the receipt of district training in restorative practices were the criteria that needed to be considered for participation. As such, six high school administrators, one middle school administrator, one elementary administrator, one

district-level administrator, one school psychologist, three school resource officers, one crisis management assistant, and one in-school suspension assistant were selected based on the stated criteria for participation. The varied administrative experience and job descriptions increased credibility and provided a comprehensive case description (Stake, 1995).

Table 1

Faculty Participants

Faculty Participant	Position	Years in Education	Method of Participation
Becky	Secondary Administrator	15	Interview, Focus Group
Bo	Secondary Administrator	30	Interview
Jessie	Secondary Administrator	12	Interview, Focus Group
Nellie	Mental Health Administrator	35	Interview
Phil	Secondary Administrator	20	Interview, Focus Group
Sharon	Middle Level Administrator	25	Interview, Focus Group
Steph	Secondary Administrator	20	Interview, focus Group
Tamara	Elementary Administrator	30	Interview, Focus Group
Tom	Secondary Administrator	12	Interview

Table 2
Staff Participants

Staff Participant	Position	Years in Education	Method of Participation
Doug	Security Officer	1	Focus Group
Gabe	Security Officer	10	Focus Group
Jane	School Psychologist	25	Focus Group
John	Armed Security	5	Focus Group
Karen	Behavior Management Assistant	1	Focus Group
Ken	Behavior Management Assistant	5	Focus Group

Results

The themes of this study are presented below. Each theme and sub-theme are extrapolated from a thorough analysis and synthesis of the data from individual interviews, focus groups, and documents. The data are presented visually as well as narratively throughout this chapter.

Figure 1
Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Building Relationships	Trust
	Collaboration
	Communication
Professional Development	Training
	Consistency and Fidelity
	Problem-Solving
Empowerment	Involvement
	Responsibility
	Accountability

Building Relationships

Fostering and maintaining relationships among the stakeholders linked to a school is imperative to not only the functionality of a school system but also the implementation of policies and procedures. Nine administrators commented on the importance of establishing relationships among the students, the community, and the faculty and staff within a school. Sharon, a current middle school administrator and former administrator at an alternative school, described the impact of an administration by saying, “it is the culture of the school that impacts how teachers feel, and administrators set the tone for a school.” That administrative influence can directly impact how the school and its policies are perceived inside and outside the school. Phil, an alternative school administrator, stated, “I do not focus on why they were referred to the alternative setting or previous discipline. It is my hope that this logic is refreshing for the student and the parent to hear. We are here to help and support students, not dwell in the past.” He

emphasized that establishing a rapport with the families and students helps to cultivate a supportive environment where students can grow, and the school and the home can work in unison.

Trust

The district of RSD has had three superintendents in the last six years, which has led to discontinuity in policy implementation and a general lack of trust all around the district. Five administrative participants gave input on the effect of this occurrence. Nellie commented on her experience as a district-level mental health administrator by saying, "so many changes at the district level creates inconsistency, and inconsistency can lead to the inability to establish trust." Tamara echoed that sentiment when she said that "the district office cannot just be a house on the hill, an effort should be made to be transparent and involved in the schools as well as the communities they serve." The current superintendent of RSD has taken this sentiment to heart and strives to create an environment in which there is transparency and approachability, thus supporting an environment that increases stakeholder buy-in for initiatives and programming related to teaching, learning, and discipline.

Building trust, however, is not limited to the district level. School administrators, teachers, and staff must work to forge trusting relationships among themselves and with the students and the parents. Jessie, a secondary administrator, emphasized the importance of parents and students trusting that the school is making decisions in the best interest of the students "it is important that we clearly communicate with students and families to support a proactive approach to policy implementation, particularly policies that involve discipline." Phil commented that in his role at an alternative school, the value of building trust with students and families is invaluable "it is up to me as the administrator to work towards building trust with the

students and families, this trust goes a long way when difficult conversations need to take place.”

Steph highlighted the importance of building trust with students, “I work with the students to build trust because it keeps the lines of communication open...they come to me about situations that I would not know about otherwise, and it helps me be more effective as an administrator.”

Collaboration

One way to build positive relationships is through the collaboration of stakeholders. Since the current superintendent's tenure, there has been a noted increase in group collaboration to encourage positive interactions and build trust. Tamara has worked in this school district for her entire career, first as a teacher and coach, then as an assistant principal, and most recently as the building principal of an elementary school. She described how things have changed over the years, saying, "it is so important to bring everyone to the table when decisions are made...that goes for parents, teachers, etc." Though she does acknowledge that when choices are made, not everyone will be happy, it is necessary to "give everyone the ability to be heard." Phil commented that in his position at the alternative school, "collaboration with students and their families is imperative because students attend the alternative school for a reason, and it is up to us as the faculty and staff to support that student as they work to overcome obstacles." Bo commented this way on collaboration saying, “students need to feel included in the conversation, whatever it may be...they want to feel listened to, particularly in moments when discipline is a factor.” Bo further elaborated that “often consequences are non-negotiable, but if there is a way to help a student feel like they have been heard, it can make the disciplinary action more effective.”

Communication

To increase communication, RSD has implemented many new initiatives to ensure open communication with all stakeholders. The superintendent has instituted "lunch and learn" sessions with teachers and staff and opportunities for community members to meet with him at different events designed to give access and help the district-level administration feel more approachable. Jessie, a secondary administrator, described the value of communication this way "communication is important for all parents, but it is especially crucial for the parents of language learners and other populations that tend to be less comfortable seeking information from the school." She went on to say that "when people feel included in the conversation, it makes the implementation of any policy go more smoothly, but particularly anything related to discipline and consequences. " Jane, a school psychologist, described the importance of communication in her role this way, "I typically work with families when something is wrong, either when identifying a possible disability or when there is a serious discipline issue has come up with a child that is already identified...in order for the team to come up with solutions for the student, clear communication is needed to build trust with the parents so they feel like we are all on the same team." Becky, a secondary administrator in charge of instruction phrased her feelings this way, "because I am the liaison between the school and district level instructional department, I have to give an exceptional amount of attention to how I communicate with district level staff and the staff in this building...clear communication is key to ensure that expectations are clear and also how to meet those expectations." She further elaborated that "people need information to make choices, but it is also an important element to establishing positive relationships through communication by providing information when possible."

Professional Development

Professional development is the cornerstone of implementing any initiative. Nellie described her first experience with training in restorative practices as "thought provoking and eye opening." She was so impressed with the philosophy that she brought the idea to RSD and began forging relationships with local professors and consultants with knowledge in the area. Initially, the training started with just administrative personnel in a "top down" approach, hoping to spread concepts to all the schools. According to Nellie, that did not happen, and the focus switched from a whole district approach to training pockets of faculty and staff, some as large as whole schools and others as small as teams of teachers within a school.

Training

Training key personnel was the first prong of the implementation approach. With the help of a local professor, who has participated in extensive research and training in restorative practices, the district began the training process through in-person professional development over the summer months, intending to continue offering training during the school year. According to the RSD training materials, the initial training started with a basic overview of restorative practices and moved into thinking about building a restorative system within the schools. The second part of the training focused on using data to drive decision-making and asked the participants to identify the most frequently addressed student behaviors that result in disciplinary action. Sharon said this of the RSD training that she has received "the training was very educational and helpful. It gave me confirmation that the way I thought of discipline was correct and the tools I needed to implement restorative practices effectively." She went on to discuss that because of the training she received at the district level, she decided to pursue additional training from a national restorative practices center in Denver, Colorado.

Through this identification process, participants were asked to outline the current process for handling behavior issues and think about alternative strategies that could be used in place of or in addition to more punitive actions. Tom, a secondary administrator described this part of the training as “very helpful”. He went on to say that “I am always looking for more creative and potentially effective behavior management strategies. As a new administrator, it is important for me to build my toolbox so I can best support the students on my caseload.” The final aspect of training pertained to using restorative circles and conferences. In the circles, students are asked to identify behaviors and the impact that the behaviors had on themselves and others to bring awareness to individuals that all behavior choices influence outcomes. Restorative conferencing is a resolution between the parties involved in an incident. An administrator or designated adult facilitates this and can be used with student-to-student and student-to-faculty/staff conflicts. Gabe stated that he found this portion of the training the most useful in his role as a security officer. “I am able to use conflict resolution strategies to de-escalate situations with students...sometimes when I get on the scene things are already out of hand, but any strategy I can use to defuse is always helpful.”

Consistency and Fidelity

Multiple participants mentioned the need for restorative practices to be used with consistency and fidelity to be effective. Sharon is passionate about the use of restorative practices, stating, "restorative practices are the most effective tool we used at the alternative school to support a change in student behavior...we found the restorative circle to be very helpful, but implementation must be consistent in order to be effective." Jane relayed her experiences at the district day treatment program, "we consistently use restorative principles with the students that attend day treatment, and we consistently see positive effects in behavior." Phil,

another proponent of restorative practices said, "when we consistently provide opportunities for students to be restored, it gives them hope that they can have a different outcome through changing the behavior that brought them to the alternative school to begin with."

Problem-Solving

The responses from the participants showed multiple uses of the phrase "problem-solving." For some, it was described pragmatically, as in identifying the barriers to using restorative practices and searching for solutions. Becky described her attempts to use restorative practices this way "I would love to use them all the time, but there just is not enough time in the day to do it correctly and attend to the other tasks and duties that I have as an assistant principal. If I had more time, I think using alternative methods could benefit the kids." Others saw problem-solving as an approach to managing student behavior, focusing on finding practical strategies and providing short-term and long-term positive results. Steph recalled a time when he was dealing with two students that argued in a math class, "I decided to have the students work in my office rather than sending them to ISS, that way I could observe them and have a chance to get to the bottom of what caused the conflict. The teacher even sent work that they had to complete together. This gave me a chance to intervene without punitive consequences, but also showed the other students that it is not appropriate to disrupt class either."

Empowerment

One of the goals of RSD is to support the empowerment of all stakeholders. Through empowerment comes a sense of ownership and an understanding that actions influence outcomes. For students, this could mean developing self-awareness and a feeling of control over their bodies and responses to situations and stimuli. For families and communities, this could mean providing input and working alongside school personnel for the betterment of all involved.

For teachers and staff, this could look like learning and growing professionally, feeling comfortable stepping outside a comfort zone, and welcoming new experiences.

Involvement

RSD pursues the involvement of parties within the school district, as the belief is that the schools should support the community, and the community should support the schools. Bo, a secondary administrator over building level special education, provided an example of involvement from his experience "when credential students are able to go into the community to work at businesses, both parties gain valuable experience with one another." He said, "working together opens doors for learning and ownership over that learning." Tom, a secondary administrator, remarked, "having parental involvement is always good, and I have mostly had positive experiences working with parents when I have utilized restorative strategies. Most parents are thankful if I can give their child a choice as to what the consequence will be for the infraction." He commented, "students and parents always feel better when they feel like that are part of the process."

Responsibility

The concept of responsibility was approached in different ways by the participants. Becky described it as helping students understand how to take responsibility for their actions and the importance of doing so. Doug echoed that sentiment when he said, "there is a choice to be made in every situation, and it is one's personal responsibility to make the right call, but to also understand that every choice comes with a consequence, good or bad." Sharon shared her view of responsibility to include the role that adults play in the development of students, "it is our job as adults to look out for the students, not just to monitor them, but to guide them towards choices

that are in their best interest, which means that we as the adults should be making decisions in the best interest of the students as well."

Accountability

Accountability is a concept that can be hard to grasp for some, particularly students that are still developing and learning. Nellie commented on the importance of modeling desired behavior, including accountability, "students first need to be instructed in what a behavior is and how to carry it out, then as adults, we need to model the behaviors that we want to see." Steph described a situation when there was an opportunity for him to model accountability for a student, "I had messed up and made an incorrect assumption about a situation, and when I was talking to the student, I had to admit my mistake and apologize for it. The student was so surprised, it is not often that adults in the school try to do that." Karen, an in-school-suspension assistant, discussed how accountability takes shape for the students she serves, "when students come to ISS, they always tell me they do not know why they are in there. But I press them and typically when the story comes out, I am able to help them see their role in the situation and, if they are willing, we come up with a plan to avoid the behavior again and try to make amends for what they have done."

Outlier Data and Findings

The participants' diverse backgrounds, experiences, and opinions led to unexpected findings. The participants' experience with students ranges from elementary, middle, and high school to alternative programs and mental health. The capacities in which each participant served in education also varied from administrators, security personnel, mental health personnel, and behavior and crisis management. Therefore, it was not surprising that outlier data emerged due to the extensive nature of the data collection and analysis process.

Adult Emotional Regulation and Intelligence

One participant in the study, Nellie, a district-level mental health administrator, commented that "managing others is often more about managing one's own emotions." She elaborated on the importance of the ability of adults to regulate themselves emotionally before attempting to engage with students or parents. Nellie recalled her time as a school-level administrator by recounting situations where the teachers' emotional state directly impacted and even escalated situations with students. She said, "when a teacher is activated, the student has no choice but to activate as well because it is the adult's responsibility to stay calm when in a situation dealing with discipline." Jane, a school psychologist, alluded to this but did not state it directly, stating that "emotional intelligence is a key component of behavior management and modification for all human beings." She further elaborated that in her role, she works with parents and guardians in addition to teachers and administrators, and at times "meetings can become contentious when discipline is the reason for the meeting...it is always better to keep a cool head when that happens."

Adult Biases

Sharon spoke from the place of an experienced middle-level administrator and her experience as a head administrator at the district's alternative education program. Through the latter, she stated that she was privy to discipline data from across the district, which in her words, "showed the disproportionate effect that adult biases have on student discipline as well as consequences." She explained that her assertions are based on her experience with the type of students who are frequently referred to the alternative programs, and the infractions that caused the referral seem to affect one demographic of students more than others. "I see students from schools all over the district, and it appears that the consequences for the same or similar

infractions can vary not only from school to school, but also from administrator to administrator." This revelation was not entirely unexpected, but this participant was the only one to directly assert a position about a perceived direct link between adult bias and student discipline management.

Research Question Responses

The participants in this study provided a very personal and thorough explanation of how restorative practices and traditional discipline policies were implemented in this case. Examining the data from interviews, focus groups, and archival documents has given insight into how RSD has implemented restorative practices in conjunction with the traditional discipline policies already in place. Using PBIS, SEL, and training for key district personnel, RSD has attempted to implement restorative practices to complement the current discipline policies. The following research questions were answered.

Central Research Question

How are restorative discipline practices incorporated with traditional discipline policies in a public school district in the American South? The findings of this study revealed three central themes: building relationships, professional development, and empowerment. The observable link to Bandura's (1969) social learning theory is the most notable element that unites the themes and subthemes. Nellie noted that the district's approach to implementing restorative practices was influenced by the opportunities presented in schools to model appropriate behavior for students and the students' tendency to learn from the environment in which they interact. She stated, "the district understood the home and school environments impact each other, and to utilize that relationship and early on social and emotional learning was implemented during the school day." Wherein students were explicitly taught conflict resolution and emotional regulation

strategies. PBIS was another step in the implementation process, where modeling and direct teaching of desired behaviors and "soft skills" were woven into the culture of each school. The most recent step towards implementation was introducing and teaching the principles of restorative practice, designed to offer administrators both alternative consequences for minor infractions and support for students that experience the most severe consequences in a school system.

Sub-Question One

How are restorative practices implemented in this case? Though participants had differing thoughts for this question, the responses highlighted how each participant built positive relationships with the students and their families. For example, Steph, a secondary administrator stated, "you have to get to know your kids and do that intentionally...that makes it easier when discipline is needed, but also when I am attempting to talk to them about how to change their behavior." Becky, a secondary administrator, explained that the training that she received from the district showed her that there are other ways to discipline students, which may be more effective and offer more long-term remedies. "I learned that in cases where I can be flexible with consequences that it is okay to do that... because the goal is to help students learn and sometimes a rigid punishment misses the mark on that."

Sub-Question Two

How are discipline policies, including restorative practices, applied to specific groups in this case? Participants answered this question in various ways, some straightforward and others very delicately. For example, Doug, a security officer, stated that he observed that the severity of the consequences can vary from group to group, and "more should be done to determine why some groups experience harsher consequences than others." John, another security officer,

offered that, in his experience, "some students do not respond to anything less than harsh consequences." Ken, the crisis management assistant, responded from a different perspective. He acknowledged that different groups appear to be managed differently, but "no matter the demographic, these are children, and support and understanding needs to be the first line of defense when possible."

Sub-Question Three

How does the environmental context influence the implementation of restorative practices and traditional discipline policies in this case? Participants provided different examples of the way in which they interpret the impact of the environmental context on the implementation of restorative practices in this case. Some responses centered on the influence of the school environment itself, while others referenced the impact of community events on the school. For example, Steph described the influence of the environment on the school and vice versa as cyclical, "what happens outside of school determines how we handle things inside the school, and often what happens at school will spill over into the community and affect what happens there." Doug recounted an experience when increased gun violence in the community among gang members resulted in more police presence during the school day. "we had kids shooting at each other at night, and then coming to school the next day like nothing happened...these kids were committing real crimes, and the administration and security staff had to respond accordingly." However, John had a different perspective. He noted the possible positive impact that restorative practices could have on the community, "if we can teach kids how to handle themselves in a positive way, then they will take those lessons home and hopefully model that behavior for others, particularly peers and younger family members."

Summary

RSD was found to support the implementation process of restorative practices a compliment to their current discipline policies through various methods, such as building relationships, providing valuable training to key personnel, and empowering stakeholders to become involved in a positive way in the school system. To support building relationships, this district has chosen to modify outdated discipline policies, including those regarding consequences that can harm a student's present and future. These changes have kept students from experiencing unnecessary justice system involvement for minor offenses and contributed to a more equitable application of discipline policies, including short-term and long-term consequences. Further by leveraging the concepts within Bandura's social learning theory (1969) this district's implementation plan encourages the provision of professional development to educate administrators and other staff with appropriate choices to prevent and mitigate student discipline matters. Lastly, by empowering stakeholders, this district accesses the unique perspectives of those the school system serves, which helps district leaders make informed decisions regarding the implementation of restorative practices.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this embedded single case study is to describe how a school district in the American South has chosen to implement restorative practices in conjunction with the traditional discipline policies currently in place. This chapter begins with a discussion that links the findings of this study to theoretical and empirical sources as well as an interpretation of the thematic findings. Next, this chapter provides implications for policy, practice, theory, methodology, as well as limitations and delimitations pertinent to this study. Recommendations for future research on effectiveness of the implementation process, impact of restorative practices on student discipline, and the implementation process from a student perspective are incorporated into the conclusion of this chapter.

Discussion

In identifying a gap in the literature related to the study of restorative practices in schools in the American South, the following research question was posited: “How are restorative discipline practices incorporated with traditional discipline policies in a public school district in the American South?” This research question is supported by the social learning theory of Bandura (1969) as the theoretical framework, precisely how an individual’s personal factors, behavior, and environment influence learning cyclically. This school district was very supportive and approved access to the site, recruitment of participants, and district documents for analysis. Also described in this section are the thematic findings resulting from the data analysis and synthesis of the findings of this study. In addition, interpretations of the thematic findings, implications for policy and practice, and theoretical and empirical implications are also provided, as well as a conclusion that describes the study’s limitations and delimitations and

recommendations for future research regarding the implementation of restorative practices in school districts across the American South.

Interpretation of Findings

This section discusses the thematic findings that resulted from data collection, analysis, and subsequent thematic development. The summary provides a concise overview of the three themes expressed in Chapter 4. My interpretation of findings is also presented, providing a connection between the theoretical and empirical literature while adding new knowledge to implementing restorative practices in this case.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The findings revealed that this school district had implemented restorative practices through building relationships, professional development, and empowerment. Relationship building was the cornerstone of the implementation process in which trust, communication, and collaboration were utilized to support unity among stakeholders. Nearly all participants discussed the importance of building relationships to meet the needs of the students and families but also the needs of the district when it came to program or policy implementation. Among the participants that dealt directly with the application of discipline policies, the view of relationship development was a way to support students and families, almost creating a proactive effect in which trust was mutual. Among non-administrative participants, building relationships was a means of prevention and allowed for gathering pertinent information that kept students and staff safe and parents involved. However, professional development was also touted as a requirement of the implementation process. Participants with knowledge and experience regarding policymaking emphasized the imperative nature of professional development to support training, consistency, fidelity, and problem-solving. Each component was discussed by each

administrative participant at some level. Training is necessary to ensure that district and school personnel acquire the appropriate knowledge of implementation strategies and techniques. Consistency and fidelity are paramount when implementing restorative practices, as that is the only way to achieve full implementation. Problem-solving is a necessary step in the implementation process as this pragmatic approach is needed to determine which elements are working and which need adjustment.

Further, problem-solving is essential because reflection is needed to promote continued buy-in from school personnel, parents and families, and the community. Nearly all participants referred to the need for empowerment to support implementation, with responsibility, involvement, and accountability deemed critical components. Specifically, students and parents, and school personnel need to feel empowered with avenues to provide feedback. School personnel should also model accepting responsibility for actions, demonstrate accountability, and provide students with opportunities for growth and development throughout the implementation process.

Teamwork Is Key. The condensed interpretation of the findings is that implementing restorative practices requires unity among stakeholders, or in Jessie's words, "everyone has to be on the same page to be successful." Perhaps the reason that schools do not consistently implement restorative programs (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019; Butterfield, 2019; Kennedy et al., 2019; Song et al., 2020; Velez et al., 2020) is because one or more critical components of full implementation, such as relationships, professional development, and empowerment are lacking effectiveness or missing altogether. My findings highlight the value of these components individually and how they coalesce to create an implementation plan conducive to success.

When school officials prioritize relationships, unique bonds support trust, communication, and collaboration (Assadullah & Morrison, 2021; Sandwick et al., 2019; Skrzypek et al., 2020; Warin & Hibbon, 2020). An example is how RSD communicates with all stakeholders in various ways over time. When decisions are made, this district strives to provide each member of the district's community with an opportunity to be heard. Further, RSD works diligently to be as transparent as possible about the reasons that necessitate a change and why the presented options are viable while others are not. As an additional tool, the district utilizes surveys throughout the school year to stay informed and keep up with school personnel's and community's needs and concerns. These efforts contribute to producing cohesive teams, which can serve as a unified front when responding proactively when issues arise.

The link between practical professional development and the ability to troubleshoot implementation methods was universal among participant responses. All participants stated that the district-provided training allowed for collaboration with peers from across the district. The non-administrative participants mentioned that their training increased their understanding of restorative practices and the likelihood of appropriately implementing them in their roles and provided them with the opportunity to talk with peers and learn from the experiences of one another. Many administrative participants also stated the importance of training and their desire to utilize alternative discipline methods when appropriate and the value of opportunities for collegial conversations present in training sessions.

All participants discussed the value of solid collegial relationships and how those contribute to successful problem-solving. However, SROs can be left out of many meaningful conversations, depending on their relationship with the district and building administration. Zhang (2019) recommended that SROs become vital to a school's implementation team to foster

positive relationships and a teaching tool for students, staff, and the community. RSD works to include SROs in the decision-making process, and an example of this is the noted relationship between Doug, Gabe, John, security personnel, and the administrators at their worksites. Each stated that their relationship with the school administrators helps them tremendously in their roles, as they can communicate openly and bring problems and solutions to the table to improve the implementation process and act proactively to prevent issues before they occur.

Empowerment is linked to involvement, shared responsibility, and accountability. Ryu et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of administrators in the role of facilitator. Findings showed that many of the administrative participants felt it was part of their job to facilitate the empowerment of those in their care. Tamara said it this way "as principal, and it is my responsibility to ensure that each student, staff member, and family feels empowered to contribute in a positive way to the culture and climate of the school." Becky said, "when people feel like they are included, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership in the school, which makes it easier to teach them about personal responsibility."

Additionally, Pederson (2020) iterated that the ability to be accountable is a soft skill that often needs to be modeled and supported through practice. Steph stated that he sees the importance of accountability, which is not just limited to students. "when people make mistakes, it is only right to give them room to own up to it and make amends; this includes adults too. Nevertheless, the issue we run into is the ability to do that, which is where the adults must learn to set the example for the kids."

Barriers to Implementation. The findings of this study uncovered barriers that can hinder the implementation of restorative practices. Interview and focus group data revealed some commonalities among participants to include limiting factors such as time, school

administrations and staff buy-in, and stringent discipline policies at the state and district levels. All of the secondary administrative participants indicated that time was a large barrier to the implementation of restorative practices. For example, Bo stated, “if I had more time, I could do a better job using the strategies”. Becky echoed this sentiment and made a similar statement “there is just not enough time in the day to what needs to be done, including using restorative practices consistently.” Tom also commented “between doing testing, meetings, and all that, I just don’t have time to do anything must more than what is prescribed in the handbook as far as consequences go.” Butterfield (2019) also acknowledges that a lack of time as a resource can interfere with adequate implementation and should be mitigated to ensure that restorative practices are a priority.

Another barrier highlighted by the findings is a lack of buy-in at all levels. Green et al. (2019) acknowledged that while the intentions of restorative practices are good, it can be difficult to convince stakeholders a change is needed regarding discipline and consequences. Nellie discussed this during her interview, stating, “this initiative was intended to be district-wide, but the team realized quickly we were going to have to change some things to get more people on board.” She further explained that her suspicion about the pushback from district and school personnel likely stemmed from the misconception that restorative practices meant no consequences.” Interestingly, Steph referred to this concept as “adults wanting a pound of flesh” for an infraction but went on to state “that mentality is punishment, and school is a place where students should learn both academic and behavior concepts.”

A final barrier to the implementation process related to the execution of discipline policies. For example, zero-tolerance policies often require administrators to give specific consequences for infractions, which can result in unintended consequences for students such as

disproportionate numbers of marginalized populations experiencing more severe disciplinary action (Karanhya et al., 2020). This lack of flexibility regarding consequences can force administrators to feel as though they have no choice in how they assign discipline measures to students. Bo highlighted this, stating “I have to follow the policy as written; I don’t have much wiggle room most of the time.” Sharon described her thoughts this way “we have to implement the policies provided to us, but it is *how* discipline is issued based on those policies where things go awry.” She further elaborated by stating “even though there is policy, there are inconsistencies in how the policies are implemented across schools, and even within schools.” These conflicting opinions over policy reinforce the assumption that the way that policies are followed could be a barrier because these differences in opinion of these two participants may reflect a common thought process among district staff and potentially translate to the implementation of restorative practices.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have implications for the policies and practices related to elementary, secondary, and alternative school settings. First, this section describes policy implications at the district and school levels. Next, this section will make recommendations for personnel across levels for improving the implementation process to support consistency and fidelity among district and school staff while involving students, families, and the community.

Implications for Policy

Due to financial constraints often present in public school systems, policymakers should invest in practical, research-based approaches to support students and staff rather than moving from an educational fad to the next without determining effectiveness and appropriateness for the context (Kennedy et al., 2019). With that investment comes a commitment to consistently

implementing restorative practices, which may bolster effectiveness and the ability to achieve the initially identified targets that lead to the decision to seek additional options for managing student discipline (Augustine et al., 2018). I recommend that policymakers provide resources and guidance to individual schools, allowing them to choose components of restorative practices suitable for the school's context and environment. While restorative practices do have components, allowing the administration to choose what is best for them may support the consistency necessary for usefulness and effectiveness. Furthermore, it is prudent for policymakers to allocate resources to hire, train, and retain key personnel at the school level that is accessible to students and staff but also support the implementation process regarding restorative practices (Senjaya et al., 2020). Resource disbursement should include additional training for SROs, behavior support and intervention staff, special education teachers, school psychologist, and school counselors, who can serve as additional resources for teachers, students, and families.

Implications for Practice

Critical implications for practice center on consistency and accountability. One recommendation is to provide ongoing training and support for all school personnel, especially those new to the school district (Velez et al., 2020). To solidify the incorporation of restorative practices, it is the responsibility of district and school-level administration to set the tone and expectations in this regard (Schiff, 2018). An effective way to do that is to provide ongoing training and support for current staff and newly recruited members to ensure that instruction in the practical application of restorative practices occurs. Another recommendation is to make accountability at all levels a priority. Each school district member is responsible for how restorative practices are implemented in their sphere of influence (Payne & Welch, 2018). This

understanding is exceptionally critical at the district and building administrative level. Those in authority are tasked with taking accountability for their personal choices as much as they are responsible for holding those in their charge accountable, supporting a trickle-down effect (George et al., 2018). These recommendations can be supported by utilizing best practices and current research findings related to implementing restorative practices. Further, seeking out and collaborating with districts that are successful in the implementation process can offer fresh perspectives and inspire creative solutions to some of the challenges faced by this school district. A final recommendation is geared towards leadership as well. District leadership should evaluate the number of tasks that building administrators face that can interfere with the time needed to implement restorative practices consistently. Bo lamented, "I really believe in restorative practices, and use them when I can, but there is almost no time to really be consistent with it because there are many demands of my time throughout the school day." A thorough examination of the tasks of building administrators could determine which ones are mission-critical and which may need to be revised. The exact process can be applied to the tasks of teachers and staff. A common complaint from the non-administrative participants highlighted a need for more time to implement district initiatives, including restorative practices. Limiting the demands on planning time, providing practical professional development, and limiting menial tasks give school personnel more time to use restorative practices consistently.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

Bandura's social learning theory (1969) was used as the conceptual framework for this study. This model is relevant and suitable for understanding how restorative practices were implemented in this case. Findings from this study indicate that consideration for all components

of this theory, behavioral, environmental, and personal factors are present in the district's implementation plan.

The theoretical and empirical literature on the implementation of restorative practices is supported by the findings of this study (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019; Breedlove et al., 2020; Clemons et al., 2021; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). While there is not an apparent connection in the literature between the social learning theory and the implementation of restorative practices, the literature does corroborate that it is necessary to consider the elements of Bandura's social learning theory (1969) when attempting to implement restorative practices in any capacity, mainly when restorative practices are being used in addition to current discipline policies. The results of this study reinforce the relevance of the social learning theory (1969) and present an opportunity for discovering how the components of this theory could be leveraged for continued use both academically and behaviorally.

This study complements the empirical literature by shedding light on the methods used by one school district implementing restorative practices in their geographic location, the American South. Empirical research is sparse in that area which supports the importance of the findings of this study. The findings also confirmed that implementing restorative practices cannot be done in isolation but through a combined effort from all stakeholders, with school and district leadership at the helm to achieve desired results (Marucci, 2020). As Phil recounted, "it takes a team to support students in their academic journey, which includes providing them with a means of learning about appropriate behavior for a setting and opportunities to display what is learned." This finding corresponds to Noltemeyer et al. (2019) and Petrasek et al. (2022), who focused on modeling and teaching desired behaviors to support behavior change and motivation to continue the target behaviors. However, based on the findings, the direct teaching of desired

behaviors should be done with intention. However, it can be time-consuming for educators with many demands on their limited time in direct contact with students. Thus, necessitating designated time to carry out these aspects of the education process (Obadire & Sinthumule, 2021). Further, Sopak and Hood (2019) emphasized that restorative practices must be built into the culture of an educational system, starting with buy-in and support from the district office and trickling down to each building in a district and then to students, families, and the community.

Limitations and Delimitations

There were three significant limitations in this study. First, the study's timeframe caused constraints in the data collection phase. The non-administrative participants do not work when school is not in session; therefore, all data collection had to take place quickly to ensure that all desired participants could be accessed. Second, many of the administrative participants served at the high school level. This limitation was mitigated by working to recruit administrators with experience at various levels, such as middle and elementary, as well as those with experience in alternative school settings. A third limitation was that direct observations were impossible as a data collection method. This was mitigated using direct interviews in which the participants were asked to provide information about their experiences.

Selecting a school district as the site instead of just one school was a delimitation of this study. During the beginning phases of this study, I wanted to study how restorative practices were implemented from a "top down" approach, which necessitated the examination of the district policies and procedures for implementation. After reading some initial research regarding the implementation process, I determined that studying the district rather than specific schools would provide me with a more significant amount of data, thus giving a better overall picture of the case.

While the data collection methods of this study, which included personal interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, did provide good material from which to draw conclusions and answer the research questions completely, utilizing direct observations of restorative practices in use would have complimented the collected data immensely. It would have provided insight into the participants' direct implementation of restorative practices, which may have allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of how restorative practices are used practically. Unfortunately, this type of data collection was not possible due to factors such as time constraints, scheduling conflicts, and the very organic nature of the events of a given school day.

Recommendations for Future Research

A quantitative study is recommended to determine the implementation process's effectiveness. This type of research can provide concrete evidence to validate assumptions by the implementation team or reveal growth areas, which could lead to improvements in professional development, building relationships, and empowerment. A second suggestion for a quantitative study would be an analysis of the impact of implementation on overall student discipline. Using data from across time, a researcher could determine any patterns related to implementing restorative practices, leading to further analysis and recommendations for improvement. Another recommendation for a qualitative study is to examine the implementation process from a student perspective. One team at one school in this district implements restorative practices with consistency and fidelity, with the support of the building and grade level administrators and grade level counselors. This could provide invaluable information for future use by the implementation team and educational researchers searching for information regarding the implementation process and its potential impact on students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to describe how this school district has chosen to implement restorative practices as a complement to the more standard discipline policies already in place. After conducting a literature review and framing this study through Bandura's social learning theory (1969) lens, I developed a single, embedded case study focusing on one school district. Administrators, school resource officers, and crisis management team members were interviewed on-site and via Zoom until saturation was achieved. The data were analyzed and synthesized to determine three overarching themes that describe how this school district has implemented restorative practices: building relationships, professional development, and empowerment. The most important takeaway is that consistency and fidelity are necessary when moving from policy to practice. Implementation of any policy starts at the top with district and building administrators, and it requires commitment from those individuals to ensure that appropriate training is provided to the faculty and staff but also that students, families, and the community are kept abreast of the policies and programs at the district and school level.

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Appendix A

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 18, 2023

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1153 IMPLEMENTING RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AND TRADITIONAL DISCIPLINE POLICIES IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH: A CASE STUDY

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, PhD, CIP

Administrative Chair

Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Adult Participant Recruitment Email

Dear Ma'am or Sir:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree. The purpose of my research is to understand the way in which the school district utilizes restorative practices in conjunction with traditional discipline policies, and the best way to do that is to consult those in the field who work directly with students in the school system. Your thoughts, feelings, and experiences are valuable and can provide much needed insight.

Participants must be district employees that have received training in restorative practices through the district initiative; create, enact, or enforce discipline policies; or district employees that utilize restorative practices as part of their job description.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview (approximately 30-45 minutes) and a focus group (approximately 30 minutes). Member checking will occur, which means that I will be asking you to validate the findings from the interview process to ensure that I have clearly understood the information you have provided. This will occur during the interview process itself and will not require extra time. All interviews and focus groups will be conducted using Zoom. Participation is completely voluntary, and any identifying information that is gathered will be removed once the data is collected.

To participate, please contact me via email at [REDACTED] and I will reach out to you to schedule an interview time. More information regarding the focus group participation will be provided after the interview process is complete.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me via email as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

[REDACTED]

Appendix C

Consent Form

Title of the Project: Implementing Restorative Practices and Traditional Discipline Policies in the American South: A Case Study

Principal Investigator: [REDACTED] Doctoral Candidate at Liberty University, School of Education.

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a Rock Hill School District employee that has received training in restorative practices through the district initiative.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

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

The purpose of the study is to understand the way in which the school district utilizes restorative practices in conjunction with traditional discipline policies, and the best way to do that is to consult those in the field who work directly with students in the school system. Your thoughts, feelings, and experiences are valuable and could provide much-needed insight.

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:

1. Participate in a one-on-one interview via Zoom which will be audio and video-recorded and will take no more than 1 hour.
2. Participate in a focus group via Zoom which will be audio and video recorded and will take no more than 1 hour.
3. Complete a "member-checking" step whereby I will provide you with the transcript of the recorded interview and ask that you either confirm or dispute the accuracy of my interpretations of your responses.

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 increase in the knowledge base for the implementation of restorative practices in school systems and an increase in the amount of available research-based practices that can be utilized to support problem-solving efforts by school officials as it relates to the mitigation of problematic student behaviors in schools.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

Liberty University
IRB-FY22-23-1153
Approved on 4-18-2023

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with codes.
- Interviews will be conducted via Zoom and in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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 included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be 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 [REDACTED] and may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, [REDACTED].

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

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner 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 are agreeing 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 with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher 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 and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Participant Signature

Appendix D

Focus Group Questions

1. How has your perspective of school discipline in general changed over the course of your time in your current position? (SQ1)
2. Please describe what supports could help you with the implementation of restorative practices in your current position. (SQ1)
3. In your current position, please describe any challenges you have experienced when utilizing restorative discipline practices with different demographic groups. In what ways have those challenges changed the way you feel about alternative discipline methods? (SQ2)
4. Please describe your beliefs about the potential impacts restorative discipline practices can have on students, schools, and the community. (SQ3)
5. Are there any additional comments that anyone would like to add to this discussion of discipline policies and restorative practices?

Appendix E**Document Analysis Protocol**

Authenticity	What makes this document authentic?	
Credibility	What makes this document credible?	
Representativeness	What in this document represents the goal of the research?	
Meaning	What meaning does this document possess?	

Appendix F

Audit Trail

Raw Data	Individual interviews and Focus Group sessions were recorded and transcribed, then moved to a consolidated electronic folder. Document analysis protocols were typed on and saved in an electronic folder that was on a computer that was password protected. Any handwritten notes were kept under lock/key.
Data Reduction and Analysis Products	Field notes and memos collected by hand in a professional notebook were stored under lock/key.
Data Reconstruction and Synthesis Products	Interviews were transcribed using Otter A.I and Microsoft Word and stored electronically in a password protected computer. Interview transcripts and focus group transcripts were printed and hand coded using open coding (level 1), pattern coding (level 2); Content analysis and open coding were used with for document analysis. Data synthesis produced thematic codes created from the pattern codes across data collection methods. All electronic materials were saved and stored in an electronic folder; password protected computer.
Process Notes	Process notes were written in a professional notebook and stored under lock and key.
Intentions and Dispositions Materials	Signed consent forms were collected and placed into a separate electronic folder on a password protected computer.
Instrument Development Information	All necessary approvals were collected and saved on a password protected computer. Electronic copies of document analysis protocols were saved in an electronic folder and saved on a password protected computer.