

Changing It Up: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Alternative School Teachers Who
Implement Restorative Practices

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explored how teachers at RISE Academy, an alternative school in the southeastern United States, experienced the shift from punitive discipline to restorative practices (RP). Using interviews, surveys, observations, and researcher fieldnotes, I examined how teachers understood RP, how they used it in daily practice, and what challenges they faced. Findings showed that teachers relied most on everyday restorative conversations—accountability talk, redirection, calm tone-setting, empathy, and consistent follow-up—which proved more practical than formal restorative circles. Safe, welcoming classrooms and a collective responsibility approach involving interventionists, crisis team members, and teachers helped prevent escalation and support students quickly.

Teacher readiness varied. Four archetypes emerged—Specialists, Skeptics, Inherent Restorers, and Mindset Shifters—and survey data showed no significant correlations between overall self-efficacy and comfort with RP, though disciplinary self-efficacy approached significance. Challenges included limited time, emotional demands, uneven expectations, and the early removal of punitive options. Still, teachers supported the intent of RP and described meaningful student growth.

Implications indicate that sustainable RP implementation requires steady administrative support, transparent communication, strong support personnel, structured tier documentation, differentiated professional learning, and modeling or peer testimony to build buy-in. Future research could develop an RP playbook and explore additional archetypes or ideologies to guide differentiated training.

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DEDICATION

For Daddy, Mom, and Erin—this work reflects your unwavering love and constant encouragement.

Chapter I

Introduction to the Study

Restorative practices are being used increasingly in schools around the country to mitigate the impact of punitive discipline on students, particularly Black and Brown children (Acosta et al., 2019; Anyon et al., 2016; Gonzalez et al., 2019). In this chapter, the broad strokes of restorative practices will be explained, along with a plan to research how teachers, as the linchpins of restorative practices, experience the transition from a punitive to restorative environment. Restorative practices are defined as a set of processes “that proactively build relationships and a sense of community to prevent conflict and wrongdoing” (Wachtel, 2016, p. 1). Understanding how teachers experience the process of becoming restorative educators can help administrators and other stakeholders make wise decisions regarding resource allocation and professional development. These decisions will, in turn, provide the best chance for positive outcomes from the implementation of restorative practices.

Preface

The idea for this study began with JT (a pseudonym). I taught him in seventh grade and eighth grade alternative school. JT was a bright and talented student. He loved video games and was an avid reader. Always polite. Fiercely loyal to his friends. I used to talk to him about so many things, but in hindsight, not nearly enough things. Or perhaps, not the right thing. I remember when JT told me his dad was in prison. It was a shock. It baffled me even more when he said he would probably end up there, too. I immediately dismissed the idea and told him he was smart and talented and had a bright future ahead of him. I told him that his father’s decisions

were not hereditary, and he did not have to follow the same path. JT just shook his head and smiled. How I wish I could go back to that moment. Our school did not have restorative practices in place, and I was ignorant about the significance of that interaction and the extra support JT needed. He was voicing a self-fulfilling prophecy, and I was too caught up in my own view of him to stop and look at his life from his perspective. In retrospect, it was naïve and selfish of me. Restorative practices could have helped me do better.

Five years later, JT was in prison for armed robbery. He helped one of his friends rob someone at gunpoint for money, which he planned to use to hide from the police. That friend was Zy (a pseudonym), another one of my former students. Zy was also smart. His entire family was bright; I taught two of his older brothers. He joked around and smiled, but also slept a lot in class and, as I tried to convey to him, wasting his potential. Zy needed money because he had shot and killed someone earlier that night and needed to run from the police. JT, his fiercely loyal friend, had helped him get that money by robbing someone. Now, both are sitting in cells at a jail directly across the street from the school where I teach, suffering severe consequences for severe lapses in judgment. I wish I could go back and do so many different things. Zy was sentenced to life in prison. He took someone else's life when he was only 15 years old. I have trouble reconciling the fact that the young boy who used to sit in my class and answer my questions and jokes about his brothers took another man's life. It will take a long time for JT, too. And what will his life be like when he does get out? What chances do felons have in today's world? The bright future I promised JT is gone, and it keeps me up at night wondering what I could have done differently and how the current educational systems in place may have failed these students.

The year after Zy left my classroom, I started teaching a novel by Walter Dean Myers

called *Monster* (1999). In *Monster*, sixteen-year-old Steve Harmon finds himself on trial for felony murder after being accused of serving as a lookout during a robbery that ended in death. Told through a mix of film script and diary entries, Steve's story captures his attempt to make sense of the chaos around him and the uncertainty of his future. His choice to write his experiences as a screenplay reflects his desire to control the narrative — a privilege often denied to young people whose lives are shaped by poverty, violence, and limited opportunities. Steve's situation illustrates how easily an ordinary teenager can become entangled in the justice system through association, circumstance, or simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

As the trial unfolds, Steve struggles with the fear of being defined solely by the charges against him and the prosecutor's label of "monster." This fight for identity and hope in the face of judgment mirrors the realities of many at-risk youths, who often navigate environments where a single mistake — or even a perceived one — can have life-altering consequences. Myers uses Steve's voice to highlight how systemic inequities, community pressures, and stereotypes can push young people toward the margins. The novel invites readers to question not only Steve's guilt or innocence, but also how society shapes the paths available to youth like him.

I sometimes wonder if JT and Zy had read *Monster* with me, they would have done things differently? Perhaps they would have thought twice before pulling the trigger or before pointing that gun and demanding money. At the beginning of the audiobook, the author spoke briefly about the research he conducted to write *Monster*. He interviewed hundreds of prisoners and discovered that no one ended up in prison based upon one bad decision. He said that the overwhelming pattern with inmates began with small things like skipping school and eventually progressed to other things like petty theft or vandalism. These smallish things continued to progress until eventually the only thing that stopped them from committing virtually any crime

was their likelihood of getting caught. Those words impacted me powerfully because every kid sitting in my classroom was already on at least the first step in this pattern. But I did not know what to do about it. To me, they were just regular students who had made a bad choice. I did not judge them for it, but I also did not address those bad choices, nor how to avoid making them again. Ignoring the problem was not the answer, and although I could try to make a difference on my own, I knew these issues were something that entire schools like mine needed to address. Understanding restorative practices could have helped me help them.

My desire to teach *Monster* to my classes was my first attempt at using a restorative practice (although I never heard of the term and did not know such a thing existed). Specifically (I now know), I wanted to use trauma-informed practice to incorporate culturally responsive texts into my pedagogy with the intent of repairing prior environmental harm to students via a relationship-centered, socio-emotional lens. Using the main character's perspective and dilemma, I intended to help educate my students about the inherent perils of surrounding themselves with people who influenced them to make poor decisions. It would be several years before I heard or began using restorative terms to describe the new practices being used to help students build bright futures for themselves.

Background

RISE Academy, a pseudonym for the actual school, is an alternative program in the southeast United States. Founded in 1994, RISE is one of the oldest alternative programs in the region. There are two schools to which students are assigned based upon their location of residence within the district. The schools were designed to address educational and behavioral needs of students who incur chronic or severe disciplinary infractions at their home schools. Fighting, drug use or distribution, weapons possession, and chronic disrespect are the types of

behaviors for which students are sent to RISE. Students who are re-entering public schools from a juvenile justice facility also attend the RISE Academy for a 30-day period before they enroll back at their home schools. Enrollment numbers at each school vary throughout the school year; the largest school typically has a population that approaches 500 students by the beginning of May, at which time enrollment is cut off until the following school year.

According to the school's website, RISE Academy's mission is "to meet the unique academic, social, and emotional needs of our students in a safe and structured environment that builds a strong foundation for lifelong learning." In addition to providing multiple avenues for academic success, the principal of RISE Academy has also implemented an extensive plan to address students' emotional and behavioral needs through restorative practices. For this reason, RISE Academy is the ideal location to explore the experiences of alternative school teachers as they transition from a punitive to a restorative environment.

The International Institute for Restorative Practice (Wachtel, 2016) defined restorative practices as a set of processes "that proactively build relationships and a sense of community to prevent conflict and wrongdoing" (p. 1). The institute also claimed that using these restorative practices helped "reduce crime, violence, and bullying; improve human behavior; strengthen civil society; provide effective leadership, restore relationships; and repair harm" (p. 1). Restorative practices can range from small, informal affective statements to larger-scale, formal restorative conferences (Wachtel, 2016). For example, restorative teaching can begin with revamping the way teachers and students communicate with one another. In a punitive model, a student who will not stop talking during instruction might be told, "Stop talking." If the student does not comply, a series of punitive outcomes, depending on the level of disruption to learning that occurs, might ensue such as silent lunch, detention, suspension, etc. In a restorative model,

the theory is that students respond better to redirection when they understand how a teacher is feeling and why. A restorative redirection for a talking student might be “I feel really disrespected when you talk while I’m talking because it makes it very hard for me to teach.” Ideally, teachers modeling saying how they feel toward students will affect students by building their empathy and making them more likely to comply. Another example of a restorative practice is restorative circles; a student who has committed a behavior infraction sits in a circle with the people whose behavior was affected. Everyone speaks about the experience in an attempt to repair the damage in lieu of a consequence such as a lengthy suspension. Teaching students social-emotional regulation through mindfulness and breathing strategies is another example of a restorative practice. Although restorative practice is an inclusive term, it is heavily connoted with behavior. For this study, the term restorative practices describe the variety of behavioral *and* academic techniques intended to combat inequalities created by systemic circumstances.

During the 2022-2023 school year, the superintendent of RISE Academy’s district mandated the use of certain restorative practices in all schools across the county. In a five-year plan issued by the superintendent of the school system, there was a system-wide goal to reduce disruptions to learning resulting from exclusionary discipline actions (e.g. in school suspension, out of school suspension, and alternative school placements) by implementing evidence-based strategies (e.g. MTSS, restorative practices and PBIS) and reimagining the alternative school model. According the district, the Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) is a prevention framework that, through data collection, captures effort toward academic success, fostering positive relationships, creating a sense of belonging, and showing mutual respect among students and adults through data collection. Elements that land under the umbrella of MTSS are Response to Intervention (RTI), teamwork, professional development, school/community collaboration,

parental action, curriculum design, responsive classroom social curriculum, and data-based decision making. These elements of MTSS, along with restorative practices, comprise the focus of this study.

Problem Statement

Restorative practices (RP) are intended to combat inequality created by systemic injustices in education, and successful use of RP ideally reduces the amount of punitive practices school administrators must use to keep order in schools (Borck, 2020). Leaders of educational institutions across the country are implementing restorative practices in the hopes of ameliorating disciplinary shortcomings of the current punitive system; however, a punitive disciplinary environment is what most teachers and leaders have experienced and trained to use for their entire careers (Borck, 2020). For RP to be successful in schools, leaders must understand the experiences of teachers during the transition from punitive to restorative discipline. Teachers, and students by extension, are the ones most impacted by sweeping changes in educational policy; they are expected to implement the changes with fidelity and tasked with trying to make sure changes are successful (Barnes & McCallops, 2019). Although RP involves all stakeholders in the educational setting, teachers are the most influential participants because they deal directly with the largest population of students (Dudovitz et al., 2017). Teachers are expected to know their students and understand their experiences. Because teachers are a bridge between students and effective RP implementation, documentation of their experiences, both positive and negative, can help inform school leaders of the areas of success and need in future iterations of RP implementation (Carswell et al., 2009; Dessoiff, 2011; Lawrence, 2020; McCallops et al., 2019; Mette et al., 2016).

There is a paucity of research showing the full implementation, effects, and sustainability

of RP in all settings (Darling-Hammond & Gregory, 2023; Fronius et al., 2019; Weber & Vereenooghe, 2020). These studies mainly address the positive outcomes of short-term restorative practice implementation while acknowledging the challenges schools face in implementing RP effectively. The researchers also cite the need for longitudinal studies that assess the full implementation and long-term effects of restorative practices. Further inquiry into RP implementation is needed because no studies directly address the experiences of alternative school teachers as they transition from a punitive educational setting to a restorative educational setting. Alternative schools are defined as places for at-risk students who have committed one or more serious discipline infractions and have been removed from their traditional school environments; these students have a set of needs not necessarily present in students from traditional public schools (Dessoff, 2011; Dudovitz et al., 2017; Huang & Anyon, 2020).

As shown in Table 1, students in alternative school settings often need more targeted support in areas like social-emotional development, trauma-informed care, and building positive relationships (Parameswaran et al., 2024; Todic et al., 2020). They tend to benefit from individualized academic plans, clear and consistent behavioral expectations, and ongoing mentorship that helps them feel connected and supported (González & Gypalo, 2022). These students also require hands-on opportunities to practice skills such as self-advocacy, problem-solving, and conflict resolution; skills that are vital for success beyond the classroom and for reintegration into the wider community. Restorative practices can meet these needs by offering a structured and fair approach that fosters learning, manages behavior constructively, and helps repair and strengthen relationships (González & Gypalo, 2022; Parameswaran et al., 2024).

Table 1*Comparison of Student Needs in Alternative vs. Traditional School Settings*

| Category | Traditional School Students | Alternative School Students |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Academic | Generally follow standardized pacing and curriculum designed for grade-level progression. | Require flexible, individualized, and competency-based learning approaches to address gaps or credit recovery. |
| Behavioral/Emotional | Typically respond to tiered behavioral interventions within structured systems. | Often demonstrate higher behavioral and emotional needs, requiring trauma-informed, restorative, and relational approaches. |
| Social | Participate in large peer groups with diverse social dynamics. | Benefit from smaller, tightly knit peer groups emphasizing trust and emotional safety. |
| Environmental | Function in larger schools with more rigid routines and limited adult–student relationships. | Thrive in smaller, relationship-centered environments with consistent structure and predictable expectations. |
| Teacher/Staff Role | Focused primarily on academic instruction and classroom management. | Focused on mentorship, relationship repair, and holistic student development alongside academics. |

Note. Synthesized from Carver (2010), Lehr et al. (2009), and Tobin and Sprague (2000).

Alternative schools also house a disproportionate number of students of color (see Table 2) and can serve as starting points for the school to prison pipeline (Bhandari, 2018; Frank, 2019). Consequently, RP can be utilized as a method to reduce and combat systemic injustices, particularly in alternative schools (Borck, 2020; Quinn et al., 2006; Slaten et al., 2015).

However, implementing changes in educational systems may be a challenge. Teachers who are accustomed to the punitive practice of writing discipline referrals and exclusionary policy of having students suspended for misbehavior may struggle to adapt to these RP (Samuels, 2018). Additionally, these teachers may have trouble recognizing a direct connection between RP and behavior modification because RP focuses on a broader cultural shift; traditional punitive practices are often more concrete and direct (Dhaliwal et al., 2023).

Table 2

Racial/Ethnic Composition of U.S. Public Alternative Schools vs. Mainstream Schools, 2018-19

| Race/Ethnicity | Alternative Schools (%) | Mainstream Schools (%) |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| White | 38 | 47 |
| Black or African American | 19 | 15 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 34 | 27 |
| Asian | 4 | 6 |
| Other* | 5 | 5 |

Note. “Other” includes American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and students identifying as Two or More Races. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Adapted from “The Students Alternative Schools Serve,” by A. Kho and S. Rabovsky, 2022, *Urban Institute*.

The process of implementing RP involves moving from a punitive to a restorative learning model. Due to a lack of research on the process of implementing RP in alternative school settings, teachers need to be able to provide feedback on how they experience the transition from a punitive to a restorative environment. The feedback teachers provide can be valuable for leaders so they can understand how their teachers balance the delivery of quality instruction while managing student behaviors using RP. Core subject teachers have an often-conflicting dichotomous obligation to prepare students for standardized tests and to educate students in a culturally responsive manner (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Mette et al., 2016). Teachers can become discouraged if they feel their instructional time is being consumed

by behavioral intervention (Mette et al., 2016). Conversely, teachers can feel a great sense of reward when their students appreciate their efforts to plan high-quality instruction that is relevant to their cultural experiences. Teachers who are unsure how to infuse restorative practices into regular pedagogy may experience difficulty. Only through understanding the successes and challenges that teachers experience as they implement RP can leaders hope to build better RP programs.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to show how teachers experience the implementation of restorative practices. Studying the experiences of alternative school teachers as they begin to implement RP can help school leaders understand where the greatest challenges might exist in their own populations. School leaders plant restorative practices, but they are watered and fertilized by the actions and follow-through of the teachers who implement them (McGregor et al., 2019). Restorative practices can only grow and flourish if school leaders revisit the policies they plant by shedding light on them; leaders must discover the threats and weaknesses in their practices by utilizing teacher feedback. They must discover which ones need more light and energy versus the ones that are thriving without additional attention. For example, many restorative practices involve leading groups in conversations that may become emotionally heavy at times. Studies of teachers' experiences leading these conversations might reveal that they do not always know how to handle some of the topics that arise (Kidger et al., 2010; Rothi et al., 2008). This information could show leaders that professional development is needed to increase teachers' comfort level as they take on a more counseling, social-emotional supportive role in school. Staying in touch with teachers' insights in this way can promote continued growth and development of leaders' programs, which ultimately lead to positive social change (Gregory et

al., 2021; McQueen et al., 2024; Moran et al., 2024).

Theoretical Application

Theory of change (TOC) is a process through which social change is planned and implemented by starting with long-term desired outcomes and backward mapping to intermediate and short-term desired outcomes (Taplin & Clark, 2012). In education, TOC offers a practical way to explain how restorative practices are expected to bring about cultural and behavioral shifts within schools. Rather than simply listing activities, TOC encourages leaders and teachers to think backward from the desired long-term goal such as building stronger relationships, reducing exclusionary discipline, and improving school climate, and then identifying the conditions, strategies, and supports needed to reach those outcomes (Anderson, 2005; Weiss, 1995). This approach also makes assumptions explicit behind restorative work, such as the belief that relational trust and community voice are prerequisites for lasting behavioral change. Because TOC emphasizes stakeholder involvement, it aligns well with restorative practices, which rely on teacher and student participation in shaping implementation (Connell & Kubisch, 1998). Used in this way, TOC not only guides the design of restorative initiatives but also provides a framework for evaluating whether changes in school discipline and culture are occurring as intended.

The requirements for RP are perhaps the greatest for teachers because teachers are the ones who deal most directly and most often with students (Rainbolt et al., 2019). Implementing RP in alternative schools is a primary step in creating institutional change in the overall system of education. This study is situated to discover the successes and shortcomings within common themes to help school leaders determine intermediate outcomes. During the research process of reviewing prior studies, many common themes emerged regarding RP and alternative schools.

Restorative practices such as social-emotional learning, culturally responsive teaching, restorative circles, and positive behavior intervention are some common strategies that have been implemented in many alternative schools as an attempt to combat systemic issues associated with punitive discipline (Carswell et al., 2009; Dessoif, 2011; Lawrence, 2020; McCallops et al., 2019; Mette et al., 2016). Common themes that arise during the transition from a punitive environment to a restorative environment are: (1) necessity of teacher knowledge (Acosta et al., 2019; Gregory et al., 2021; Vaandering, 2014), (2) impact of teacher attitudes and beliefs (Lustick et al., 2024; Starnes, 2023), (3) necessity of strong school leadership and support (Sullivan et al., 2022; Vincent et al., 2021), and (4) lack of proof of the sustainability and long-term effectiveness of restorative practices (Black, 2016; McCallops et al., 2019). Very few studies show how teachers experience this transition; this gap in literature is evidence of a need to understand how teachers experience new implementation of restorative practices, highlighting the successes and challenges they face. Teachers' experiences can help stakeholders determine how to allocate resources and training to create a positive transition process. This information is crucial because the effects of a poor transition from punitive to restorative practices will impact students the most, potentially for a lifetime. For these reasons, and because the literature supports it (Gregory et al., 2021; McQueen et al., 2024; Moran et al., 2024), greater investigation of the process of teachers' experiences with new restorative practices implementation is necessary to achieve positive outcomes for the nation's most high-risk student populations.

Research Questions

This qualitative research, which uses a case study design to examine the experiences of alternative school teachers as they transition from a punitive to a restorative environment, is framed by the following research questions (RQ):

RQ 1: How do alternative school teachers in a restorative environment interact with students to address behavioral problems?

RQ 2: What perceptions do alternative school teachers have about RP?

- What are their understandings of the concept?
- What are their beliefs and attitudes about RP? How do alternative school teachers' sense of self-efficacy affect their comfort level with RP?

RQ 3: What challenges do alternative school teachers report experiencing during the transition to RP?

Justification

Teachers who are accustomed to having students removed and sent to in-school or out-of-school suspension for behavioral infractions, as most alternative school teachers are, will undoubtedly struggle when tasked with finding new ways to keep students engaged in instruction and on track with discipline (Carswell et al., 2009). This is not to say that alternative school teachers are not good classroom managers. Instead, teachers who are already adept at classroom management may struggle with learning new, restorative ways to intervene with their students, especially if these teachers believe they already provide ample opportunities for their students. A deeper understanding of this process is needed (Weber & Vereenhooge, 2020) and may provide the following contributions: (a) the information gathered from alternative school teachers' experiences with RP implementation can help educational leaders determine the types of training and resource allocation that benefit teachers most when implementing RP, and (b) data collected can also help leaders develop a structured, gradual rollout of restorative practices that minimizes the stark transition from a punitive to restorative setting. The ultimate goal of this study is to provide information that can help stakeholders develop what does not yet exist: an effective,

sustainable restorative program that teachers can use to meet the needs of each student (McCallops et al., 2019)

The purpose of this study links to a trickle-down process in which teachers' needs are met first so they can implement restorative practices effectively. When teachers are supported, students benefit the most. Students are less likely to make meaningful changes in their behavior when things are done to or for them by authority figures (Wachtel, 2016); rather, they become better at communicating and working with others when they are involved in the process of resolving their transgressions (Gray & Drewery, 2011). Understanding and addressing how teachers experience RP implementation can help improve the outcomes for students. The results of this study will highlight the successes and the challenges associated with RP. There are very few studies that fully address challenges associated with RP implementation, but understanding, considering, and proposing solutions to those challenges will increase the credibility of RP with teachers who are skeptical of the strategies. Decreasing the number of teachers who dismiss the practices as merely another set of strategies that does not work will increase the likelihood that RP can have a positive effect on today's students. If teachers feel supported and that their needs are being addressed as they move away from punitive practices to restorative ones, they are more likely to sustain the practices with fidelity. If students who have the benefit of comprehensive restorative instruction develop greater resilience and increase their social-emotional capacity, they can use those life skills into adulthood to build brighter futures for themselves. Building these life skills for students will help them handle adversity during their developmental years, a process that will help them through all stages of their lives.

Delimitations and Assumptions

This study is limited to the teachers at RISE Academy because the principal has

prioritized allocation of time and resources to implementing RP in an alternative school. Some alternative schools participate in a few RP; however, RISE Academy's principal deliberately focused time, energy, and monetary resources toward providing multi-faceted restorative practices such as non-exclusionary discipline, social-emotional learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, and positive behavior reinforcement. RISE Academy has the immersive environment necessary to show how alternative teachers experience the transition from a punitive to a restorative environment. Examining the teachers in only this school limits the breadth of the study, but the immersive atmosphere available only at RISE is necessary to achieve sufficient depth of inquiry into the transitive experience.

There are assumptions associated with this study. The researcher assumes that finding a way to successfully implement RP can have a positive societal impact. The researcher also assumes that participants interviewed are truthful with their responses and that her interactions with them will not influence those responses. She also assumes that her role as a 21-year veteran teacher at RISE Academy will not influence responses and that the subjects she has chosen to interview will provide the richest, most informative data relevant to the research questions. To accomplish this goal, she will keep anonymous the identities of the teachers being interviewed.

Definitions

- *Restorative Practice (RP)* – A relationship focused approach in schools that emphasizes building community, addressing conflict, and repairing harm through dialogue and accountability rather than punishment (Wachtel, 2016).
- *Repairing Harm* – A key component of restorative justice involving acknowledgement of the harm caused and active efforts to make amends—acknowledging needs of victims, those responsible, and the community (Zehr, 2015).

- *Restorative Circle* – A structured meeting format rooted in restorative justice, where all parties gather—typically in a circle—to dialogue, address harm, and collaboratively work toward resolution and healing (Pranis, 2005).
- *Relationship-Centered Approach* – An educational philosophy that prioritizes building and maintaining positive, respectful, and trusting relationships as the foundation for learning and behavior management (Gregory et al., 2016).
- *Punitive Discipline* – A behavior management approach that focuses on assigning consequences or punishments in response to misbehavior, often without addressing underlying causes or repairing relationships (Skiba & Losen, 2016).
- *Exclusionary Discipline* – Disciplinary actions that remove students from the regular school environment, such as suspension or expulsion, which have been linked to negative academic and social outcomes (Skiba & Losen, 2016).
- *Zero-Tolerance Policy* – A school discipline policy that mandates predetermined consequences—often severe—for specific offenses, regardless of the circumstances or context (Skiba & Losen, 2016).
- *Behavioral Intervention* – Strategies designed to teach and reinforce positive behaviors while reducing inappropriate or harmful behaviors, often using evidence-based approaches tailored to student needs (Sugai & Horner, 2020).
- *Facilitator* – A trained individual who guides restorative processes, ensuring respectful communication, emotional safety, and productive outcomes for all participants (Wachtel, 2016).
- *Stakeholders* – All individuals or groups impacted by an incident of harm or involved in addressing and resolving it, including harmed parties, responsible parties, families, and

school staff (Zehr, 2015).

- *Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)* – The process through which individuals acquire and apply the skills to understand and manage emotions, set positive goals, show empathy, build relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2020).
- *Trauma Informed Practice* – An approach that recognizes the widespread impact of trauma and integrates this understanding into policies, procedures, and interactions to avoid re-traumatization and promote resilience (Avery & Lang, 2020).
- *School Climate* – The overall quality and character of school life, including relationships among students and staff, norms and expectations, and the physical and emotional safety of the environment (Cohen et al., 2009).

Summary

Restorative practices are gaining popularity in education as a method to combat systemic injustice (Davison et al., 2021; Dhaliwal et al., 2023). However, there is little evidence regarding the prolonged effectiveness and sustainability of those practices. For RP to have a proper chance at creating social change, educational leaders need a clear picture of the successes and challenges of the implementation process through the perspectives of those who enact the practices: teachers. Because alternative school teachers serve students at what can be a critical turning point in their young lives, those teachers' perspectives are of particular importance. The purpose of this study is to gather information about teachers' experiences implementing RP; through survey and interview data analysis, common themes will arise. Those themes will help educational leaders and stakeholders determine how future iterations of RP implementation can be improved for greater, more effective impact on teachers' and students' experiences with a restorative environment.

As restorative practices gain momentum in schools, several common themes emerge in the research, including the importance of leadership support, staff training, and consistent implementation across classrooms. Some of the literature highlights the experiences of teachers, but it tends to focus primarily on traditional school settings. Less is known about how alternative school teachers experience and implement restorative practices, creating an important gap that will be addressed in Chapter 2 through a review of the existing research.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Restorative practices are becoming increasingly popular in education as a way to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline and to address the disproportionate number of students of color who are subject to zero-tolerance discipline practices. Restorative practices can address the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of students. Restorative practices can be successful in some circumstances; however, the challenges of using these practices must be overcome to ensure they are effective and sustainable for long-term implementation. The following literature review explains the different types of restorative practices that research has shown to be effective, along with the challenges and successes associated with those practices.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of change serves as a foundational framework for transformative processes in schools. Theory of change acknowledges the necessity of creating large-scale change through small, attainable goals. Because the goal of this study is to affect large-scale, societal change through the smaller (relatively speaking) attainable goal of effective restorative practice implementation, it is essential to understand how to apply theory of change. By understanding and leveraging this theory, educators and policymakers can strategically navigate the complex process of school reform as they work toward the broader vision of a more restorative educational landscape.

Theory of Change

Theory of change is a process through which social change is planned and implemented

by starting with long-term desired outcomes and backward mapping to intermediate and short-term desired outcomes. Theory of change also involves analyzing various interventions to achieve the desired long-term goal (Taplin & Clark, 2012). The process seeks to achieve more than a simple evaluation of whether an initiative works; instead, the goal is to understand the conditions under which it works and for whom (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020). Intermediate and short-term outcomes are determined by ascertaining the requirements to reach the long-term goal. In this study, restorative practices are the short-term outcomes (i.e., preconditions) being used to achieve the long-term outcome of dismantling zero-tolerance discipline and creating resilient adults skilled at handling adversity.

Theory of change and change theory are not interchangeable terms. Change theory represents knowledge about how change occurs and applies to more than one specific project; it is generalizable beyond a single initiative, whereas theory of change applies to a particular initiative. When assessing the effectiveness of interventions, leaders must have an ongoing process designed to “reconsider and revise their theory of change as they gather data that indicates whether and how their efforts are working” (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020, p. 3). Many people approach Theory of Change as “a way of thinking about how a project is expected to work” (Stein & Valters, 2012, p. 5). However, Monaghan and King (2018) expanded this idea by exploring the potential of theories of change as living entities. This perspective envisions an adaptive and iterative process where, for instance, intermediate outcomes may lead to revised inputs, and outputs may influence the broader context or shifts in the context itself may necessitate rethinking the approach.

Theory of change is the theoretical application for this study (see Figure 1). Theory of change is a process intended to provide a path for moving something from its existing state to a

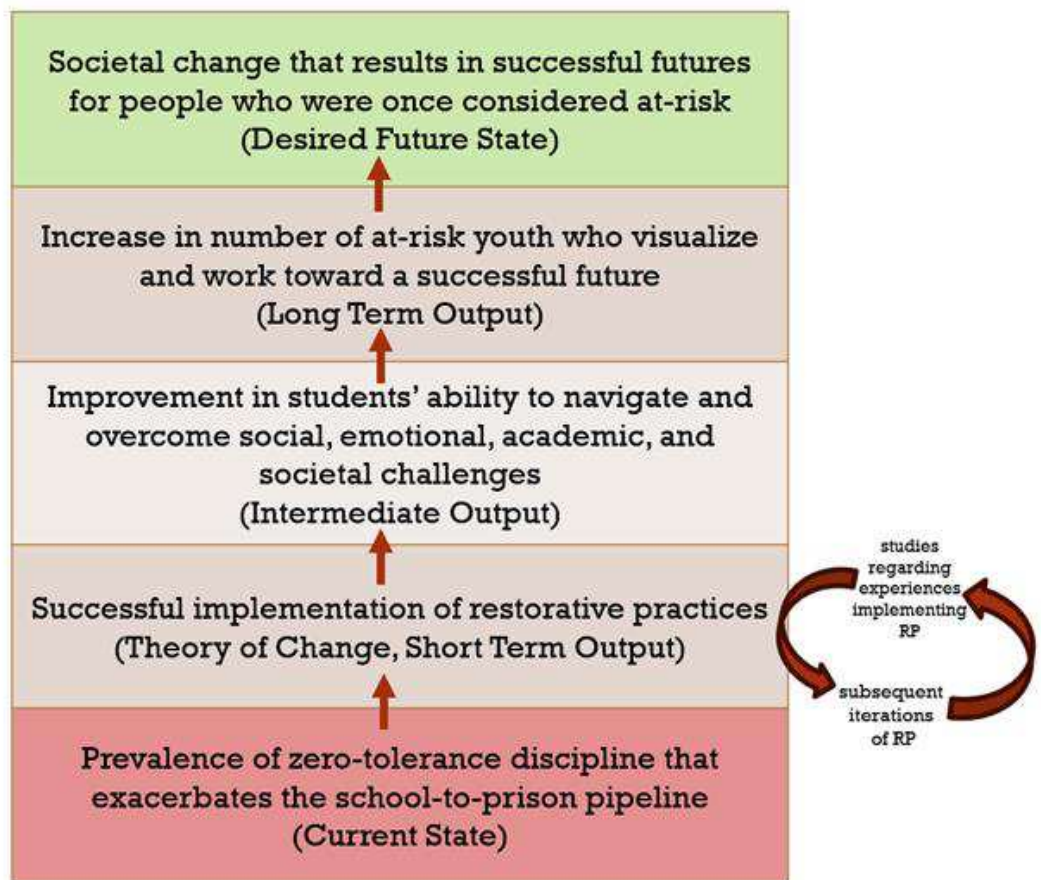
future, desired state, with the understanding that the path may need to be re-evaluated along the way to make beneficial adjustments. The first step on the path is naming the current state or problem. In this case, the problem is zero-tolerance discipline policies that promote the school-to-prison pipeline. To address this problem, a theory of change—a small step that might have a domino effect and contribute magnified changes toward the ultimate desired state—must be created. Here, the change agent is the implementation of restorative practices in alternative schools, where a large population of at-risk youth is concentrated. Enacting this theory of change (restorative practice implementation) propels short-term outputs toward the ultimate desired future state. However, because theory of change is an iterative process by nature, it must be re-evaluated (Monaghan & King, 2018). As the process of implementing restorative practices yields outputs such as improvements in students' abilities to navigate social, emotional, academic, and societal challenges, the results must be examined for efficacy. A question to ask in this stage is the types of changes to the implementation process that could be made to achieve more significant numbers in the intermediate outputs. Those improved outputs would ideally lead to a greater success rate in the long-term output phase of increasing the number of at-risk youths who visualize and work toward a successful future. An increase in those numbers would likely increase proliferation toward the ultimate desired future state, which is societal change that results in successful futures for those who were once considered most at risk.

As noted, my proposed study is situated in the short-term output phase. The insights it provides will yield information regarding (a) how alternative school teachers in a restorative environment interact with students to address behavioral problems; (b) how alternative school teachers perceive restorative practices (including their understanding of the concept, their beliefs and attitudes regarding the concept, and how their sense of self-efficacy affects their comfort

level with the concept); and (c) the challenges they report experiencing during the transition to restorative practices. The information from the study will be helpful to school leaders who spearhead new implementation of restorative practices because they can learn from the experiences of others what works, what needs to be changed, and which new directions they might need to take.

Figure 1

Theory of Change in the Context of Restorative Practice Implementation



Restorative practices are not the only change agent that could help lead to the ultimate desired state. There are other strategies and practices that might have a significant impact on the situation. However, just as restorative practice implementation needs to be re-evaluated to improve future iterations of the process, those other strategies and practices would also need to

be re-evaluated. Experiences of teachers are vital to the evaluation of any new initiative in education because they serve as the lynchpins that connect the initiative to the students. This study is designed to provide information salient to understand when and under what conditions teachers feel successful or unsuccessful while implementing restorative practices. Leaders can use this information to inform and revise their iterations of implementing change in this area.

Conceptual Framework

In this study, the conceptual framework illustrates how MTSS, teachers' sense of self-efficacy, and restorative practices interact to shape teachers' experiences as they transition from a punitive discipline system to a restorative approach. MTSS is a structured, evidence-based framework that provides varying levels of support to students based on their needs. The transition from punitive discipline to restorative practices aligns with MTSS by emphasizing proactive interventions, social-emotional learning, and tiered supports. Teachers' experiences with this transition may depend on how well their school integrates MTSS into behavior management. Teachers' sense of self-efficacy refers to their confidence in their ability to influence student behavior and learning outcomes. A shift to restorative practices may challenge teachers' beliefs, requiring them to develop new skills in conflict resolution, relationship-building, and social emotional support. Teachers with higher self-efficacy may adapt more easily, while those with lower self-efficacy may struggle with the transition. Restorative practices include strategies such as peer mediation and conflict resolution that replace punitive discipline with relationship building and accountability. Teachers' experiences may vary depending on their training, school support, and personal beliefs about discipline.

Schools implementing MTSS provide a framework for shifting from punitive to restorative discipline. Teachers experience this transition through professional development,

school policies, and administrative support. Teachers' confidence in using restorative practices influences how they experience the transition from punitive to restorative as well. Those with higher self-efficacy may embrace the change, while those with lower self-efficacy may feel overwhelmed. The extent to which restorative practices are effectively implemented affects teachers' experiences, their classroom management strategies, and their relationships with students. In essence, MTSS provides the structure for restorative transition. Teachers' self-efficacy influences their adaptation to restorative practices, and restorative practices shape teachers' experiences with student discipline (See Figure 2).

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework Incorporating MTSS, Teacher Self-Efficacy, and Restorative Practices



This framework can help explain why some teachers experience a smoother transition than others, depending on the level of MTSS support, their self-efficacy, and their comfort with restorative practices. In the following pages, more information is provided about factors that

influence each of these elements of the conceptual framework and the way that those influences converge to shape teachers' transition from a punitive to a restorative environment.

Restorative Practices

Education that includes academic, behavioral, and social-emotional instruction is becoming increasingly popular worldwide (Garrett, 2024; Schoch, 2023). Providing behavioral and social-emotional learning, in addition to academics, is intended to address the needs of the whole child. Previously, education had a singular focus on intellectual growth. Helping students grow behaviorally and socially has become a new focus intended to produce more prepared, well-rounded citizens as they exit youth and enter young adulthood. In the following section, I will review common approaches regarding intervention-based academic, behavioral, and social-emotional education.

Types of Restorative Measures

In alignment with the whole-child approach to education, many school leaders use academic, behavioral, and social-emotional strategies. These strategies aim to build and repair relationships, strengthen community bonds, and provide alternatives to punitive disciplinary measures (Atticott & Kam, 2024; Vincent et al., 2021). In academics, restorative practices encourage student engagement and accountability through collaborative, culturally responsive learning environments. Behaviorally, alternatives to traditional punishment are often used to help students understand the harm caused and find ways to make amends. Social, emotional, and restorative practices help students develop empathy, communication skills, and constructive conflict resolution.

Academic Restorative Measures

Restorative practices aimed at improving academic outcomes can be applied to all

academic subject areas. From the English classroom (de los Ríos et al., 2019) to the math classroom (McQueen, 2022), restorative education has improved student outcomes by increasing student engagement and academic performance. Additionally, restorative practices can bridge the gap between academics and behavior by addressing issues such as academic integrity (Orr & Orr, 2021). However, there is little information available to define what *restorative instruction* is, specifically (Fine, 2018). In the researcher’s mind, restorative instruction combines the use of restorative behavior strategies and culturally responsive teaching to create a restorative academic setting.

There are elements of restorative instruction that are well defined in theory. For example, culturally responsive education is a restorative instructional practice. Gloria Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay, and Django Paris are three scholars who have contributed most to the concept of culturally responsive education. Ladson-Billings (1995) posited that *culturally relevant pedagogy* was a teaching practice that involved considering the perspectives and environmental influences of all cultures, particularly those traditionally excluded when implementing instruction. Gay (2010) built upon Ladson-Billings’ work by discussing *culturally responsive teaching*, which involved making “positive changes on multiple levels, including instructional techniques, instructional materials, student-teacher relationships, classroom climate, and self-awareness to improve learning for students” (*Culturally Responsive Teaching*, 2019, p. 4). Paris and Alim (2017) envisioned *culturally sustaining pedagogy*, which called for teachers to “help students develop a positive cultural identity while teaching math, reading, problem-solving, and civics” (*Culturally Responsive Teaching*, 2019, p. 5). Culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining teaching can help bridge gaps for marginalized youth. However, research specifically addressing restorative instruction in this context is lacking.

Academic restorative measures highlight the use of strategies to create a positive, inclusive classroom environment where students feel heard, respected, and engaged. An occurrence of these measures used in a classroom could be shown through an example teacher, named Emily, working with students by providing restorative feedback. Emily shows encouragement for growth and improvement rather than focusing solely on what went wrong. She reacts to students using questions like, “What do you think you could try differently next time?” or “How can we work together to improve this?” Emily relies on peer support in the classroom as another academic restorative practice. When a student struggles with a math concept, Emily may pair him with a peer who can explain the problem differently, using language and cultural references that the student can relate to. When planning a literature lesson, Emily chooses texts that are relevant to the student cultures present in the classroom to foster engagement and to improve students’ comprehension by providing familiar background information and context. Finally, Emily might hold student-led conferences in lieu of traditional parent-teacher meetings. During these conferences, students take ownership of their learning by reflecting on their academic progress and setting goals. This practice encourages self-reflection and accountability while also valuing student input. These restorative academic strategies create an inclusive classroom culture where students feel respected, empowered, and supported.

Behavioral Restorative Measures

Addressing behaviors can be a challenging task for educators. Using restorative discipline is largely about building relationships with students (Forsberg & Leko, 2022; Gray & Drewery, 2011; Gregory et al., 2021; Schafer, 2023; Schinella, 2024; Skrzypek et al., 2020). When students empathize with their teachers and peers, a social-emotional gain is created and can transfer to behavioral improvement (Gregory et al., 2016; McQueen et al., 2024; Rogers et al.,

2018). For example, a teacher saying, “I feel frustrated when you talk while I’m teaching because I worked really hard to prepare this lesson,” is more likely to achieve the desired response of silencing a student than snapping angrily at them to “be quiet.”

Restorative circles are perhaps the most well-known form of restorative behavior intervention; students, their family members, and other adults who have been involved in a specific incident of harm gather in a circle to verbally acknowledge the damage they have done and/or the hurt they have experienced in an effort to repair the harm that was done (Evanovich et al., 2020). However, these circles consume time and resources (Atticot & Kamm, 2024). Instead, subtle adjustments to the day-to-day interaction between teachers and their students are the most impactful contributor, in terms of resource utilization, to culturally responsive behavior management (Gregory et al., 2016; Schinella, 2024; Skrzypek et al., 2020). For example, teachers can learn to use humor to diffuse tense situations, level the tone of their voice to avoid escalating an already emotionally elevated student or use eye contact or hand signals to redirect students from engaging in undesirable behaviors. These strategies are only a few of the things that teachers can learn to teach in a restorative manner. When teachers use restorative techniques, classrooms become less of a power hierarchy and more of a team environment where mutual respect and educational inquiry are keys to success (Fine, 2018; Moran et al., 2024).

However, there are cases when positive relationships are not enough to keep some students from engaging in undesirable behaviors, and that is where restorative practices become crucial to the process of moving away from punitive discipline. Yet creating and maintaining a set of resources that provide behavioral intervention for students beyond what the teacher can offer is costly because it involves paying for additional resources such as social workers and mental health specialists (Atticot & Kamm, 2024; Hollands et al., 2022). As shown later in the

research, sustainability has proven to be an obstacle when using restorative practices.

Behavioral restorative measures highlight the use of strategies to create a positive, inclusive classroom environment where students feel heard, respected, and engaged. Example of an occurrence of these measures used in a classroom could be shown again through a teacher named Emily, working with students to build strong, respectful relationships and to address conflicts through dialogue rather than punishment. Emily begins the school year with a restorative classroom agreement, which is created collaboratively with her students. When behavior issues arise, she refers back to the agreement, facilitating restorative conversations, and focusing on mutual respect and understanding. When a student disrupts class, Emily does not immediately resort to traditional disciplinary actions. Instead, she initiates a restorative conversation where the students reflect on their behavior, the impact it had on others, and how they can make things right. For instance, Emily may ask, “How do you think your actions affected the class?” and then guide them to brainstorm ways to restore the flow of the lesson. She might also encourage the class to use “I” statements to express their feelings when conflicts arise, fostering open communication and empathy. These approaches create a safe space for students to express concerns, rebuild relationships, and take ownership of their actions, ultimately maintaining a positive and cooperative learning environment.

Social-emotional Restorative Measures

Whether academic or non-academic restorative measures, effective restorative practices tend to include the social-emotional aspect. When restorative practices include social-emotional learning, school climate has been shown to improve (Dyson et al., 2021; Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Schoch, 2023; Steed et al., 2022). Social-emotional instruction also closely relates to and enhances culturally responsive teaching (Michalec & Wilson, 2022). Students

involved in social-emotional conversations have been shown to improve their listening, anger management, and empathic skills, which led to greater self-efficacy (Dennen, 2024; Evanovich et al., 2020; Schumacher, 2014). Social-emotional learning has also reduced incidences of bullying, victimization, and perceived stress while enhancing engagement and achievement (Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2018).

As with other aspects of restorative practices, there are limits to what social-emotional instruction can accomplish when resources are limited (Atticot & Kamm, 2024; Elias, 2019; Hall et al., 2021; Haymovitz et al., 2018). Teachers' experiences implementing restorative practices, including social-emotional learning, can create insight into which resources should be prioritized (Dennen, 2024).

Social-emotional restorative measures highlight the use of strategies to help students develop self-awareness, empathy, and effective communication skills. Example of an occurrence of these measures could be shown again through a teacher named Emily. She greets students at the door each day, making notes of any students who seem to be having an off day so she can check in with them a little later. To help students manage stress and develop self-regulation skills, Emily incorporates mindfulness and breathing exercises into her classroom routine. She starts each class period with a mindful minute, which allows students to focus on a short video or coloring to calm their minds and help them refocus their energy. She also guides students in breathing exercises before stressful activities like exams or presentations. Additionally, Emily devotes time each week exclusively to social-emotional education. She leads students in role-playing scenarios where they must navigate social challenges, such as comforting a friend or apologizing for a mistake. She also encourages students to keep journals where they reflect on their emotions, interactions, and growth. She may ask them to write about a situation from the

past week when they felt proud of their behavior or about something they could improve. These reflections allow Emily to check in with her students, offering guidance when needed, and celebrating progress. Using these restorative practices helps students develop their social and emotional skills and creates a classroom environment where emotional intelligence, empathy, and mutual respect are important parts of learning and interactions.

Challenges of Transitioning to Restorative Practices

Successfully implementing restorative practices in alternative schools is a primary step in creating institutional change in the overall system of education (Atticot & Kamm, 2024; Augustine et al., 2018; Gray, 2021; Gregory et al., 2016). However, transitioning to new approaches in the education system presents significant challenges. These challenges stem from systemic issues, resistance to change, and the complex nature of implementing large-scale reforms. The current education system relies on a one-size-fits-all education model, which focuses more on *what* schools teach rather than *who* they teach. Research suggests that personalized learning experiences tailored to students' interests and abilities and built upon their personal background knowledge leads to better outcomes (Hughley, 2025; Wah & Nasri, 2019). However, personalized learning and educating the whole child present challenges due to resource constraints and standardized testing pressures. Leaders who implement restorative practices are attempting to address the needs of the whole child—of *who* is doing the learning—despite the significant obstacles that exist. This study is situated to discover the successes and shortcomings within common themes related to implementing restorative measures to help school leaders determine what is working and what needs to be revised to make decisive steps toward change.

During the research process, researchers have found common themes regarding the implementation of restorative practices in schools (Hall et al., 2021; Lustick et al., 2024; Vincent

et al., 2021). Restorative practices such as social-emotional learning, culturally responsive instruction, and restorative behavior intervention are some common strategies that have been implemented in many alternative schools as an attempt to combat systemic issues associated with punitive discipline (Carswell et al., 2009; Dessoiff, 2011; Lawrence, 2020; McCallops et al., 2019; Mette et al., 2016). Successful implementation of restorative practices in schools can build relationships, teach empathy, teach academic content, and help with problem-solving skills; however, successful implementation requires action planning, training, and evaluation (Evanovich et al., 2020). Some implementation processes are more well-planned than others, but even the best-planned programs have room for improvement during the transition to restorative practices. Common themes and challenges that arise during the transition from a punitive environment to a restorative climate relate to some key factors. Some of those factors are internal to teachers, while others are external. Factors internal to the educator include teacher knowledge, teacher attitudes and beliefs, and teachers' identity as a change agent. Factors external to the educator include school leadership and support. Cost is another external factor that presents challenges. Finally, there remain questions about the effectiveness of restorative practices since there is a lack of empirical evidence showing the long-term effects on academic improvement. In the following sections, there is insight into some positive and negative educational outcomes related to these challenges.

Factors Internal to the Teacher

Teachers play a crucial role in implementing educational initiatives and driving changes in schools. They are often lynchpins to those initiatives' success. Teachers' willingness and ability to embrace new approaches are influenced by internal factors such as their knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and their identity as change agents.

Teacher Knowledge

Educators who are well-informed about the principles surrounding restorative practices and techniques are better equipped to create a supportive and inclusive school environment that fosters positive relationships and promotes conflict resolution (Acosta et al., 2019). A comprehensive understanding of RP enables teachers to effectively facilitate restorative conversations, which are essential for addressing conflicts and repairing harm (Gregory et al., 2014). Teachers must know how to guide students through the process of thinking about what has happened, who is affected, and what can be done to make things right. This knowledge and skill set empowers teachers to create spaces where students feel heard, valued, and part of a community invested in mutual respect (Vaandering, 2014).

Logic follows that teachers' knowledge of RP can also enhance their relationships with students. When teachers are trained in attentive listening, understanding individual perspectives, and facilitating dialogues, they can build trust and respect with their students (Gregory et al., 2014). This improved rapport contributes to a more conducive learning environment where students feel supported and motivated to reach their full potential.

Teachers who are well-versed in restorative practices are also better prepared to integrate those practices into their daily classroom management strategies effectively. By starting with basic restorative skills such as active listening, affective communication, and curiosity questions, teachers can gradually incorporate more complex restorative techniques into their teaching practices (Mansfield et al., 2018). This incremental approach allows for a smoother transition toward a fully restorative school culture.

Teacher Attitudes and Beliefs

New educational initiatives, particularly those involving disciplinary approaches, can be

significantly impacted by teachers' level of buy-in and their prevailing ideologies (Lee & Min, 2017). The successful rollout largely depends on the willingness of educators to embrace a paradigm shift regarding student behavior, discipline, and learning (Starnes, 2023). Teacher buy-in is crucial because new initiatives require them to adopt new responsibilities and methods that may be outside their traditional roles. Punitive approaches often align with long-standing societal values around punishment as a means of accountability, whereas restorative approaches emphasize healing, cooperation, and restoration. The effectiveness of restorative practice implementation is heavily influenced by the ability to bridge these ideological gaps (Lee & Min, 2017; Lustick et al., 2024).

Apathy of the Overwhelmed Educator and Teacher Buy-in

Teachers who feel overwhelmed often develop apathetic attitudes toward restorative practice initiatives (Lustick et al., 2024; McGregor et al., 2019; Mette et al., 2016). Restorative practices involve more skill than simple academic and behavioral intervention; apathy arises when teachers become overwhelmed by the magnitude of things required to implement restorative practices with fidelity (Mette et al., 2016; Moran et al., 2024). Teachers who are already overburdened with time-consuming protocols and pressured to incite academic excellence for their students may fail to give restorative practices a chance because they cannot conceive of adding one more thing to their daily routine. Mette et al. (2016) found that teachers' apathy toward implementation and lack of time were barriers to the successful execution of culturally responsive pedagogy. In DiVincenzo's (2024) study, elementary school teachers cited time limitations as a barrier to implementing restorative practices. They often lacked sufficient time to engage in restorative conversations and complete the necessary documentation. Atticot and Kamm (2024) found that because teachers were inundated with responsibilities, schools

must be strategic in ensuring time was dedicated to training in restorative practices. Teachers also wanted to see school leaders participating in restorative practices to promote trust toward those leaders in the process of implementation. Teachers wanted to know that leaders were committed to restorative practices not only through administrative words but also through administrative actions (Moran et al., 2024).

Garrett (2024) discovered the importance of positive teacher attitudes to the success of restorative practices. Teachers who had a greater sense of self-efficacy also had a greater implementation rate for restorative practices. In fact, teachers' confidence and belief in their ability regarding restorative practices is crucial to the implementation process (Moran et al., 2024). Furthermore, Schoch (2023) found that teachers at schools that implemented restorative practices had higher social-emotional competence in relationship management and job satisfaction than teachers at schools that did not implement restorative practices. For effective implementation of restorative practices, teachers must not view it as one more thing added to their already overburdened workload, but as a tool to enhance the learning environment and reduce their workload (McGregor et al., 2019; Mette et al., 2016; Moran et al., 2024).

Some researchers have succeeded with restorative practice implementation by adapting the standard curriculum into a culturally responsive curriculum. This approach focuses on a *modification* of the curriculum rather than a separate addition to the curriculum. Kulkarni et al. (2020) found that discussing democratic principles in class led to culturally responsive learning. The researchers showed that culturally responsive pedagogy could be seamlessly integrated into classroom discussions and create more democratically aware students without adding extra time to teachers' classroom preparation schedules. McGregor et al. (2019) also found natural ways to incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy into their classes. Their methods required no

additional effort to plan, yet they achieved positive learning outcomes. They engaged the cultural norms of the students and found room in the standards to incorporate geographically localized learning, that created language-rich learning environments. These methods allowed culturally responsive pedagogy to organically flow through their teaching and engaged students in a relevant, culturally rich learning experience. These findings are crucial because they show ways to incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy without extra time commitment from teachers, a factor that could help combat teachers' apathy toward restorative practice implementation (DiVincenzo, 2024).

Proper training and teacher buy-in were two more keys to successful restorative practice implementation (DiVincenzo, 2024; Evanovich et al., 2020; Starnes, 2023). Starnes (2023) found that teachers who received training and support in trauma-informed methods were more likely to use strategies more attentive to the needs of students who have experienced trauma. Barnes and McCallops (2019) worked with faculty in a diversely populated school and found prior training in culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) was key for appropriate implementation of the practices in social-emotional learning (SEL). Additionally, they found implementation of CRP and SEL were heavily dependent upon buy-in from all educational stakeholders. Barnes and McCallops (2019) showed that proper teacher training and teacher buy-in were essential components of restorative practice implementation. The researchers also noted the need for more studies examining educator perception in this area.

Other studies showed the importance of teacher buy-in. Dudovitz et al.'s (2017) work with 32 low-income minority youth in which the researchers found one of the main factors influencing students' positive self-concept was having caring teachers and coaches. The success of the program relied heavily on teachers who recognized the value of their commitment to their

students and who were properly trained regarding the best ways to support student morale. Gray (2021) followed a group of first-year teachers and their use of restorative practices as advocated by their teacher preparation program. Teachers used affective statements and circles most frequently, while informal conferences and affective questions were used more minimally. Gray also found that the majority of first year teachers in the study combined restorative practices with incentive systems, which were negatively critiqued by the teacher preparation program. This combination of methods reveals people's tendency to revert to traditional or familiar when training in new concepts is not ongoing. However, many programs support the integration of positive behavior recognition with restorative practices. Vincent et al. (2021) studied a program in which school-wide positive restorative discipline was adopted. The implementation of this program required top-down and bottom-up support for the long-term commitment of using restorative practices. In their study, Evanovich et al. (2020) recommended combining restorative practice implementation with a school's preexisting positive behavior framework. Finally, McCallops et al. (2019) showed a need for deeper understanding of teachers' experiences with restorative practices, which would provide insight into the practices' effectiveness and sustainability. The research would also inform school leaders about the training successes and failures of previous restorative practice iterations and would inform them of areas of need in future iterations.

Conflicting Ideologies

Although it may seem that all teachers working together toward a common goal is easy, the fact is that teachers have a wide range of ideologies and beliefs regarding education (Samuels, 2018). There are too many philosophical variations to cover, but for the purpose of this review, restorative versus punitive ideologies is compared.

Some teachers with punitive or conservative educational ideologies have struggled to conceptualize restorative practices as beneficial to students (Lustick et al., 2024; Samuels, 2018). Atticot and Kamm (2024) discovered that some educators were fixated on punishment as opposed to restoration and viewed restorative practices as a free pass for students who have done wrong. Asking these teachers to participate in restorative practices would require a shift in their mindset. Samuels (2018), in her work with a focus group of teachers using restorative practices, noted the difficulty some teachers had with merging their conservative ideologies with inclusive practices (e.g., a conservatively religious teacher with LGBTQ students). Samuels concluded that teachers needed (a) the professional development opportunity to explore their own relationship with diversity, (b) to practice discussing controversial topics, (c) to learn about and implement inclusive pedagogical practices, and (d) to talk about how to create an inclusive environment for students. Samuels's findings were an important revelation regarding the extensive amount of support many teachers needed to simply conceptualize the restorative environment. Samuels (2018) also found some teachers' conservative, punitive ideologies were barriers to effective restorative practice implementation. Essentially, teachers who believe that suspension is the appropriate consequence for student misconduct are less open and adaptive to restorative practices. Lustick et al. (2024) found that even teachers who tout understanding and use of restorative practices did not always implement them effectively. Teachers who understood restorative practices to increase equity and promote relationships were often influenced by behaviorist, punitive logic. They relied on the restorative coordinator in their school to be a troubleshooter rather than a facilitator of cultural change. Their study highlighted an important attribute of restorative practice implementation in schools: teachers often view RP as a technical means of getting students to behave in a desirable way, rather than a relational approach to

repairing harm.

Being a classroom manager is different from being a behavioral mentor; the latter requires teachers to be vulnerable and talk to students through their own emotional struggles to help the students learn behavioral accountability (Vincent et al., 2021). Teachers who have consistently been good at classroom managers may be less amenable to the changes in perspective and control required to implement restorative practices. Warren (2018) addressed this reticent attitude from some teachers in his study. He found perspective to be an essential concept when cultivating teacher dispositions regarding culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). According to Warren, the emotional aspect of empathy must be conjoined with the mental act of adopting another's perspective to create a true culturally responsive disposition. This disposition, he noted, may not be possible for all educators to assume. He asserted that it is a much more realistic prospect to ask teachers to show evidence of using CRP in their teaching practices than to ask them to change their core, personal beliefs on culture. Schinella (2024) found that positive student-teacher relationships were built upon trust and involved five key behaviors: benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence. The important takeaway from these studies regarding conflicting ideologies is as follows: teachers not inherently culturally responsive in their beliefs can incorporate restorative practices into their classrooms.

Role of Teacher Sense of Self-Efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy plays a key role in the successful implementation of new restorative practices in schools. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as a teacher's belief in their own ability to organize and carry out the courses of action required to successfully accomplish a task in each context. This concept is particularly relevant when introducing new approaches like restorative practices, which require most teachers to adapt their classroom management strategies

and expand their interpersonal skills.

Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory identified four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states (see Figure 3). These sources can be leveraged to enhance teachers' sense of self-efficacy when implementing restorative practices.

Figure 3

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory



For instance, providing teachers with opportunities for successful mastery experiences in using restorative techniques could boost their confidence and willingness to continue using the strategies. Vicarious experiences, such as observing colleagues successfully implementing

restorative practices, could also inspire and motivate teachers to believe in their own abilities to do the same. In this context, boosting teachers' sense of self-efficacy can propel them into the restorative realm of becoming behavioral mentors rather than simply classroom managers. However, some teachers may not have an inherent ability to navigate the stressful facets of a restorative environment. Erikson (1950) emphasized how important the stages of psychosocial development were in shaping a person's resilience. He postulated that there were eight stages of psychosocial development. These stages presented a series of challenges or conflicts that individuals must resolve throughout their lives. The stages span from infancy to late adulthood, and each one contributes significantly to shaping a person's identity and approach to life. Successful resolution of each conflict results in a sense of mastery, providing individuals with the emotional and psychological tools they need to face future challenges. However, unresolved conflicts can result in psychological struggles that may affect how people cope with stress as they mature. In other words, these stages contribute to a person's ultimate sense of self-efficacy. Positive self-efficacy helps prevent burnout and depression among teachers (Capone & Petrillo, 2018).

Gaumer Erickson and Noonan's (2013) work regarding teacher efficacy used survey design to provide insights into how teachers perceived their skills and areas for professional growth, ultimately contributing to better targeted teacher training and educational outcomes. Teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to persist in the face of challenges and seek assistance when needed, which is essential for overcoming obstacles during the RP implementation process. These teachers with higher self-efficacy are also less likely to experience burnout (Friesen et al., 2023). Obtaining this information regarding the self-efficacy of teachers at the research site would be particularly relevant when considering the

implementation of restorative practices; school leaders could use the information to tailor training that capitalizes on teachers' strengths and boost their abilities in the areas where they need growth (Evanovich et al., 2020; Starnes, 2023).

Implications for this Study

These internal factors play a significant role in determining how teachers respond to the implementation of restorative practices. A teacher's self-efficacy or belief in their ability to successfully implement restorative practices directly influences how confidently and effectively they use them in the classroom. If a teacher feels overwhelmed by their workload or is skeptical about the effectiveness of restorative practices, they may experience apathy, making it difficult to fully engage with the process (Terry, 2023). Conflicting ideologies, such as a belief in traditional discipline methods or skepticism toward non-punitive approaches, can create resistance to restorative practices, especially if teachers feel that these practices clash with their established teaching philosophy. Finally, a teacher's attitudes, beliefs, and prior knowledge about restorative practices shape how they perceive the approach. Teachers with a strong understanding of restorative principles are more likely to implement them effectively, whereas those lacking knowledge may feel uncertain or reluctant to try something new. Hearing directly from teachers who implement restorative practices, therefore, will provide necessary insight into how they navigate these internal factors and how it influences their perception of restorative practices.

Factors External to Teachers

There are significant challenges external to teachers that must be considered regarding implementation of restorative practices. These challenges are related to school leadership and support systems as well as cost (Fronius et al., 2019; Skiba & Losen, 2016). School leaders must

prioritize RP by embedding it into existing systems while simultaneously providing necessary resources such as additional staff, extensive training, and ongoing support (DiVincenzo, 2024). This philosophical shift in school culture can be difficult to achieve and sustain (Morrison et al., 2005). Additionally, due to the larger number of resources required, the financial burden of restorative education is often more substantial than traditional exclusionary, punitive measures.

School Leadership and Support System: Behavioral Restoration vs. Academic Rigor

Administrators in alternative schools face the difficult task of maintaining academic rigor in classrooms while also providing behavioral restoration for the student population. Although some do exist, few studies show academic excellence accompanied with effective restorative practice implementation, leading many educators to believe that one must be sacrificed to achieve the other (Ascher & Maguire, 2011; Bhandari, 2018; Frank, 2019; Garcia & Garcia, 2016). One success story was Borck's (2020) study of academic and behavioral restorative practice implementation in an alternative environment. He worked with a transfer school in Brooklyn in which he found teachers who were able to engage, retain, and prepare overaged and under-credited youth through cultural relevance and critical race awareness. These teachers were able to alter the downward course of students' lives through successful use of restorative practices. Another success story was Garcia and Garcia's (2016) work with an urban high school Spanish class in which they found students gained a greater pride in their culture and a better desire to achieve academically when taught with culturally rich resources. Students became more self-motivated after their culturally responsive course; they showed more interest in making educational gains in other subjects and in obtaining leadership positions in school. In another study, Lawrence (2020) found that CRP could be used effectively in online learning, but teachers needed further training to provide the most benefit to students. These researchers highlighted

small-scale ways of creating academic success in a restorative environment, but there was no common formula that created those successes.

Some studies with a more formulaic approach do exist. Ascher and Maguire (2011) studied schools that focused on four areas for at-risk students: academic rigor, student support networks, college expectations and access, and data usage. The school's answer for keeping academics rigorous with a population that already found school challenging was a network of mentoring, tutoring, and counseling supports. Therefore, Ascher and Maguire showed that it was possible to have effective use of restorative practices in conjunction with academic achievement. Mette et al. (2016) found teachers who agreed that targeted CRP professional development did improve their knowledge of culturally diverse topics, but it failed to help close the achievement gap. The researchers revealed the problem teachers experienced when trying to simultaneously incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy and maintain focus on standardized testing.

As noted, there was a scarcity of studies that addressed behavioral support equally with academic improvement. However, Carswell et al. (2009) conducted a study that addressed both elements. The researchers worked with an after-school program intended to provide academic and behavioral support for alternative education students; however, their use of restorative practices proved unsuccessful. The program elements included group mentoring, parental support, and community outreach as an attempt to provide its students with better habits and coping strategies. Behavior problems due to transitioning from one location to another, influx of new participants, and fighting plagued the program. Many students had to be removed from the program, and the results were not ideal for those who remained due to the small group size and inability to form a cohesive atmosphere.

Disciplinary issues prove to be a confounding factor in restorative practice

implementation, which creates a level of difficulty for alternative schools that may not be prevalent in other schools (Quinn et al., 2006). Huang and Anyon (2020) analyzed discipline data and student surveys from a large urban school district and found that students with suspensions had a more negative attitude regarding school climate. Conversely, students without discipline records had a more positive perception of school climate. Huang and Anyon also showed that students with discipline histories (e.g., alternative school students) have an inherently negative outlook regarding school climate that is exacerbated by punitive practices. Huang and Anyon's (2020) discipline findings gave credence to the idea of brain-based teaching. Hammond and Jackson (2015) wrote extensively about how different parts of the brain physically process information and how students' sense of safety impacts their ability to learn. Hammond and Jackson made famous for the idea of the *amygdala hijack*, a process with which teachers of high-risk students have become familiar and have been urged to avoid. The authors said that when the amygdala was activated, usually by a perceived threat that could be something as commonplace as hearing raised voices in an argument, no learning took place until the perceived threat was removed, and the amygdala could allow the brain to feel safe again. The authors also found that students needed physical activity, mental challenges, and practice with solving new problems to increase the brain's physical ability to perform complex tasks. The ideas in Hammond and Jackson's text clarified how behavior and academics were closely aligned and why the two elements were dependent upon one another.

Despite the challenges it presents, educational leaders have spent time developing a data-driven approach to addressing the multifaceted needs of students. Creating a holistic educational experience that nurtures cognitive, academic growth and promotes social-emotional, physical, and mental development is a huge undertaking. A framework called MTSS (Multi-Tiered System

of Support) is one choice for school leaders who want to provide layers of support for the changing needs of students.

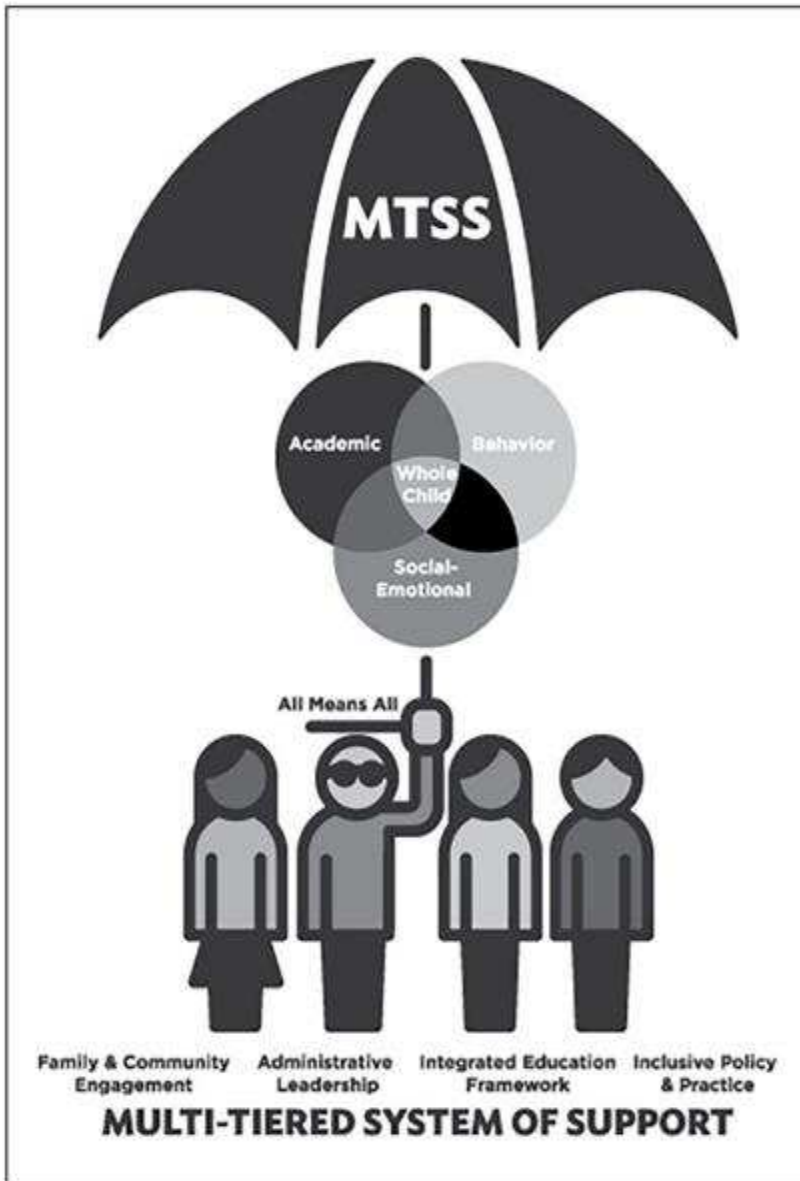
Multi-Tiered System of Support

The school setting for this dissertation study has adopted Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) to provide resources that address the needs of its students and to document the use of those resources. MTSS is a whole-child approach to education that includes academic, behavioral, and social-emotional support for students (Sailor et al., 2021; Sullivan et al., 2022). MTSS models provide a structure for tiered supports that can address disciplinary disproportionality when implemented through an equity lens (Sullivan et al., 2018). Embedding restorative practices within these tiers ensure that both behavioral and equitable supports are built into the system (Sullivan et al., 2018). Family and community engagement, administrative leadership, integrated education framework, and inclusive policy and practice are the undergirding elements to this approach (see Figure 4). It is designed to proactively address students' wide variety of needs and support.

Within a school building, MTSS usually consists of three tiers of support for students' development. The first tier is considered universal and supports 80% of students in the school. The first tier includes students who can be successful with the support that is provided to all students in the building. The second tier includes more targeted support for students identified as needing additional services. The third tier provides intensive, sustained support on an individualized basis for students in tier one and tier two have not shown success (Sullivan et al., 2022). These supports can provide academic, behavioral, social-emotional, mental health, or trauma-informed services for students who need assistance (Freeman et al., 2015; Sugai & Horner, 2020).

Figure 4

Theoretical Framework for Multi-Tiered System of Support with Supporting Domains



Note. From *Preparing Teacher Educators for Statewide Scale-up of Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS)* by W. Sailor, T.M. Skrtic, M. Cohn, & C. Olmstead, 2021, *Teacher Education & Special Education*, 44(1), p. 24 (doi:10.1177/0888406420938035).

MTSS is the framework used to monitor students' progress as the district moves from a punitive to a restorative model. District leaders have chosen to incorporate restorative practices into the MTSS model to promote equity in schools (Sullivan et al., 2022; Vincent et al., 2021). The MTSS framework is the ideal system to use when investigating how teachers experience the transition from a punitive to a restorative environment because it provides resources for almost any intervention a student might need. It also requires documentation of those interventions so that new parties who are introduced to affect change with a student are fully informed about all of the previous efforts and can make strategic decisions about further options.

The school setting for this study has resources in place to address all facets of MTSS. Saturday academic intervention is available in all academic subjects. Virtual assistance from certified teachers in all academic subjects is available from 3-5 p.m. Monday through Thursday for students requiring extra academic support. Workshops are offered to teach parents about students' academic expectations and to foster parent involvement. The school includes a behavior coach, four school counselors, and two social workers. Additionally, leaders within the school arrange outside support from the community to mentor students. These mentors engage students in life coaching sessions and, in many cases, provide students with opportunities to find jobs or to enroll in technical school. The amalgamation of these resources provides a holistic approach to supporting a child in the educational setting.

MTSS enhances the implementation of restorative practices by ensuring all students receive the appropriate level of support to foster a positive school climate. By integrating academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions, MTSS helps educators address the root causes of conflicts and guide students toward meaningful resolutions. It is a proactive approach that not only reduces disciplinary issues but also strengthens relationships, promotes equity, and

creates a more inclusive learning environment (Ziomek-Daigle, 2016). These are also desired outcomes of restorative practice implementation. Having a strong MTSS framework established in schools can mitigate harm to students (because of not meeting their needs) and mitigate the harm that students cause to others (because of meeting their needs). In cases where harm occurs regardless of other MTSS support, restorative practices are used to help repair and prevent future occurrences.

Cost of Restorative Practice Implementation

The cost of restorative practices has proven to be a barrier to its sustained implementation (Samuels, 2018). Dessoiff (2011) found schools using successful ways to help at-risk youth prepare for college, including collaborative student groups, writing to learn, literacy groups (like book clubs), questioning from students and teachers, classroom discussion, and scaffolding. These schools had high rates of graduation and high rates of passing end-of-course exams, but most of the schools were funded by charitable donations. McQueen et al. (2024) found two programmatic elements were consistently noted by teachers and staff to be major contributors to the positive climate and discipline developments at their under-resourced urban school: (1) the support of a full-time restorative practice coordinator and (2) the work of a student leadership group. These two entities were crucial to reducing conflict and improving school climate.

Additionally, student leadership helped develop relational and empathetic capacities in teachers.

Conversely, Bhandari (2018) explored an inexpensive storytelling technique in schools. This practice proved effective for students. However, Bhandari noted that the success of this strategy was heavily dependent on teachers' level of skill in implementing the strategy; many teachers in the school did not want to give storytelling a chance and viewed it as a waste of educational time. Bhandari's conclusions, therefore, tied back to the idea that teacher buy-in was

a critical element of restorative practice implementation. Although there are some cost-free resources and strategies available to school leaders, most studies show that an extra level of monetary resources may be required to achieve academic success paired with the implementation of restorative practices.

Black (2016) addressed the issue of the long-term sustainability of restorative practice in his book, as well. He asserted that the responsibility was for state governments to finance restorative programs; governments, he said, cannot and should not depend on individual districts to independently adopt and fund the restorative programs. In fact, he supposed that states' funding of the restorative programs was the only way to minimize litigation regarding the failure to provide proper resources and support for high-risk students. Although there are clearly many variables to consider and multiple obstacles to the successful implementation of restorative practices, a logical place to start is to learn from the experiences of others. To wit, asking teachers to share their lived experiences of the implementation process is an essential tool for successful future implementations.

Effectiveness of Restorative Practices

Finally, few studies exist that show the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of restorative practice implementation (McCallops et al., 2019). In Samuels's (2018) study conducted with a focus group of teachers, the educators noted many benefits of culturally responsive pedagogy but cited time and resource constraints as obstacles to implementation. Slaten et al. (2015) found successful restorative implications for alternative school educators, such as (a) integrating social-emotional learning into critically conscious and culturally relevant ways, (b) creating authentic relationships with students that fostered an accepting school environment, and (c) emphasizing community collaboration. Weber and Vereenoghe (2020)

also found some evidence of reduced suspension and referral rates from the use of restorative practices. However, the researchers noted a great need for further detailed research into the effects of restorative practices in schools.

No matter the strategy reported in the strategy research, information was inconclusive regarding the sustainability and availability of resources to continue implementation of the strategy. Research has demonstrated short-term benefits of restorative practices, such as reduced suspension rates and improved school climate, but the sustainability and effectiveness of these benefits over long periods of time remains understudied. Researchers need to conduct longitudinal studies to evaluate the sustained impact of restorative practices on factors such as academic performance, college admissions, and future employment opportunities. This study regarding the experiences of alternative school teachers as they implement restorative practices is situated to provide short-term findings that can contribute to the greater success of long-term outcomes.

Implications for this Study

Factors external to the teacher, such as school leadership and support, Multi-Tiered System of Supports, cost, and proven effectiveness, are crucial in shaping how teachers respond to the implementation of restorative practices. Strong leadership and administrative backing are essential for successful adoptions; when school leaders actively champion restorative practices and provide the necessary resources, teachers are more likely to feel supported and motivated to integrate these methods into their classrooms. Additionally, alignment with school-wide frameworks like MTSS, can help ensure that restorative practices are part of a larger, cohesive system for addressing students' academic and behavioral needs. Cost also plays a significant role as restorative practice implementation requires financial resources for training, materials, and

support staff; schools must ensure that these resources are available or risk teachers feeling overwhelmed or unsupported. Finally, teachers are more likely to embrace restorative practices if they are convinced of their proven long-term effectiveness in improving student behavior, fostering a positive school climate, and enhancing academic outcomes. Hearing directly from teachers who implement restorative practices, therefore, will provide necessary insight into how they navigate these external factors and how they influence their perception of restorative practices.

Summary

Restorative practices have gained popularity as an alternative to punitive discipline measures in schools, aiming to foster relationships, promote accountability, and create inclusive learning environments. The focus is on repairing harm and rebuilding relationships, and RP includes both proactive and interventional strategies. In the classroom, restorative practices involve creating a supportive environment where students feel valued and engaged in their learning process. Behavioral restorative practices focus on addressing misconduct through dialogue and accountability. Both behavioral and academic RP include social-emotional learning. Although there were many success stories, there were challenges to the process of implementing RP. Teachers face challenges related to their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about RP. Some may struggle with shifting from a punitive mindset to a restorative approach, while others may question their role as behavioral mentors rather than traditional classroom managers. Successful implementation also requires strong school leadership and support systems, such as MTSS. Cost considerations also pose challenges to the adoption process. Despite these challenges, many schools that have increased their use of restorative practices have seen improvements in student behavior and overall school climate. The missing element in the

literature regarding behavior and academics with restorative practices was a comprehensive, schoolwide plan that created practices to address *both* strong disciplinary support and high academic achievement. For alternative schools, this comprehensive plan is necessary because the goal of restorative practices is to effectively create an improvement in both behavior and academics. Understanding how teachers are experiencing the implementation of restorative practices in their infancy will help guide future, more successful iterations of the process.

Chapter III

Methodology

Restorative practices are known to promote positive social change, such as helping students understand how to repair harm created by misbehavior or allowing schools to break the cycle of exclusionary and punitive discipline measures, which are often unfair to racial minority groups and students with disabilities (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). However, change is a difficult process that can cause stress and confusion (Hord & Roussin, 2013). People who become comfortable with the status quo can be hesitant to implement new processes. Moreover, implementation of restorative practices is outpacing research on how to effectively introduce the new practices into schools' discipline systems (Vincent et al., 2021).

Better understanding how members of a school community experience such change can help policy makers and other schools to better promote the change successfully. Prior studies have pointed out that further research is needed to fully examine teachers' perceptions of restorative practice implementation and how they make sense of the process to provide greater understanding of how restorative practices can be effective in schools (Dhaliwal et al., 2023; Mendez Bonnell, 2024; Rainbolt et al., 2019). The need exists to observe and interview teachers to learn what they perceive as successful versus unsuccessful restorative tactics and to learn how they think the process can be improved.

The purpose of this case study is to understand teacher experiences regarding the transition from a punitive style of discipline to a restorative style at an alternative school in the southeast region of the United States. The focus on the alternative school is expected to provide

an information rich source of data due to the saturated use of both punitive and restorative discipline measures that its teachers have experienced. To examine alternative school teacher experiences about implementing restorative practices, the following research questions are generated:

RQ 1: How do alternative school teachers in a restorative environment interact with students to address behavioral problems?

RQ 2: What perceptions do alternative school teachers have about RP?

- What are their understandings of the concept?
- What are their beliefs and attitudes about RP? How do alternative school teachers' sense of self-efficacy affect their comfort level with RP?

RQ 3: What challenges do alternative school teachers report experiencing during the transition to RP?

Next, details of the methodology used in this study are described, including a description of the research design, the setting, participants, data collection methods, and the data analysis procedures.

Research Design

To understand the complex nature of teachers' experiences while transitioning from a punitive to a restorative discipline design in an alternative school, the case study design with multiple data sources is employed (Creswell & Poth, 2016). According to Merriam (2002), a case study design allows researchers to "gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation" (p. 19). The case, in this study, was the RISE Academy, an alternative school that adopted restorative practice within the last

five years.

For this study, I am interested in understanding teacher perceptions as they go through the transitional process from a punitive to a restorative model of education and in the context of an alternative school with committed leadership, support, training, and resources for teachers, as opposed to examining the impact of adopting restorative practice in the alternative school. The teachers who have taught at this school for more than 8 years have spent multiple years in the punitive phase and the restorative phase of its discipline transformation. They provide data-rich experiences in both the punitive and the restorative models of discipline. These models are heavily used in the alternative setting, which again provides an ideal set of experiences to draw upon from its teachers (i.e. a school with few disciplinary issues would not yield such rich data because the environment is not saturated with the use of disciplinary measures). These teachers' experiences provided insight into how they make sense of an ambitious disciplinary transformation and as such, the case in this study is the collective experience of teachers at an alternative school.

Research Setting: The RISE Academy

This study takes place in RISE Academy (a pseudonym), a grade 6-12 alternative school in one of the largest school districts in the southeastern United States. The school serves a varying number of students throughout each school year, because enrollment in the school is based upon students' removal from their home school environments and being sent to the alternative school for a semester or a calendar year. Maximum capacity for the school is considered 500 students, and at the time of this study, the school has enrolled more than 400 students. The school has 94% minority enrollment: 67% Black or African American, 20% Hispanic or Latino, 5% multi-racial, 2% Asian, and 6% White. The student population is 27%

female and 73% male. The school employs 43 teachers: 67% Black or African American, 30% White, and 3% multi-racial. The teacher population is 75% female and 25% male.

The RISE Academy is an appropriate choice for this study for many reasons. First, the teachers in the alternative school, like other teachers in the district, have been asked to transition from a punitive mindset to a restorative mindset when dealing with student disciplinary issues and instruction. Second, the principal of the school is fully dedicated to the restorative model and funneled time and resources into the transition, whereas principals at other schools, while compliant, are more hesitant to dive head-first into the process when doling out resources. Also, the alternative school's position as a home for the district's toughest disciplinary cases creates a data-rich environment for observing restorative interactions between teachers and students. Last, I, as the researcher, am a 20-year veteran teacher at RISE Academy, have extensive knowledge of the school's history, its veteran teachers, its processes, and its administration. I also have my own set of experiences implementing restorative practices from which to draw information. At the time of this research, the school is in a unique situation that affects the alternative school teachers' experience with the transition to restorative practices.

In 2021, four years prior to this study, a change in district board leadership brought in new proponents of the restorative model. To accelerate the shift away from punitive discipline, district leaders directed principals to drastically reduce the number of students sent to disciplinary tribunals. This reduction, in turn, would drastically reduce the number of students who were sent to the alternative school, because that was where most students found guilty of a major behavioral offense were sent. This directive to lower the number of tribunals, coupled with discussions about dissolving the district's alternative school system, created significant unease among the alternative school staff. The district's plan was to replace the centralized alternative

school with smaller, school-based programs designed to reduce stigma and the overrepresentation of minority youths in disciplinary placements.

As principals complied with the policy of reducing the number of students they sent to tribunals, enrollment at the alternative school slowed significantly, to less than half of the typical enrollment numbers. However, the backlash to this attempt at dissolving alternative schools was tremendous. District board meetings were flooded with parents, teachers, and administrators who asserted that keeping some of the behaviors in schools, particularly fighting and drugs, was putting students and teachers unnecessarily in danger and negatively impacting their ability to focus on academics.

As a result, the push to eliminate alternative schools dissipated, but the lasting impact remained: district leaders' insistence and adamance regarding the importance of moving away from punitive to restorative discipline had been established. In the interest of maintaining their current positions, alternative school teachers understood the necessity of fully embracing the restorative initiatives. For these reasons, it is important to explore the intricacies of what teachers experienced and perceived in this alternative school that has committed leadership and resources dedicated to the restorative initiative.

Participants

A purposeful sampling was used for this study, as it is important to choose the “information-rich cases...from which one can learn a great deal about issues of great importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (Patton, 2015, p. 311). Because the purpose of this inquiry is to explore how alternative school teachers experience the transition from a punitive to a restorative environment, participants needed to have taught sufficient years at the school prior to and after the school's transition. In this study, the plan is to recruit teachers with at least eight years of

teaching at RISE Academy by the semester of recruitment. The eight-year mark allows for at least four years in the punitive environment and four years in the restorative environment (although two of those years were significantly impacted by low student numbers during the pandemic period from 2020-2021).

In the research school, there were 14 teachers who qualified for the selection criterion of 8 years. The recruitment email is sent out to all of these teachers (see Appendix A). The target number of participants is eight teachers with varied experience teaching in the six through twelve grade level range. The teachers selected from RISE Academy are from varied ethnic backgrounds and varied grade levels to capture multiple and diverse perspectives on the transition process and to provide representation for the wide-ranging population of southeastern United States alternative school teachers. To protect participants' identity, individual participant demographic information is not detailed.

Data Collection

This case study involves collection of multiple data sources, such as semi-structured teacher interviews, surveys, field observations, and researcher self-reflection. These data collectively portrayed teacher perceptions and experiences of transitioning from punitive to restorative practices at an alternative school. Prior to the start of the study, an IRB approval is obtained by Valdosta State University (see Appendix B) and by the school district where the study is situated (see Appendix C). The study has met the guidelines involving human subjects (see Appendix B for IRB approval).

Teacher Interview

Semi-structured interviews have been used to elicit “the emerging worldview of the respondent” (Merriam, 1998, p. 112). Each teacher participant was interviewed for

approximately 60 minutes to capture multiple aspects of their cognition known to shape teacher experience in practice: beliefs, knowledge, and perceptions. Each interview consisted of three parts: (1) teacher efficacy beliefs survey, (2) teacher perception interview on restorative practice (RP), and (3) scenario-based assessment of teacher knowledge on RP (see Appendix D).

Part 1. Teacher efficacy survey. Prior to each interview, I have asked the respondents to complete a Teacher Self-Efficacy Survey (see Appendix E), which includes 30 items designed to measure teachers' beliefs in their own ability to impact their schools, students, and the outside community (Bandura, 1997). On a scale of 1 (Nothing) to 9 (A Great Deal), respondents rate their perceived ability to impact RISE Academy's through (a) decision making (2 items), (b) resource allocation (1 item), (c) instruction (9 items); (d) classroom management (3 items), (e) school climate (8 items); and outside influences (7 items), such as parental and community involvement.

Part 2. Teacher perceptions about RP. The interview consists of six total questions. First, I asked teachers to rate their comfort level using restorative practices on a scale from 1 (not comfortable at all) to 10 (extremely comfortable). The goal is to determine if there exists any significant correlation between teachers' perceptions of restorative practices and their personal self-efficacy ratings. The remaining five questions are open-ended, focusing on exploring teacher perceptions about restorative practice: what it means, which part of RP is effective or ineffective and why, what RP strategies they often or rarely use, and the organization change process towards RP (what went well or wrong).

Part 3. Teacher knowledge about RP. At the end of the interview, teachers were given some classroom scenarios, asked what their response would be, and then asked if their response would be considered a restorative method. The scenarios include one about how to handle a

sleeping student, how to handle a disrespectful student, and how to handle a distraught student who is being bullied.

The semi-structured interviews are conducted face-to-face in a closed room of the teacher's choice and audio-recorded for future analysis. During the interviews, I take notes highlighting participants' body language, facial expressions, and general attitude when being asked questions about restorative practices. I keep a chart with big ideas that arise regarding their experiences with restorative practices. I also note when tangential topics arise that need to be reviewed for additional analysis. I limit the amount of my own speaking, allowing participants to speak extensively. The interview protocol guides the interview, but the sequencing of questions varies based upon participants' responses as they create meaning through their experiences (Merriam, 2002). I allow participants' comments to illicit non-scripted follow up questions if elaboration on a topic is desired (Yin, 2016). These face-to-face interviews regarding individual teachers' experiences provide closer insight into the observations collected as an additional form of data.

School Field Observations

The teachers at RISE Academy are observed over the course of three weeks to gain descriptions of their interactions with students (Yin, 2016). Participant observations are made "serendipitously" (Yin, 2016, p.152), meaning I record observations as I see them happening rather than scheduling a time to watch specific teachers. To accomplish the observations, I set specific times each day, sometimes morning and sometimes afternoon, and post myself in the hallway where students and teachers frequently interact with one another. I took digital field notes during the data collection period to record details of restorative practice implementation as I observed them in action. I have not conducted any formal, scheduled observations because I do

not want the idea of being watched to affect participants' actions, body language, tone, or statements.

Observation notes contained each of the following aspects of the restorative encounter, when applicable: (1) direct quotes from participants; (2) description of the teachers' actions; (3) participants' body language; and (4) tone of voice or volume used by participants (see Appendix F). At the end of each day, I reread my observation notes and fill in any gaps if I have been unable to get full details down on paper at the actual time of observation. These observations provide meaningful data regarding how teachers used (or did not use) restorative practices in their daily interactions with students. Some restorative encounters, such as restorative circles, can be extended and formal in nature; however, the greatest portion of restorative encounters (e.g., giving visual cues, using verbal validation, practicing empathy, reaffirming expectations) are instantaneous, fleeting, and informal and therefore, needed to be captured at varied moments rather than during a formally scheduled observation.

During the 300 minutes of hallway observations, I have recorded a total of ten qualifying interactions that meet the criteria for inclusion in the analysis. These moments captured authentic exchanges between teachers and students as they navigate daily routines and unexpected behaviors. The transcribed observation notes totaled approximately 1,255 words and reflected a range of tones and situations from casual morning check-ins to more intense moments of behavioral redirection. Each interaction provides valuable insight into how teachers communicated expectations, maintained composure, and fostered positive connections within the flow of the school day.

Teacher Interview – of the Researcher-Self

I have spent all 20 years as an educator working at the RISE Academy. Teaching at-

promise students is the only place I want to be in education. My personal teaching style is to use kindness, playfulness, and comfort to build a trusting relationship with my students and to provide individualized feedback to students daily regarding their academics so that they know I care and I am keeping track of their progress. In this study, I use my own experience as a teacher who has made the transition from a punitive to a restorative environment. I have completed the self-efficacy survey and composed a self-reflection that addresses the questions from the interview protocol prior to conducting interviews with other teachers. I have analyzed my data separately and compared how it coincides with the data from other teachers. I expect the contributions I have made to the study to be insightful. Prolonged engagement with the research site and my own journey through restorative practice implementation position me to offer perspectives that deepen, rather than compromise, the study's credibility. Far from being a limitation, this insider knowledge strengthens the value of my input as a source of data. However, in the interest of maintaining credibility, I have kept my data separate from the other data collected to avoid any risk of skewing the results of others with my own experiences.

Data Processing and Analysis

The analysis process is systematic and reflective, guided by a desire to understand how teachers made sense of restorative practices in their everyday work. I examine the data for patterns, insights, and moments that reveal how teachers experienced the shift from punitive to restorative approaches.

Analysis of the Interviews

After each interview is transcribed, the transcripts are entered into a spreadsheet organized by the participant. To facilitate systematic comparison across interviews, a separate spreadsheet has been created for each interview question, and all participant responses to that

question are compiled in the same sheet. This organizational strategy supported the efficient management and retrieval of data across participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The spreadsheet serves as a structural tool to organize responses in preparation for interpretive analysis.

Throughout the process, I continually return to the full transcripts to ensure that the meaning of each comment is understood within its original narrative context (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Once the data are organized, I engage in several rounds of reading to gain familiarity with the content and to note preliminary ideas and recurring concepts. Through open coding, I begin labeling these recurring ideas using short, descriptive phrases that capture their essence (Saldana, 2015). Related codes are then compared, refined, and grouped into broader categories that reflect common patterns, such as time and resource challenges or teacher autonomy. From these categories, larger themes are developed to represent main ideas across all interviews. Table 3 shows how the data moves from individual quotes to broader themes, ensuring that the results remain true to teachers' experiences while revealing shared insights across participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

This layered, iterative process from data familiarization to open, structural coding ensures that patterns are grounded in the data while also connecting to the broader theoretical context of restorative practice implementation.

Table 3*Process of Qualitative Coding and Thematic Development*

| Raw Excerpt | Initial Codes | Focused Categories | Emerging Theme |
|--|--|---|---|
| “Restorative strategies that I rarely use are ones that tend to be the most time-consuming... I don’t really find restorative circles to be super practical for day-to-day instruction.” | time-consuming, impractical for daily instruction, context-specific use | Time and resource constraints; practicality and accessibility of RP | Practical Constraints of Restorative Circles |
| “Reentry circles... didn’t seem very receptive to the student... too many adults... not authentic.” | student disengagement, authenticity concerns, lack of training | Student reception and engagement; authenticity and connection | Authenticity and Student Engagement |
| “I rarely use restorative circles... I have a good relationship with my students... I don’t normally need a mediator.” | relationship-based conflict resolution, self-sufficiency, skepticism toward formal processes | Teacher autonomy and confidence; reliance on relational problem-solving | Teacher Autonomy in Behavior Resolution |
| “I don’t like the circle... it’s a spectacle... should be more task and goal-oriented... teachers shouldn’t act as therapists.” | restorative circles as spectacle, preference for goal-oriented resolution, role clarity for teachers vs. specialists | Professional role boundaries; problem-focused restorative approaches | Need for Clear Role Boundaries and Professional Support |

Analysis of the Survey Data

Survey data have been analyzed to investigate the relationship between teachers’ self-efficacy and their comfort level with restorative practices (Bandura, 1997). Descriptive statistics are first calculated for each of the seven self-efficacy subscales, as well as for total efficacy scores and participants’ self-reported comfort levels. After organizing scores into a spreadsheet by each participant, correlation analyses have been conducted to evaluate the strength and direction of associations between comfort with restorative practices and each dimension of self-efficacy. Pearson’s R coefficients and corresponding p-values are generated to determine whether any relationships met the conventional threshold for statistical significance (Cohen et al., 2003).

Analysis of the Observation Data

Hallway observation notes have been analyzed using a process parallel to that applied to the interview data. The focus was on capturing naturally occurring moments that reflect the

school’s restorative culture in action. Each set of notes include detailed descriptions of observed body language, tone of voice, specific words or phrases used, and the actions or interactions noticed by the observer.

Observation notes are first recorded into a chart (see Appendix F). I began by reading through all the notes to develop a holistic sense of how staff and students interacted in informal spaces. Using open coding, I label recurring behaviors and interactional cues that convey restorative intent or relational awareness (Saldana, 2015).

These initial codes are then compared, refined, and grouped into broader categories representing common restorative responses or environmental patterns (see Table 4). Through iterative analysis and constant comparison (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), these categories are distilled into themes that illustrate how restorative practices are informally enacted in everyday school life.

Table 4

Observation Coding and Thematic Development

| Observation Excerpt (Condensed) | Initial Codes | Focused Categories | Emerging Theme |
|--|---|---|---|
| Morning Interaction (4/14) Student X approaches Teacher Y loudly in the hallway. Teacher responds with humor, redirects the student toward class expectations, and engages in light conversation about work, goals, and social topics. Teacher corrects a biased comment calmly; student laughs and agrees. | humor to redirect, calm correction, maintaining respect, positive tone, interest in student goals | Positive connection and guidance; constructive response to missteps | Building Connection Through Everyday Conversation |
| Afternoon Interaction (4/15) Student X yells through the classroom door demanding work. Hallway teacher stays calm, models a respectful tone, and de-escalates the situation. Classroom teacher provides the work and the student leaves without further issue. | calm response, tone modeling, redirecting behavior, de-escalation, teamwork between teachers | Maintaining order with empathy; modeling calm problem-solving | De-escalation Through Calm and Consistent Response |
| Nonverbal/Context Notes Morning: smiling, laughing, leaning casually. Afternoon: raised voice, teacher calm and steady. | contrasting emotions, emotional control, adaptability | Managing classroom climate; responding to changing student moods | Flexibility and Emotional Control in Daily Interactions |

Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness in this study, credibility, transferability, and dependability are considered (Stahl & King, 2020). Whereas quantitative researchers strive for validity, qualitative researchers endeavor to achieve trustworthiness, which promotes readers' confidence in the results of the study (Stahl & King, 2020). The strategies discussed in the following sections are designed to mitigate potential bias arising from my prior experiences with restorative practices and familiarity with the participants.

Credibility. There is no one way to prevent threats to validity, but there are strategies to use to ensure a study is credible (Maxwell, 2005). In a credible study, readers can be sure that data have been appropriately collected and interpreted to reveal an accurate representation of the participants and their environment (Yin, 2016). Triangulation through the use of several sources of information is one way to credibly discover identifiable patterns (Stahl & King, 2020). In this study, methodological triangulation occurs through data gathered via surveys, interviews, and observations. Prolonged engagement with the research site is another credibility support for the study. Because the researcher has a deeply familiar relationship with the school and its patterns and schedules, "long-term, persistent observations" (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 27) are possible. These allow the researcher to perform "reflexive self-analysis, often facilitated through daily jotting in research logs" (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 27). These notes provide an opportunity for the researcher to question findings and identify and comment on any opinions or evaluative statements that may have been used in the descriptive data.

Transferability. Transferability points to the common purpose of any study; that is, to provide beneficial application to others' circumstances (Stahl & King, 2020). This study was intended to provide teachers, administrators, local and district school leaders with information

about how teachers who deal with some of the most difficult behaviors in schools experience struggle and success while implementing restorative practices. Alternative school teachers are a specific population, and the case teachers at RISE Academy yield the perceptions of only a small representative sample of alternative teachers. However, those teachers' thoughts and actions provide a data-rich set of experiences from which stakeholders with varied states of disciplinary needs can learn. Stakeholders at schools with students who exhibit very difficult behaviors can learn from the case teachers' trial and error, successes, and shortfalls. Conversely, stakeholders at schools with few behavioral difficulties can learn how to make small modifications to further lessen those behavioral difficulties and to improve the educational experiences of their underrepresented populations. To achieve the goal of transferability from this case to other stakeholders, I have used thick description (Geertz, 2008). With thick description, the perceptions and experiences I gathered from teachers are contextualized to provide a "comprehensible, meaningful frame" (Geertz, 2008, p. 30) that stakeholders can apply to their own populations. Use of restorative practices is increasing in many school districts, and this study is designed to use teachers' experiences to ease the growing pains that other districts may experience during the process of new implementation.

Dependability. During all stages of data collection, I have kept in mind the instructions offered by Stahl and King (2020) regarding dependability: researcher bias and assumptions are always present in the research act. It is naïve to think about owning and discarding researcher bias. Qualitative research is much too subtle to be able to partition researchers' efforts. In fact, such control is not even desirable. Qualitative research needs researchers' values and passion as engagement with research. But it is also necessary for researchers to monitor the influence of their values and passions. Being immersed in research with their values creates another level of

trust, providing researchers are able to communicate their entailment in their own research. This is reflexive auditing, or who one is/was when active in an individual research project (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 28).

To remain reflexive, I have kept in mind the goal of my research and that of so many others who do related studies: to improve educational experience and to maximize the potential of underrepresented youth. To achieve that goal, I needed to accurately represent all sides of the issues addressed in my research. The truth of teachers lived experiences, both positive and negative, regarding the transition from punitive to restorative discipline is essential to the research. To that end, I remain open to multiple perspectives and continuously reflect upon the impact my own biases might have had on the study.

Summary

A case study design (Merriam, 2002) is used to examine teacher perceptions about transitioning from a punitive to a restorative environment in an alternative school. Multiple sources of data are gathered including surveys, teacher interviews, field observations, and researcher reflection to allow capturing multifaceted teacher experiences during the transition process. Transcriptions of interviews and observation field notes are collated and analyzed to determine common themes regarding the experience of moving from a punitive to a restorative setting. These teachers' perceptions regarding restorative practice implementation yielded insight into the restorative implementation processes at other schools by helping steer school leaders toward adjustments that might be made to foster a smooth, effective transition from punitive to restorative practices.

Chapter IV

Findings

The purpose of this case study is to investigate how alternative school teachers experienced the transition from a punitive to a restorative environment. Eight teachers—nine, including myself—have been interviewed about their experiences adopting and implementing restorative practices and surveyed regarding their sense of self-efficacy. Each of these teachers has taught in the specific research setting of RISE Academy for at least eight years, which, as noted in Chapter 3, is sufficient time to experience the prior punitive environment of the academy in comparison to the newer restorative environment. Interview and survey respondents were 50% male, 50% female, 63% Black, and 37% White. Due to the small faculty size of the academy and in the interest of protecting the anonymity of the 8 respondents (of the 14 qualified), no other identifying information regarding the interview subjects will be provided. I have recorded my own responses to each of the interview questions prior to interviewing any other respondents. In addition to the interviews, teacher-student interactions were observed from the RISE Academy hallway for a total of 300 minutes. In this chapter, detailed analysis results of the interviews, surveys, and observations are presented in the order of the following research questions in this study:

RQ 1: How do alternative school teachers in a restorative environment interact with students to address behavioral problems?

RQ 2: What perceptions do alternative school teachers have about RP?

- What are their understandings of the concept?

- What are their beliefs and attitudes about RP? How do alternative school teachers' sense of self-efficacy affect their comfort level with RP?

RQ 3: What challenges do alternative school teachers report experiencing during the transition to RP?

RQ1: Individual Teacher Strategies for Restoration

To identify strategies that alternative school teachers in a restorative environment used to interact with students to address behavioral problems, both teacher interview (n = 9) and field observation data (n = 10 recorded hallway interactions) were examined. Thematic analysis results of the teacher interviews are reported first, providing broad themes describing the teachers' strategic approaches to restorative practice. Then, interactions documented during the hallway observations are mapped to these categories to further characterize each approach.

According to the interview data, teachers shared that they primarily addressed behavioral problems through individual conversations that focused on individual student needs (RP Strategy 1). They also emphasized the importance of creating a safe and welcoming learning environment where students feel respected and heard (RP Strategy 2). Furthermore, many teachers expressed that they did not find restorative circles, a strategy that was often highlighted in literature as effective, particularly effective or practical in managing day-to-day behavioral challenges (RP Strategy 3). Each theme identified from the interviews is detailed in Table 5, alongside the corresponding interaction data.

RP Strategy 1. Restorative Conversations

Restorative conversations emerged as one of the most consistently referenced strategies across teacher interviews. Overwhelmingly, teachers mentioned caring and reflective conversations as their primary way of building positive relationships. This emphasis on dialogue

underscored the centrality of communication in creating trust and connection with students.

Table 5

Summary of Restorative Practice Strategies and Example Interactions (RQ1)

| Restorative Strategy | Key Theme or Approach | Example Interaction or Quote | Summary Insight |
|---|---|---|---|
| Restorative Conversations | Caring dialogue; accountability talk; empathy | “Conversations with kids... allowing students to talk” (Jackson); <i>Interaction 1</i> “What are you doing after graduation?” | Teachers used reflective and caring talk to build trust, redirect behavior, and encourage students to think about the future. |
| | Playful redirection | <i>Interaction 2</i> “These hands are rated E for everyone” | Humor and light tone de-escalated tension and preserved rapport. |
| | Consequence reminders | <i>Interaction 4</i> “This isn’t you... Let’s let it go.” | Calm reminders balanced compassion with accountability. |
| Safe & Welcoming Environment | Positive climate and consistency | “Candy actually works... I model the behavior I want to see” (Wendy) | Teachers emphasized calm, consistency, and comfort to prevent problems. |
| | Collective responsibility | <i>Interactions 7–9</i> (team chat, hallway support) | Staff collaborated to de-escalate conflict and share responsibility for student well-being. |
| | Crisis response | <i>Interaction 10</i> “All hands on deck.” | Crisis team provided trauma-informed support for students in distress. |
| Restorative Circles | Limited use; logistical barriers | “Never really felt like students got much out of the circles” (Zoey) | Most teachers rarely used circles, citing time constraints and lack of authenticity. |

Note. Table summarizes major restorative practice strategies, representative examples, and key insights drawn from teacher interviews and observed interactions under Research Question 1.

Zoey, one of the interviewees, said “one to one conversations with kids” were the most helpful when having restorative interactions. Jackson also said “conversations with kids, allowing students to talk” is his preferred method of creating positive relationships with kids. Andy said conversation is “what it’s all about.” Charlie said, “having side conversations, not putting the kids front and center, maybe pulling them to the side... is a lot more effective.” Bailey emphasized it is essential “to make sure that line of communication is open” with her students. Bella also talked about conversations with students. She said, “just asking them, you know, how can you help them? What do they need?”

Although not a conversation, specifically, I noted in my interview the importance of talking to students by greeting them at the door every morning to let them know they are seen, whether they reciprocate or not. Such small but consistent acts of connection helped establish a

foundation for restorative interactions throughout the day. These consistent points of connection from teachers created the groundwork for more intentional accountability talk, which they used to guide students toward productive choices.

Accountability Talk. Accountability talk consisted of teachers redirecting focus to a productive future, using gentle/playful behavioral redirection, and reminding students of the consequences of impulsive actions. The following interactions exemplify these themes.

Redirecting Focus (Toward a Productive Future). The first interaction I recorded showed how teachers could skillfully guide a conversation to diffuse an immediate behavioral concern and create an opportunity for reflection and forward thinking.

Interaction 1. “What are you doing after graduation?” One morning during student intake, a female student, who was being loud in the hallway, walked up to a teacher standing on hallway duty:

Student: (approaching the teacher) What are you doing?

Teacher: Putting in these grades. I need you to keep that energy for this afternoon (referring to when the student will have her class).

Student: [Peers at teacher’s computer screen]

Teacher: Why you looking at my stuff?

Student: I’m seeing what you’re doing,

Teacher: Putting them zeroes in.

Student: Nah uh!!!! You be ready to put a zero in before you even put in grades. (To other people standing around). She put a zero in immediately but be taking forever to put in your actual grade.

Teacher: Did you have to work this weekend?

Student: Yes, but I need to get a new job. My boss be doing too much. She is not a good boss.

Teacher: Look at that characterization! Maybe you should just quit and focus on school for a while.

Student: I got bills and maintenance. I'm a high maintenance young lady. Hair, nails, lashes, makeup.

Teacher: Just wait until you add eating, keeping a roof over your head. What are you doing after graduation?

Student: College.

Teacher: Where you applying?

Student: [says name of a technical school] Aesthetician to start off with and then I might add some different certifications in other areas. I just need to learn how to drive and get a car.

Teacher: When do you go back to your home school? Don't you go over there and get in trouble!

Student: In May. [Looks down the hallway] Why a big old group of Hispanic boys walking down the hallway like that?

Teacher: That's stereotypical racist. That's like saying there's a bunch of black people walking down the hall.

Student: You right, you right.

[Bell rings to report to class]

There were a lot of interesting things happening in this interaction. First, the student was loud in the hallway. The teacher did not tell her to be quiet. She simply engaged in conversation

with the student, which brought the student's volume down automatically. When the student looked at the teacher's computer screen and made a joke about the teacher putting in zeroes more quickly than she puts in assignment grades, the teacher did not get defensive, telling her to get away from her computer or berating her about turning in her assignments late. The teacher simply continued to engage the student in conversation, asking her about her life outside of school. In this case, it was about the student's job.

The teacher found an opportunity during the interaction to bring up academics when she referred to the student's description of her boss as characterization. Then, when the student was talking about how much money it took to keep up her "high maintenance" appearance, the teacher took the opportunity to remind her that very soon she would have other bills that would become her priority. The teacher again showed concern for the student's well-being outside of RISE Academy, telling her to be cautious when she returned to her home school. Finally, the teacher issued a subtle rebuke when the student made an offensive remark but explained why it was offensive. The student was receptive to the correction, likely due to the non-threatening way the teacher provided redirection. The teacher directed a seemingly innocuous conversation into an advisement session that encouraged a productive and respectful future. This illustrated how restorative conversations could both address behavior and foster personal growth without formal discipline.

Playful Behavioral Redirection. As the next set of interactions revealed, some teachers used humor as a tool for restorative redirection by blending authority with approachability.

Interaction 2. "These hands are rated E for everyone." During end of day student dismissal, a teacher who was monitoring the hallway asked two students multiple times to stop horseplaying and play fighting while they waited in their classroom for their rides. After giving

verbal directions three times, the teacher walked into the room and said, “Look, y’all wanna fight, you gonna have to fight me. These hands are rated E for everyone.” The students smiled and held up their hands in acquiescence, saying “Alright, alright, you right. We gonna stop for real now. We don’t want none of that.” The teacher, instead of getting angry because her instructions were not being followed, changed tactics and went for humor as a firmer redirection. This shift in approach prevented escalation and maintained a positive rapport.

Interaction 3. “What you tryna do then?” In another exchange, a teacher was concerned that two male students who had been in an ongoing conflict for weeks would get into a physical altercation. The students had a verbal conflict during the last period of the day, and two male teachers, who also served as behavior interventionists, were asked to escort one of the students to his bus to make sure no fight occurred. The teachers asked to speak with the student in the hallway, and once the student got out into the hallway, they said “Hey, hey, we need to talk to you,” and crowded him playfully into a corner while pretending to throw elbows at him. The student played along, joking and saying, “What you tryna do then? What you tryna do? What you tryna do?” The teachers laughed, backed up, and said, “We gotta talk to you about earlier. Come with us to the buses and we’ll talk.” They clapped the student on the back, and he walked between them, listening to them talk about how to avoid conflict in the future.

These interactions involving playful humor accomplished several positive goals. In Interaction 2, the teacher gained compliance from the students without anyone raising their voices or becoming agitated. It was important for the teacher to remain as serene as possible in order to model calm reactions. Because loud confrontations can often be a source of trauma, teachers used raised voices only when absolutely necessary. In Interaction 3, the student was receptive to the impending talk from the teachers because they had used humor and playfulness

to diffuse any tension he might have felt when they pulled him from class. Their walking and talking with him to his bus ensured he did not get into an altercation with the other student during dismissal. Finally, the teachers taking time to confer with the student individually showed their concern for him and their desire to help him make good decisions in the face of adversity. In both of these instances, the interaction began with humor, but the follow-through from that playfulness led to a strategic and effective restorative intervention.

Consequence Reminder. In the next interaction, a teacher calmly reminded her student of the natural consequences of his actions, expressing concern rather than frustration to preserve trust and reinforce accountability.

Interaction 4: "This isn't you. If you don't stop, ... I'm writing you up. Let's let it go." In this interaction, a teacher and a student were standing in the hallway right outside the classroom door where they could speak privately. The student, who had been arguing and posturing to fight with another student, was listening to his teacher. She said in a quiet yet earnest tone, "What are you doing? This isn't you. If you don't stop, they [the other student] gonna be here and you gonna be home with your mama and daddy crying about it. If you say anything else today, I'm writing you up. Now let's let it go." The student agreed and they went back into class.

In this interaction, the teacher showed concern for the student's well-being by reminding him that his actions could get him sent home if he initiated a fight, whereas the student he was arguing with would stay in school if he did not throw the first punch. This short but impactful conversation combined firmness with care. The teacher understood that her student was not thinking through the natural consequences of his actions and guiding him through the consequential thought process was the strategy she used to maintain order in her classroom.

It is important to note that this strategy of threatening a disciplinary referral and its

accompanying out of school suspension became available only later in the RP implementation process. Early in the implementation, teachers were discouraged from writing referrals, and almost all behaviors were handled in-house. The evolution back to consequences for certain extreme behaviors like fighting marked a shift toward balancing restorative ideals with practical accountability structures.

Relationship-building conversations. Not all restorative conversations involved discipline. Some observed interactions reflected empathy and trust in teacher-student relationships.

Empathy. In the following interaction, a teacher addressed a difficult topic directly and without judgment, using empathy to ensure the student felt understood and turned the conversation into a moment for growth.

Interaction 5. “We’re gonna keep working on it.” A brief interaction was observed when a teacher was talking to a student regarding the documentation he needed to obtain from his job to get credit for a course. Despite being a quiet conversation, this interaction was recorded as an example of how teachers build relationships by following up with students and addressing topics that students might be reluctant to discuss but were important for their holistic development.

Teacher: You don’t smell as much like weed today.

Student: I know. I just came from work. I don’t do it at work.

Teacher: That’s good.

Student: It’s just that when I’m sober, my head drifts off, and I get distracted easily.

Teacher: Okay, we’re gonna keep working on it.

Student: Yes, we will. Thank you, bye!

The teacher’s calm and nonjudgmental approach allowed the student to speak openly

about substance use and focus issues. This interaction demonstrated how direct but compassionate communication builds trust, enabling students to reflect without fear of punishment.

Follow Up. Next is an example of how a restorative teacher worked to intentionally sustain the relationship she had built with a student. She showed willingness to invest time and care to preserve her connection, ensuring the student continued to feel valued and supported by her.

Interaction 6. "I'll make sure I see you tomorrow." In this interaction, a young lady stopped to speak to a teacher as students were leaving the building for the day:

Student: I miss you. Why are you never in 6th period?

Teacher: I don't have a class 6th period.

Student: I know. But you can still be in the class with us.

Teacher: You're right. I'll make sure I see you tomorrow.

This simple exchange reflected the power of presence in restorative relationships. The teacher's willingness to give up planning time to reconnect with a student illustrated genuine care and continuity. Such acts of follow-through help students feel valued beyond their academic performance, strengthening the relational fabric that restorative practices depend upon.

RQ1: Collective Teacher Strategies for Restoration

Often, collective strategies for restoration took place, with teachers and staff collaborating to support students' growth and accountability. These collaborative efforts demonstrated a shared responsibility for student well-being that was standard community practice.

RP Strategy 2. Safe and Welcoming Environment

Creating a safe and welcoming learning environment began with individual classrooms but extended schoolwide when educators worked together to maintain consistency, care, and safety for all students. In interviews, some teachers mentioned that it was important for students to feel welcomed and comfortable in their classrooms. Wendy said she offers candy as part of her welcoming learning environment, “The candy actually works, believe it or not. Giving them something for free that they didn’t have to earn... it just cuts down a lot of behavior problems. So I keep my candy jar full because it works.” Wendy also said she stays positive with her students as much as possible, noting “I just remain positive, and I model the behavior that I want to see from them... They don't see me yelling and they don't yell at me. They see me being gentle and calm and on task, and that's the behavior that I get from them. So, I basically try to model the behavior that I expect from them.” Charlie said, “It’s not sweating the small stuff” that helped in his classroom. Bella said “picking your battles” while “still being consistent” was a big part of her safe and calm learning environment. Leo said he “put a high emphasis on creating a safe and positive classroom culture.” During my interview, I also emphasized the significance of a calming environment, noting:

I try to make sure that my environment has soothing music, soothing lighting. I create a routine. I try to maintain a clean environment, and I ask my students to do the same. That kind of prevents a lot of issues—having that routine and keeping those expectations routine. It really helps with establishing some norms for the classroom. I also believe in feeding students—they really interpret that as love, as they should.

Collective Responsibility Approach. Beyond individual classroom practices, teachers at RISE Academy also engaged in a collective approach to student support. I observed multiple instances where teachers, interventionists, and administrators worked collaboratively to respond

to student needs. This practice, often involving both real-time and virtual communication, reflected a shared sense of responsibility rather than isolated classroom management. In these instances, teachers drew upon one another and external supports as part of a coordinated network of restoration.

Mediated by a Behavior Interventionist. As noted in *Interaction 6: What you tryna do?* behavior interventionists were called in to ensure the safety of students during the dismissal process. The collective responsibility approach occurred again when a loud disruption occurred in the hallway.

Interaction 7: We can ask for that work without disrupting everyone. A loud disruption occurred in the hallway when a student left her classroom to retrieve makeup from another teacher. The teacher's classroom door was locked, and when the teacher did not immediately respond to her knock, the student began yelling:

Student: [Yelling] Nah I need my bellringer! That ain't fair. Just give me my bellringer! That's bullshit! No, I'm not going away until I get my work!

[A teacher who serves as a behavior interventionist (BI) is walking toward the noise]

Teacher (BI): [With volume, but not yelling] Hey, whoever is talking is being way too loud out here in the hallway.

Student: [Still loud] She needs to give me my work.

Teacher (BI): Okay, well we can ask for that work without disrupting everyone around us. Let's ask quietly and use a better tone.

[Teacher (BI) stays as classroom teacher opens the door and hands the student with the requested work. Student goes back to current classroom teacher.]

There was no further consequence issued for that student. Some teachers would argue

that she should have received a consequence for the disruption and for her profanity and disrespect. Maybe she should have. However, the immediate goal of defusing disruption and getting students back to work was the priority.

Communication in Team Chat. Teachers also used their team chats to communicate about potential issues with students. This system of communication was essential in facilitating collective awareness and intervention.

Interaction 8: Sharing Responsibility. One afternoon, as I was standing in the hallway recording interactions on my computer, a teacher posted a message in the chat that two students on their team had been exchanging harsh words and that someone needed to remove one of them to prevent further conflict. Another teacher immediately responded, “I have [one of the students] and will keep her this period.” This quick, coordinated effort showed that teachers did not operate in silos. There was no ‘not my student, not my problem’ ignoring the issue. A colleague immediately stepped in to help out and protect the students’ well-being.

Interaction 9: Heads up, everyone. In another instance, a teacher posted a message in the chat asking for diligence during transition due to two students who had been in a verbal altercation and were threatening to fight one another. During transition, the two referenced students did, in fact, continue arguing and posturing to fight. The additional support available in the hallway due to the warning in the chat helped to de-escalate the situation. The incident and its resolution occurred like this:

Student 1: [Posturing to fight] You gonna do something besides talk? You gonna do something besides talk?

Student 2: Are you? [starts moving toward Student 1]

Teacher: [To Student 2] Turn around right now and go into that room.

[Student 1 goes into his class, but Student 2 continues standing there.]

Teacher: [Sternly to Student 2] Get into class RIGHT NOW.

[As admin walks up, teacher warns about potential conflict. Admin pulls Student 2, still grumbling, to side]

Admin: You gonna close your mouth and listen to what I say or you're gonna go home.

Student 2: I better not get a referral. I wasn't being disrespectful. [a referral is a written record of a student's behavior that usually comes with a consequence of in school or out of school suspension]

Admin: You're still talking, and I need you to listen. Go back to class, and [the behavior interventionist] will come talk to you about what happened.

[Student 2 walks back to class. Admin calls behavior interventionist to conference with Student 2 and Student 1 individually]

This interaction was tense and direct, yet still restorative in its intent. Teachers and administrators were firm with these two students, communicating boundaries while preventing escalation. Some readers might perceive this interaction as inconsistent with restorative practice due to its tone and forcefulness. However, restorative encounters did not always take a gentle or conciliatory form. At times, they were more directive in nature and emphasized the reality that actions carry natural consequences.

RISE Academy had people in place who recognized the need for these more direct encounters and used them sparingly yet accordingly. The adults in this situation were stern and direct with their instructions to the students, and the students were told about the consequences that would occur if they did not comply. The interaction demonstrated the other tactics that teachers must use when their prevention strategies have not worked. This was another example

of faculty coming together to handle a situation. The initial warning via computer chat put teachers on high alert during transition, and a monitoring hallway teacher observed the conflict and was able to get Student 1 to comply by going into the classroom, which created separation between the students. Administration came in to help with getting Student 2 to listen and comply with instructions, and later, behavior interventionists went by to confer with the two young men about what happened to further the restorative impact.

Crisis Team. RISE Academy had a designated crisis team that stepped in to handle complex or time-sensitive situations requiring immediate intervention beyond the classroom teacher's capacity. This system allowed teachers to maintain classroom stability while ensuring that students in crisis received timely, focused restorative support from trained staff.

Interaction 10: All hands on deck. Another incident that the collective stepped in to help with was not one that I directly observed, but I heard it was taking place in the hallway. Zoey, one of the teacher interviewees, was part of the team that helped handle it, and she described the occurrence in detail. She and another teacher had to physically restrain a student to keep him from hurting himself as he threw a physical fit (this was the part that I overheard from my classroom because the student was banging up against one of my locked classroom doors as he thrashed around in the hallway). Zoey described the situation as follows:

Just this morning, I was called in as a member of the crisis team to deal with a situation. And it took, you know, almost 45 minutes for the student to be able to talk. And it appeared as though the student didn't want to do the writing assignment in class at the moment, because that's when he had the blowout. But after discussing with the student, I was able to, after many strategies to getting him to calm down, what actually finally worked was playing his favorite song over and over until he became in a self-soothing

state, and he was able to say these lyrics over and over and over. Once he was able to calm down and the music was over, he told us that—he told me that he was upset because he found out yesterday that he will always be in DFACS custody because his grandma is too old to take care of him and his needs. And he spoke to her yesterday about that. So, then he comes to school, and he's carrying that baggage, and he's talking to other kids who get to go home to their families. So, it wasn't about the writing assignment. The writing assignment was to write about your spring break, which to him wasn't a very good time. So, in that moment in that classroom, it appeared as though he was just being defiant and disrespectful and didn't want to write, which he does struggle with writing. So that could have seemed legitimate, but at the end of the day, it was something much deeper, and he was able to express that just by getting to the point where he was able [to explain]. Now, a classroom teacher is not going to have 45 minutes to spend with the student to figure that out, but because we have that [crisis team] in place here at the school, we were able to get to the bottom of it. Now that kid is getting the services he needs at this moment [professional counselors and social workers were called in to follow up and place the student in a facility for emotional evaluation].

This example illustrated the depth of emotional support that sometimes accompanies restorative work. What initially appeared as classroom defiance was revealed to be emotional distress linked to personal trauma. Zoey and her colleagues employed patience, music, and compassion—hallmarks of trauma-informed restorative practice—to help the student regain regulation.

Importantly, the school's crisis team enabled this level of response. As Zoey explained, “a classroom teacher was not going to have 45 minutes to spend with a student,” but having

trained team members available made such an intense intervention possible. This collaborative infrastructure ensured that students received the care they needed: academically, emotionally, and psychologically.

Ongoing systems of collective support. It was important to note that other processes and resources at RISE Academy contributed to the collective approach to student support. Every week, grade level teams met to discuss business, confer with their grade-level administrator, and discuss students as needed. Some reasons that students might be discussed were poor attendance, concerning behavior at school, poor academic performance, etc. Students had their own individual files (visible only locally at RISE Academy), and any voiced concerns were documented in the student's file. Also documented were interventions that had been tried with the students. This file was part of the MTSS process at the school, which meant that many different stakeholders had access to it in order to record their contributions as well.

MTSS. As noted in prior chapters, MTSS, a collection of resources and processes that promotes a whole-student approach to student success, has been used at RISE Academy. People with varied supportive roles are a part of the collective community that contributes to student support. Counselors, social workers, behavioral interventionists, mentors, and other relevant stakeholders make notes regarding behavioral counseling group placement, individual conferences, parent contact, referrals to outside resources, etc. that occur for the student. This recording of information keeps everyone informed about all interventions taking place for a student and provides thorough documentation for parent conferences. This documentation is also essential for showing justification for moving a student to a higher tier of MTSS support if their current level is not promoting success for them.

RP Strategy 3. Restorative Circles as Nonstarters

Restorative circles were touted in research as a significant tool for restorative practice intervention (Evanovich et al., 2020; Schumacher, 2014). However, almost every respondent cited restorative circles as a strategy they rarely used, for reasons including scheduling difficulty, lack of authenticity, and discomfort with facilitation. Some teachers acknowledged that there might be a time and place for effective restorative circles but contended that day-to-day instruction was not it.

Zoey said circles could create logistical problems because so many people's schedules must align to take place. She explained:

First of all, putting those people [the circle participants] in place is always very difficult. But even when I was in a different role and we were able to kind of put those in place, it just didn't seem very receptive to the student. And I don't know if it was because it was like too many adults and it was intimidating, or if it just didn't seem authentic, I never could really feel why. I never felt like students got much out of the restorative circles. Maybe we didn't do them correctly, or weren't trained correctly, but I did them probably upwards of about 10 times, and I just never really felt like—even the feedback I would get from the kid one-to-one later was that it was not very beneficial.

Charlie also did not use restorative circles. He said:

I don't like to be the center of attention... So I kind of look at it from that perspective, that students also don't like to be put on the stage. Some students would love it, but I know that from my perspective, that's not something I would want, and I don't want to put a student in that situation where they are uncomfortable in that sense too, because I know how it would make me feel.

Bailey said that even though restorative circles had been used at times in the school, she rarely

used them because “that one kind of requires, like a mediator, and people, you know, coming in to mediate, to bring a student back into the circle.”

Bella also did not use circles. One of the reasons she cited was a need for specially trained professionals. She said regarding circles:

I think it's too much emphasis on the student and not enough on the problem. So, I think it should be a little bit more... task, goal oriented... I definitely believe more behavior specialists should be involved in the process, and even should lead the circle... Teachers, of course, we have many hats. I don't feel like we should be put in a position where we have to be trained psychiatrists or trained therapists to try to figure out what's going on with the student. I think it needs to be more professionally led by experienced professionals who really know how to get to the root of the problem.

During my own interview, I also named circles as a strategy I rarely used. I noted:

Restorative strategies I rarely use are ones that tend to be the most time consuming. Like, a restorative circle is not something that I have ever found particularly effective. I'm not saying that there aren't times and places where that can be effective. But as far as the amount of resources, and, you know, time that is involved in doing that restorative circle, I think that those need to be reserved for very special instances where you are trying to take more of a severe case of something, and really, you know, work to resolve it. But as far as something that is user friendly for every day, I don't really find restorative circles to be super practical for day-to-day instruction.

RQ2: Teacher Perceptions about Restorative Practice

In response to RQ2, I first examined alternative school teachers' understanding about what RP was about, which highlighted its key characteristics as discussed in the literature as well

as limitations. Then, I examined their beliefs about and attitudes towards RP. Lastly, I examined whether teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and their comfort level with RP were related.

RQ2.1: Understandings About RP

According to the interview data, the alternative school teachers perceived RP as supportive alternatives to punishment, aimed at repairing relationships with dialogue and reflection. The teachers also mentioned that successful RP required multiple stakeholder engagement and criticized that RP have inconsistent definitions and limitations. These findings largely align with what is described in the literature about RP, as noted in Chapter 2.

First, RP was viewed as an alternative to punishment. I commented that RPs are “strategies ... to help students overcome behavioral, emotional academic challenges ... instead of simply using some sort of punitive measure.” Wendy described RP similarly: “using measures to gain compliance from the students without damaging their self-esteem, ... the teacher does everything under the sun that they can think of instead of punish.” Zoey also said RP was an “opportunity to reflect ... and look at ways to correct ... before you're really talking about more serious consequences.”

Second, RP was understood as aimed at repairing broken relationships that students have with dialogue and reflection. Bailey described RP as “practices you put in place to bring a relationship back to where it was.” Bella said that RP was when teachers tried to “bridge a gap between a broken relationship.” Leo shared a similar view that RP was is an “approach to make things right when things go wrong ... a systematic approach to making things right and healing harm.” Charlie stated that RP was “having conversations with the students about how parties were harmed and how a resolution can be made to try to fix what harm was caused.” Andy also commented, “conversation? I mean, that's what it's [RP is] all about.”

Third, RP was understood to require multiple stakeholder engagement, meaning restoration takes place when two or more parties are involved. Charlie called restorative practices “having conversations with the students about how parties were harmed and how a resolution can be made to try to fix what harm was caused.” Andy said restorative practices involved “addressing the perpetrator, the victim, the community, and, I mean, even a reteaching of skills needed to get through the situations that could cause the infraction.”

Lastly, RP was thought to have inconsistent definitions and limitations. Jackson called restorative practices a “chameleon” because the definition “can change according to who you listen to or how it’s presented.” Bella said RP “puts the teachers in a negative light. It's assumed that you're not doing something the way you should be doing it, and that's why the student isn't being successful. I personally think the student gets more control of the situation.” Charlie noted that RP manipulated “true representation of data” because although punitive consequences are technically fewer, “it doesn’t mean the behavior has necessarily improved. It just means that what you’re reporting has improved.” Collectively, these perspectives illustrate both the promise and the complexity of RP in alternative school settings.

RQ 2.2: Beliefs and Attitudes

The nine teachers interviewed for this study, including myself, were categorized into four groups, based on their professional roles (specialists vs. content area teachers), attitudes towards restorative practices (skeptics vs. supporters), and personal orientations to restorative practices (inherent vs. learned) portrayed in the interviews (see Table 6). Leo and Zoey were categorized as specialists because their jobs were largely dedicated to restorative work, and they believed that RP could achieve significant positive results with the appropriate time and resources available. Jackson and Bella were skeptics because they questioned RP’s impact on student

accountability. Andy and Bailey were inherent restorers whose teaching styles and relationship building practices were naturally restorative long before RP became an initiative at RISE Academy. Finally, Wendy, Charlie, and I were mindset shifters because we were able to shift our past punitive experiences into a restorative approach.

Table 6

Teacher Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Restorative Practices (RQ 2.2)

| Teacher Group | Descriptor / Orientation | Core Belief or Attitude | Representative Example or Quote | Summary Insight |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Leo & Zoey (The Specialists) | Dedicated restorative support staff | View restorative practices as highly effective when time and resources are available | “A classroom teacher is not going to have 45 minutes to spend with the student... but because we have [the crisis team] in place... we were able to get to the bottom of it.” – <i>Zoey</i> | Specialists believed RP produced strong outcomes due to their ability to spend extended time supporting students. |
| Jackson & Bella (The Skeptics) | Effective but skeptical classroom teachers | Believe RP undermines student accountability and rigor | “Kids are not challenged. They can make excuses. They can hide behind the restorative concept.” – <i>Jackson</i> | Viewed RP as enabling avoidance of responsibility; preferred traditional expectations and active family involvement. |
| Andy & Bailey (The Inherent Restorers) | Naturally relationship-driven educators | Use empathy, listening, and one-on-one conversations as core practices | “Oftentimes I will pull the student to the side... and just listen.” – <i>Bailey</i> | Strong relational approach; emphasized trust, communication, and the need to balance RP with consequences. |
| Wendy, Cindy, & Charlie (The Mindset Shifters) | Supportive adopters who evolved their restorative mindset over time | Emphasize calm routines, modeling, positive reinforcement, and pragmatic RP use | “I basically try to give them as many chances as possible before resulting in a write up... these kids need a second chance.” – <i>Wendy</i> “It’s not sweating the small stuff... picking and choosing my battles.” – <i>Charlie</i> | Support RP while acknowledging limitations; focus on kindness, consistency, environmental calm, and selecting battles wisely. |

The diversity of perspectives among participants illustrated the complex and often personal nature of restorative practice adoption. Collectively, these perspectives revealed that teachers’ beliefs and attitudes toward restorative practices are shaped by their roles, experiences, and the realities of their work at RISE Academy. Details of teacher beliefs and attitudes are described below.

Leo and Zoey (The Specialists): Time to Achieve Restorative Breakthroughs.

Perhaps the two biggest proponents for restorative practices were Zoey and Leo, which was to be expected considering their roles at the school. Zoey and Leo were not tied to a classroom all day

as the other respondents were. Their day-to-day duties involved, among other things, providing restorative support to students and teachers throughout the building.

Zoey described a situation during which she and Leo were called on as part of the crisis team at RISE and had to restrain and soothe a middle school student who was having a meltdown in the hallway. After 45 minutes of trying multiple strategies, playing the student's favorite song over and over finally helped him reach a self-soothing state. Zoey said, "Now, a classroom teacher is not going to have 45 minutes to spend with the student to figure that out, but because we have [the crisis team] in place here at the school, we were able to get to the bottom of it." Zoey again mentioned the important role of outside personnel to support classroom teachers through their time. She said "having people in place for students to go to, whether it's counselors or just other staff members, behavior coaches, other staff members that are not in the classroom, I think, are essential to be able to support those teachers when those kids need that time." Those resources were available because of the robust MTSS framework in place at RISE Academy.

Leo could not think of any aspects of restorative practices that he deemed ineffective, noting that he performed restorative re-entrances and restorative mediations almost daily and found that the "piece that kind of brings it all home is when I enlist the students to develop their own solutions and commitments to heal and to prevent future harm." Like Zoey, he had time separate from instruction during the day to devote solely to behavior and restorative intervention. These two respondents believed that restorative practices could achieve great results, but they also had more time during the school day than full-time instructional teachers to put effort into restoration.

Jackson and Bella (The Skeptics): Limited Student Accountability for Behavior. In contrast, perhaps the two biggest dissenters of restorative practices were Jackson and Bella.

These two teachers were highly effective with students, but they did not believe that restorative practices contributed to their success in the classroom.

Jackson said that relationship building was key to his success with students but noted “that’s a part of teaching... effective teachers built relationships before they were introduced to restorative practices.” Jackson believed that, under the umbrella of restorative practices, “Kids are not challenged. They can make excuses. They can hide behind the restorative concept.” Jackson also believed that keeping parents and families involved in their students’ school lives, rather than using restorative practices, was key to their academic and behavioral success. He said:

Restorative practices, to me, is a misnomer. Restoring to what? That’s a question I ask people when it’s brought up. There are kids who have social, emotional issues, and as a school system, we can't address it. But kids have spiritual issues—when I say spiritual, I'm saying recognizing that there is more to life than themselves... we're in a culture now where it's all about the kids and kids are not challenged to recognize that there's more to life than themselves. Their opinions are promoted and put on a higher level.

Bella had similar thoughts regarding student success, accountability, and restorative practices. Her key to success with students was knowing what they liked and building relationships with them. She said that it was important to pick battles while also being consistent:

Firm but fair is what I like to say. Accountability. Asking them how you can help them. What do they need? And just creating an overall welcoming and safe environment that they want to come into every day. I think if you focus on those two things, you don't even need restorative practice if you're consistent with those aspects of this job.

When asked to be specific about what aspects of restorative practices she found ineffective, like

Jackson, Bella addressed student accountability:

Kids are feeling entitled. Instead of having students own their negative behavior and that being the topic of discussion, a lot of times, what happens... is they want the students to let the teachers know what the teachers did wrong and how the teachers can help the student be better in terms of the student's behavior... it's not enough focus on the students' behavior and how we can, you know, turn that bad behavior, negative behavior into appropriate behavior... it's like the blame somehow finds its way back to the teacher.

Andy and Bailey (The Inherent Restorers): Inherent Restorative Ideology. Andy and Bailey were, in the researcher's opinion, two of the most restorative-minded teachers in the building. They had a natural effect that was restorative. Andy was arguably the most popular teacher at RISE Academy. Students loved him because he was funny, energetic, intelligent, and relatable. In his interview, Andy cited one-on-one conversations as his main restorative strategy. "I mean, that's what it's all about," he explained, "is sitting down with the person in the situation and informing them exactly what's at stake in the actions that were taken or were not taken in the situation." However, as someone who worked closely with Andy for years and personally witnessed his interactions with students, I saw him use humor, food and drinks, and openness about his own past struggles during his youth to establish a connection with the students. I saw students literally cheer for him when he walked into the room. They appreciated him because he truly cared about them. He called them at home when he had not seen them at school in a while, and he sat down and talked with them when he saw that they might be going down a destructive path. He wanted to help them make good decisions, and he used his own life experiences to establish credibility with the kids. It worked for him.

When addressing limitations or ineffective aspects of restorative practices, Andy cited the

repeated use of the same intervention without seeing any change in the targeted example. He called it “unthinking, unchanging.” He gave an example of students who were caught vaping being assigned to complete a project detailing the negative effects of vaping on their health. Although a good idea in theory, he noted that the intervention needed to be implemented with an eye toward the ultimate desired result, which was to stop the student from vaping. He explained:

I could be mistaken, but I thought I saw multiple uses of that [intervention] on the same student... If the student goes through the restorative practice and perpetrates again and again... why would we use the same restorative practice afterwards?

Bailey was also a very popular teacher. She engaged students in sports conversations and clearly enjoyed fielding their trash talk about her team. She frequently stepped in to help her colleagues and her students with interventions. She emphasized the importance of teachers humanizing themselves to students and really listening to what students have to say. Bailey, by her own admission, also had a great relationship with her students. She said her main strategy for maintaining a restorative environment was keeping lines of communication open with her students. She explained, “Oftentimes, I will pull the student to the side and just allow them to express themselves, like, what—what happened? What is your perspective on this? What is your take? Why did it happen? And just listen.” She said that students also appreciated it when a teacher admits that they were wrong or that they could have handled something differently:

If you [the teacher] own that, and you can say, ‘You know what, I could have handled that differently,’ or ‘I should not have said it that way. Maybe I could have rephrased that.’ Just taking ownership, they [the students] understand that... you're human too, and just like they make mistakes or need to correct some behaviors, we [teachers] do too. I think that is helpful to them.

However, Bailey also acknowledged the need for balance when implementing restorative practices:

I don't think that restorative practices should be put in place in lieu of consequences... In the past, that has been the case where there was so much focus on restorative practices that there wasn't a balance with when there should have also been consequences. You could have restoration and receive consequences. And I think when that balance is off, then it's not as effective.

Wendy, Cindy, and Charlie (The Mindset Shifters): Transformed Practices Due to Restorative Mindset Shift. The remaining respondents, including myself, were what could be described as supportive of restorative practices, yet aware of their limitations and necessary accompaniments. Wendy and I shared similar approaches to restorative practices. We both used kindness, modeling, and positive behavior supports as our main methods of ensuring student success. Wendy explained:

I'm not very punitive in general. With students, I'm very nice, kind, polite and gentle, and I basically treat them the way I'd want to be treated if I was a student. I basically try to give them as many chances as possible before resulting in a write up or referral, because at the end of the day, these kids need a second chance.

I noted the importance of creating a workspace that is conducive and calming to student learning:

I try to make sure that my environment has soothing music, soothing lighting. I create a routine. I try to maintain a clean environment, and I ask my students to do the same. That kind of prevents a lot of issues—having that routine and keeping those expectations routine. It really helps with establishing some norms for the classroom.

Wendy and I also used candy and snacks to establish goodwill with students. Wendy said she keeps a candy jar on her desk and allowed students to take from it as they choose, explaining, “It's something for free from you to me that you didn't ask for, and it breaks the ice.” I explained how I tied snacks to student effort:

I check in with each student every week, and if they're passing, they get a snack. I believe in feeding students. They interpret that as love, as they should. And if students are not passing, I will sit down with them and figure out what assignments they need to do to get the most bang for their buck, and if they can get one or two of those assignments done during that class period, then they can also get a snack. So, it's not just about whether you're passing; it's about whether you are trying to make progress. And I think that that really helps.

Charlie took a very moderate stance regarding restorative practices. He said his key to maintaining a restorative environment was to be aware of which situations could become a bigger issue and which ones are best left unaddressed. He explained, “It’s not sweating the small stuff,” and being willing to have side conversations with students when necessary. But mostly, he said, “picking and choosing my battles, knowing which ones are my firm stands and which ones aren’t.” However, Charlie cautioned that the implementation of restorative practices could create a skewed set of data when taken out of context. He said that when teachers were discouraged from writing referrals, it automatically created a decrease in ISS and OSS numbers. Those lowered numbers get attributed to the success of restorative practices when actually they were a result of teachers being unable to document behaviors that might warrant ISS or OSS. He explained, “It doesn’t mean the behavior has necessarily improved. It just means that what you’re reporting has improved.”

RQ 2.2: Relationship Between Teacher Cognition and Their Practices

Through surveys and self-rating, the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and comfort level with restorative practices was examined, but no statistically significant connections were discovered. However, research regarding teachers' attitudes toward disrespect showed potential for finding a way to predict teachers' differentiated needs during restorative practice implementation.

The correlation analysis between teachers' comfort level with restorative practices and the various dimensions of self-efficacy did not yield statistically significant results (see Table 7). Although several of the correlation coefficients were moderate in size (e.g. $r = .575$, $r = .571$, and $r = .503$), their associated p values exceeded the accepted thresholds for significance. The strongest relationship, related to disciplinary self-efficacy, $r = .652$ approached significance with a p -value of $.057$, but still fell slightly above the $.05$ cutoff.

The most likely explanation for the non-significant findings is the small sample size ($n = 9$). With such a limited number of participants, the data did not have enough power to show significance even when the relationships looked meaningful. In samples this small, the results must be extremely strong to meet the statistical threshold. A larger sample would give a clearer picture and might show significance where this set of data could not be found.

The scatterplot below (see Figure 5) shows the relationship between teachers' disciplinary efficacy and their comfort level with RP. I chose to examine this pair more closely because it was the closest to reaching statistical significance. Disciplinary efficacy was particularly important to this study because teachers' confidence in handling behavior could affect how willing and able they were to use restorative approaches.

Table 7*Teachers' Self-Efficacy Scores and Comfort with Restorative Practices*

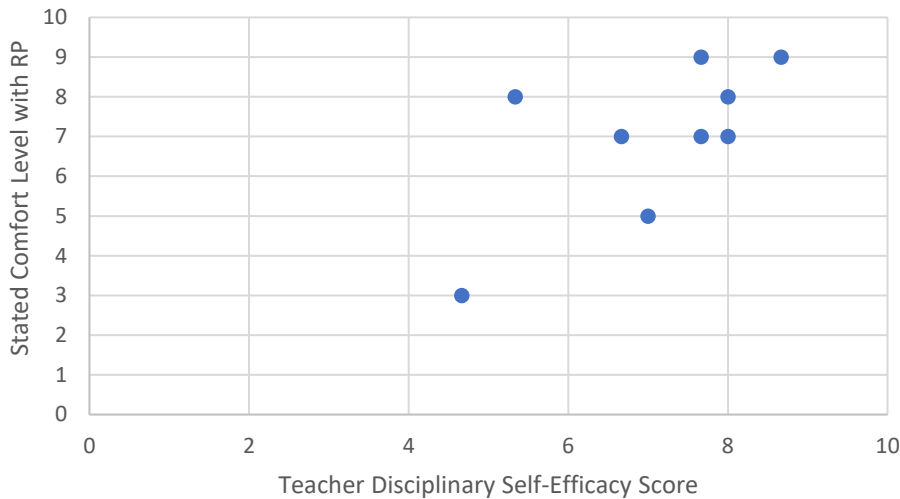
| Participant | Decision Making | School Resources | Instruction | Disciplinary Practices | Parental Involvement | Community Involvement | Positive School Climate | Total Efficacy Score | Comfort Level With RP |
|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Self | 7.50 | 7.00 | 6.63 | 7.67 | 5.00 | 5.67 | 8.13 | 6.80 | 7 |
| Zoey | 6.00 | 6.00 | 4.00 | 5.33 | 5.00 | 3.67 | 4.88 | 4.98 | 8 |
| Wendy | 8.00 | 5.00 | 4.25 | 6.67 | 4.00 | 3.00 | 6.00 | 5.27 | 7 |
| Jackson | 6.00 | 8.00 | 3.63 | 4.67 | 6.00 | 1.00 | 4.63 | 4.85 | 3 |
| Andy | 5.00 | 7.00 | 5.63 | 7.67 | 5.50 | 2.00 | 5.88 | 5.52 | 9 |
| Charlie | 4.50 | 7.00 | 5.25 | 7.00 | 6.00 | 2.33 | 7.00 | 5.58 | 5 |
| Bailey | 6.00 | 4.00 | 5.88 | 8.00 | 6.50 | 3.00 | 6.25 | 5.66 | 7 |
| Bella | 8.00 | 8.00 | 6.50 | 8.00 | 6.00 | 6.67 | 8.38 | 7.36 | 8 |
| Leo | 8.50 | 8.00 | 7.38 | 8.67 | 7.50 | 5.67 | 7.00 | 7.53 | 9 |

Note. Comfort level was rated on a scale from 1 (not comfortable) to 10 (very comfortable).

Roland et al. (2012) also explored the idea that positive levels of self-efficacy were related to a greater capacity for restoration. The researchers developed an instrument designed to assess the relationship between teachers' restorative justice ideology and their sense of self-efficacy. The researchers found that teachers who had low levels of personal distress had a higher capacity for restoration, cooperation, and healing. The data also showed that high levels of perspective taking, and empathic concern were associated with higher levels of restoration.

Figure 5

Scatter Plot of Teachers' Disciplinary Self-Efficacy and Comfort with Restorative Practices



RQ3: Transition Process from Punitive to Restorative

Teachers were interviewed regarding their experiences with the transition process from a punitive to a restorative school environment (see Table 8). Many cited professional development opportunities and an abundance of resources as key supports that contributed to a successful transition. However, they also identified areas for improvement, emphasizing the need to secure teacher buy-in through better preparation and open communication. Additionally, teachers advocated for gradual introduction of new protocols and a clear plan to address the most challenging aspects of implementation, including managing the initial pendulum swing away from discipline and the rise in disruptive behaviors during the adjustment period.

Table 8

Challenges and Supports During the Transition to Restorative Practices (RQ3)

| Theme | Description / Core Idea | Representative Example or Quote | Summary Insight |
|---|--|---|--|
| School Leadership and Support System | Strong administrative backing and abundant | “The principal... put the full force of his staff and resource allocation behind it.” | Administrative support created conditions for a smooth rollout and |

| Theme | Description / Core Idea | Representative Example or Quote | Summary Insight |
|--|--|--|--|
| | resources facilitated the transition. | – <i>Researcher</i> | encouraged teacher participation. |
| Professional Development | PD was helpful but needed to start earlier, include modeling, and be continuous. | “Training should begin during pre-planning... and show what it looks like, how successful it’s been.” – <i>Bella</i> | Early, sustained, and data-informed training strengthened teacher readiness and consistency. |
| Communication and Buy-In | Teachers needed transparent information and evidence of RP effectiveness. | “Having 100 % buy-in from people that strictly believe in consequences... we need to solidify the happy medium.” – <i>Zoey</i> | Clear rationale, open communication, and proof of results build teacher trust and buy-in. |
| Gradual and Systematic Introduction | Sudden removal of punitive measures caused confusion and resistance. | “There should have been a more gradual step into it...it was a shock to everybody.” – <i>Charlie</i> | Gradual rollout prevents disruption and helps staff adjust to cultural change. |
| Behavioral Challenges | Early implementation led to spikes in disruptive behavior and teacher frustration. | “Disruptive behaviors were at an all-time high... and teacher frustration was also at an all-time high.” – <i>Bailey</i> | Clear expectations and consistent consequences are needed during transitions. |
| Availability of Student Support Resources | Counselors, reset rooms, and behavior coaches supported RP success. | “Having people in place for students to go to... is essential to support teachers.” – <i>Zoey</i> | Access to non-classroom supports relieved teachers and reinforced restoration. |
| Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) | Provided structure and documentation for interventions beyond the classroom. | “If MTSS tools and resources are in place, teachers will feel supported.” – <i>Researcher</i> | Tiered systems ensured accountability and continuity of interventions. |
| Pendulum Swing | Overuse of restoration without boundaries led to inconsistency and chaos. | “At first, the pendulum swung all the way over... things in the building were wild.” – <i>Researcher</i> | Balanced approaches blending consequences with restoration sustain order and trust. |

Note. Table illustrates both supports and challenges during the transition from punitive to restorative practices at RISE Academy.

School Leadership and Support System

RISE Academy was an ideal location to perform this study for many reasons, one of which was the support that administration provided for the rollout of restorative practices. The principal of the school was a personal proponent of the initiative and wanted to see it succeed, so he put the full force of his staff and resource allocation behind it.

Effective and Efficient Professional Development. Part of that resource allocation was professional development training regarding restorative practices. Some training was provided by local school talent, some by teams from the district, and some by both. Most respondents agreed that the professional development was helpful at providing resources and strategies, but they also agreed that it needed to be thorough and needed to begin before students were scheduled to return to the building.

Respondents cited professional development received later during the implementation process as a successful aspect of the transition from punitive to restorative. Andy explained:

I think that the professional development that I've seen was useful for me. I think it was. That's because I was receptive to it. I don't think that as many people—I don't think that all the people—were as receptive to it, and so we maybe needed more professional development. Because I don't feel like I needed more on my end, but I know that I've watched restorative practices not in use in many, many, many classrooms.

Andy's comments highlighted a key finding from this study: learners needed differentiation. He explained that the training was helpful for him because he was open to it, but the others were not. This points to the importance of approaching training differently for teachers who are less receptive. Exploring ways to group teachers for differentiated professional development could be a valuable area for future research. If learners are not met at the appropriate level for their skills and knowledge, there is a risk they may become apathetic toward the entire restorative process.

Bailey reinforced the need for differentiation when she noted that professional development addresses differing levels of learning:

It can teach strategies, because not everybody comes just knowing. So having the professional development where teachers can grab hold to some of the strategies that may

work for them. You know, not everything works for every person, but at least they have something to pull from to start to implement that in their classroom.

Bella noted the benefits of professional development regarding restorative practices but did say that it should have been rolled out immediately:

I think the first year we implemented it, they were saying next year was going to be a full-out training on restorative practice with the county, and we didn't see that for at least one, maybe two years. Now, this past school year, I can say that we started getting more help at the county level coming in with behavior specialists to talk about restorative practices.

During my own interview, I said that “providing training, providing charts, and providing role playing scenarios for teachers in order to help them figure out how to be more restorative” was a very helpful part of the implementation process.

Bella noted that training for restorative practices should begin during pre-planning and include testimonies from individuals who have successfully implemented restorative practices with their own students. She referenced a need for up-front training and data to support the effectiveness of restorative practices:

I definitely felt like it should have been training, maybe during pre-planning, before the school year even started. That's why I say pre-planning would have been a good time to have the behavior specialists out. “Hey, this is what we're thinking about implementing. This is what we're going to be looking for.” And the training could have... been ongoing. So having people come out who have used restorative practices at their facility to, you know, not only just to support the program, but to show teachers what it looks like, how successful or unsuccessful it has been. Just to even have seen some data on it would have

been nice, you know. Because they love to say, we're data-driven and all decisions—data drives decisions. So, it would have been nice to see what other schools were doing with this restorative practice and why they chose it. I would like to have known the real reasons behind it, because everything that sounds good isn't good. And also, the success rate. I would love to know the success rate of schools who have used it. How long did they use it? Are they still using it? Or, you know, did they get rid of it?

Wendy said that follow-up from professional development was essential, noting that her preferred method of training was to learn a new strategy, have time to put it into practice, and then reconvene later to discuss why it did or did not work well. Jackson noted that professional development regarding restorative practices was the only reason he could rate his comfort level with RP at three instead of one. Along those same lines, Zoey felt that communication could always be improved upon, noting that teachers (and other stakeholders) needed to be made aware of all the resources and interventions that are available to students outside of the classroom:

[W]e could definitely improve in the communication across the board to parents, to teachers about the things that we have to offer and the things that we have done. And when they are working, let other teachers know, because they might not even know that they could send a kid to the reset room, or that we even have... the amygdala room.

I expressed a need for a specific type of training geared toward a specific demographic of teacher:

I would start out with intensive training regarding restorative practices, and I would really focus on how it's not always what you do “in the moment” that is being restorative. It's the way that you conduct yourself in your classroom, like the way that you just are as a teacher. I don't think there's enough emphasis put on the fact that, to be restorative, it's

almost like that needs to be part of your personality. You need to be, you know, not quick to anger. Don't take things personally. Make sure you set up routines. Do all you can to sort of prevent issues from happening, but then have tools in place when things do occur. So I think that there needs to be a little bit more emphasis on that, especially for teachers who are really kind of zero-tolerance type teachers who say, "It's my way or the highway." We really need to come up with some ways, I think, to get through to them about what being restorative is. Because it doesn't mean letting kids get away with things and never giving them any consequences, but it does mean that everything that a kid does that is not exactly what you want is not always something that requires a punitive consequence.

When discussing limitations of restorative practices, Wendy noted that some of the resources were not practical for her to use in the moment when trying to manage student behavior. She referenced a "beautiful" flow chart that offered many different suggestions for dealing with problem behaviors in the classroom. One of those suggestions was to visit a website and find the behavior that needs to be addressed, click on the link, and explore the multiple solutions offered. Wendy said, "I don't have time to run and look up 'Johnny is sleeping. What do I do?'" Instead, she said, "I just have time to do the strategies that work for me and address Johnny [in the moment]. Get in close proximity, offer Johnny piece of candy, call Johnny's parents, and go from there."

Securing Buy-In through Preparation and Communication. Another theme from the research that was also present in the responses from interviewees was the need to have open discussions about restorative practices, including evidence of effectiveness, and to secure teacher buy-in for the initiative. Buy-in needs to be a focus for any new leadership initiative, and for RP

implementation, teachers wanted to see realistic results from others' implementation processes. Bella said that, prior to implementation, she would have had people from other schools who have been using restorative practices "to show teachers what it looks like, how successful or unsuccessful it has been." She also said she would have liked to see proof that RP implementation was a data-driven decision, saying "I would love to know the success rate of schools who have used it. How long did they use it? Are they still using it? Or did they get rid of it?"

When asked what she thought the most challenging part of restorative practice implementation was, Zoey said, "Having 100% buy in from people that strictly believe in consequences for actions. And I do understand that mindset, but I think there's a happy medium that we need to solidify, because there is a point where you can do both." Bailey summarized that sentiment as well, noting that "other people, especially who've been in education for so long, are kind of stuck... and they don't really believe in a student should have a voice... it's what I say goes." She continued, "some people just get stuck in in their ways, but I do think it's [restorative practice] definitely needed."

Leo agreed that gaining buy-in was something that could have been handled differently, and he had some innovative ideas for securing that buy-in, including fireside chats with leaders who were responsible for the implementation rollout and smaller, targeted conversations "teaching folks of the benefits while showing the supporting data with real-life success stories." He also said that he "believe[d] in the fierce urgency of the moment" and felt that "it was definitely overdue for us to push it [restorative practice implementation] out district wide and school wide." Leo had further ideas on how buy-in could have been handled via preparation and communication:

With not having 100% buy in from the get go... when the county made the big move, what made it challenging was that we had to fill in gaps, a lot of gaps of understanding as to why it was happening, and not having all of the answers from the district standpoint as to why to be able to convey... The big thing is buy-in. Implementation with fidelity, resulting in a lower level of implementation with fidelity than what we would like. What else could have made it smoother? I would say also having more neutral, trusted advocates of it... like a figurehead. Like more than just a superintendent, but you know, I would say well-recognized or respected figures within education who were deeply rooted in it to promote and push it... would have been good.”

In essence, teachers needed to know why they were being asked to add something else to their already full schedules. They needed to see results that made the initiative seem worth their time and effort. They also needed to hear candid feedback related to challenges of RP so that they could prepare themselves and possibly even avoid those challenges.

Gradual and Systematic Introduction of New Protocols: Avoid the Pendulum Swing.

Another thing that many respondents said they would advise was a steady, measured rollout of restorative practice implementation. They said it was important to avoid creating stark policy changes that could leave teachers feeling blindsided and unsupported. For the implementation at RISE Academy, the change that caused the most disruption to teachers’ routines and to the school environment was the drastic dropoff in disciplinary consequences issued for student misbehavior. Teachers were no longer allowed to write discipline referrals, and local school administrators were encouraged to keep kids in school. This policy created a chaotic environment for teachers and students, because behaviors that would have, at one time, gotten students sent home or separated from the school for a time period, were being dealt with

restoratively in the school building. Behaviors such as fighting, drug use, and disrespect toward teachers were being handled with strategies like restorative meetings, contracts, or projects. However, students quickly realized that they could behave in those ways and still be allowed to stay in school. Problem behaviors began to spiral, and teachers were unsure how to maintain order in their classrooms.

Wendy explained, “I try to use as many restorative practices as possible first before resulting to using the punitive measures. But at some point, if it's out of my hands and if it's out of my control, then I will use punitive measures to get the desirable behavior.” When the option to issue punitive measures was taken from teachers, she said it left her feeling powerless. Andy described feeling “offended, frustrated, betrayed,” during the time period when disciplinary consequences were not being issued to students. Charlie said it created a “shock” for teachers and students and left them feeling unsupported. Bailey noted that students took advantage of that time period with no disciplinary consequences, saying that “disruptive behaviors were at an all-time high... and teacher frustration was also at an all-time high.” Bella said lack of disciplinary consequences “sends the wrong message to students that you can engage in bad behavior and you can just be forgiven if you come to the circle. And that's just not life. Actions have consequences, and students need to know that.”

When asked what he viewed as the most challenging part of the transition process, Andy said:

The equilibrium can't swing so far, so fast. Or the pendulum? Yeah, there we go. I would have continued to implement disciplinary policies with consistency. And that's a big thing too, is consistency... I saw inconsistent use of the practices, and that was one of the big problems, too.

Charlie referenced the jarring nature of the quick changeover as well:

There should have been a more gradual step into it. Instead of just jumping straight into the pool. It was a shock to everybody, because we go from having a very much punitive, fairly heavy, to now—it's the complete opposite.

During my own interview session, I had a lot of thoughts about the immediate stark contrast in policy as well:

At first, the pendulum swung all the way over. We were completely punitive. Then we swung all the way over to completely restorative. And that creates a problem... I think it should have been done at a much slower pace. The challenging part of switching, I think, was those years of growing pains where it just seemed like, you know, things in the building were wild, and I think that was felt all across the county. So, I think that process definitely could be avoided if other people, or other, you know, implementations of restorative practices did it more gradually. Started with training. Started with saying, okay, you know, instead of writing referrals, we are going to put things in intervention email format. It will be documented, and you will get feedback about what happens. I do think that that is something that needs to be done, too, is follow through with teachers. Let teachers know what kind of things are being done to intervene with a kid, and also what sort of consequences are being issued, if there are any. Or even if there aren't.

Substantial Availability of Student Support Resources. Another successful aspect of restorative practice implementation at RISE Academy, according to respondents, was the availability of outside [the classroom] resources. Zoey explained:

Having people in place for students to go to, whether it's counselors or just other staff members, behavior coaches, other staff members that are not in the classroom, I think, are

essential to be able to support those teachers when those kids need that time. I also think having places for kids to go that isn't just like ISS, because it used to just be that if the kid can't be in the classroom, they could just go to ISS. There was really nowhere else to go. Now, because we have these people in place, or even a place like... reset. That's what it's called. Yeah, you can go there for a reset, and it's not just going to that room. You can go to that room if you just need a break and you don't want to talk to anybody, but that's also a place where the counselor could come and get you, because maybe they were in a meeting when you needed them and they couldn't be with you. But I think having, you know, the amygdala room, which we probably don't use enough. Still, I've seen kids go in there because we have an exercise bike and like, get that energy out, or whatever they need to do. Having people available, like the coaches, having the walkie talkies to be able to take a kid to the gym to punch the bag, or this stuff is utilized so much. People probably don't even know, because the next thing you know, the kid is back in the classroom and doing fine. So I think the short breaks, it's just proven that sometimes kids need those short breaks, whether it's to vent or get energy out, or whatever it is, and then they can get right back to the classroom, and that prevents them from just sitting in ISS or being called to be picked up and losing the whole rest of the day academically.

Bella also mentioned the usefulness of outside resources when handling certain behaviors:

Teachers, of course, we have many hats. I don't feel like we should be put in a position where we have to be the trained psychiatrist or the trained therapist to try to figure out what's going on with the student. I think it needs to be more professionally led by experienced professionals who really know how to get to the root of the problem.

In my interview, I also addressed the value of additional help throughout the school building:

I think that the amount of resources that have been dedicated during the changeover process has been amazing. We do truly have so many resources in this building to offer to our students, and it takes a village. So, the fact that we have so many people who are available to help with any sort of issues that any of our students have is really, really fantastic.

Multi-Tiered System of Support. MTSS at RISE Academy provided resources for almost any intervention a student might need, and it also required documentation of those interventions so that new parties who were introduced were fully informed about the previous efforts and could make strategic decisions about further options. MTSS was essential to the success of restorative practice initiatives for many reasons. For the scope of this study, MTSS was important because it provided resources for teachers to use when their own restorative buckets had been emptied. When Zoey was telling the story about the student who had a mental health meltdown, she mentioned that it took her and the crisis team 45 minutes just to get him into a state where he could talk. She admitted that there was no way a classroom teacher would have been able to devote that much time and energy to one student.

Leo, in his role as a restorative facilitator, had time outside of a regular classroom to pull students from their classes to meet with them and talk through situations. He would not be able to conduct those restorative meetings if he had to simultaneously teach a classroom full of students.

There were other more day-to-day situations during which teachers require support. As Wendy noted in her interview, she did not have time to go to a website and look up a suggested intervention for a student who was exhibiting an undesirable behavior. In the moment, when teaching and learning were occurring, she relied on the tools with which she was familiar and

that worked for her in most instances. However, if those tools did not work, Wendy had the option to document the behavior and have the student removed from the classroom. At that point, the student's restorative interventions would be placed into the hands of a member of the MTSS team, who would make sure the student received restorative intervention in some other manner. Wendy would be kept in the loop regarding the outcomes for the student, and she would be told if her documentation resulted in any disciplinary consequences for the student. With the appropriate MTSS tools and resources in place, teachers felt supported and knew that they had options when everything they tried was not working. Some stakeholders might argue that teachers would use having students removed from their class as a crutch instead of working out issues themselves inside the classroom. However, it would become clear quickly during a restorative practice initiative which teachers were using student removal as their main disciplinary strategy versus those who genuinely used as many restorative strategies as they had in their personal toolbox before requesting removal.

Thoughtful Plan to Address Challenges of Implementing Restorative Practices

During interviews, teachers emphasized the importance of having a clear and structured plan to navigate the most challenging aspects of implementing restorative practices. They also noted an increase in disruptive behaviors during the transition period, reinforcing the need for proactive strategies and clear expectations.

Wendy expressed frustration with disruptive behaviors as one of her major challenges during the implementation process. She said:

At first, administrators, to me, were not handling a lot of the behaviors or undesirable behaviors that teachers did refer them to. I felt like it wasn't being addressed effectively. I felt that I would have an issue, and I would refer them to the admin, and I feel like the kid

would be right back into the classroom in the same behavior, even though I was using the different restorative practices that I speak of today. Now, fast forward now to this year and last year, I would say the administrators are doing their part to handle the undesirable behaviors, and the consequences they're giving are more effective to me now, personally, because I'm not having as many disruptive behaviors as I did... Overall, I can tell the administration is on board with trying to address those behaviors and give the appropriate consequence. And because they are giving those appropriate consequences, it's causing less undesirable behaviors in the classroom.

I also addressed the increase in disruptive behaviors during my interview responses:

I will say that the transition process has grown and matured over the last year or two... [In the past] there were a ton of fights, and this school building felt unsafe because it just seemed like there was no order, nobody putting any kind of foot down about what line cannot be crossed in order to maintain a safe environment. And across the county, this was the same issue... There was a complete uprising from teachers and from parents about the state of the schools during that transition time... Now, as we have grown through the transition process, we see that there is a medium ground where you can offer things like having students go online, so you're not depriving them of their education, but you're saying, "You know what, you're not a safe person to have in this building, so we are going to let you work online from home." Just providing those kinds of options, I think, has been a great way to kind of compromise for people who say we can't have fighters in this building. But that being said... There is now a self-defense policy that if you're just fighting back because somebody started fighting you, then you are not necessarily going to get suspended or put out of school, and I think that's fair in a lot of

circumstances.

Although it took a few years of growing pains, leadership at RISE Academy realized that restoration and disciplinary consequences can coexist. Zoey described a “happy medium” for the school. She said, “Sometimes a kid needs a consequence, but you're still doing the restorative stuff big picture... it can be both—kids can still receive consequences and have a restorative practice in place.”

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from interviews and observations that explored how alternative school teachers at RISE Academy implemented and experienced restorative practices. Results for Research Question 1 showed that restorative conversations were the cornerstone of teacher-student interactions, supported by humor, empathy, and accountability talk that fostered trust and reflection. Teachers also emphasized the importance of safe, welcoming environments and collective staff responsibility for maintaining consistency and care. Findings for Research Question 2 revealed a range of teacher beliefs and attitudes shaped by role, experience, and mindset from strong advocates who viewed RP as transformative, to skeptics who questioned its impact on student accountability. Some participants naturally embodied restorative dispositions while others described how reflection and mindset shifts gradually changed their approaches. Research Question 3 highlighted both supports and challenges in the transition from punitive to restorative discipline. Key supports included administrative leadership, abundant resources, and structured professional development, while challenges involved limited buy-in, abrupt policy shifts, and early spikes in disruptive behavior. Over time, educators found that balancing restorative ideals with practical accountability measures created greater stability and trust. Collectively, these findings illustrated that restorative practice implementation is most effective

when grounded in communication, collaboration, and gradual cultural change.

Chapter V

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine how alternative school teachers experience the implementation of restorative practices. Investigating the perspectives of alternative school teachers can provide school leaders with insight into the challenges that may arise in their own contexts. Although school leaders establish restorative practices, their effectiveness depends largely on teachers' implementation and ongoing engagement (McGregor et al., 2019). Leaders must therefore revisit and refine policies by incorporating teacher feedback to identify which practices require additional support and which are functioning effectively. For instance, facilitating restorative conversations can be emotionally demanding, and research indicates that teachers may not always feel adequately prepared to address sensitive topics that emerge in these settings (Kidger et al., 2010; Rothi et al., 2008). Understanding these challenges can guide the development of professional learning opportunities that strengthen teachers' confidence in their social-emotional support role. Attending to teachers' insights in this way can promote the sustained growth of restorative practices and contribute to positive social change (Gregory et al., 2021; McQueen et al., 2024; Moran et al., 2024). In this chapter, I will share a summary of the study findings, an interpretation of the results, and discuss implications for future implementation. I will also discuss the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Through observations, surveys, interviews, and personal reflection, I investigated the

following research questions in this study:

RQ 1: How do alternative school teachers in a restorative environment interact with students to address behavioral problems?

RQ 2: What perceptions do alternative school teachers have about RP?

- What are their understandings of the concept?
- What are their beliefs and attitudes about RP? How do alternative school teachers' sense of self-efficacy affect their comfort level with RP?

RQ 3: What challenges do alternative school teachers report experiencing during the transition to RP?

According to the field observation data, I found that teachers used various strategies to enact restorative practices, including facilitating conversations and building relationships, incorporating humor as a tool for behavior management, and drawing on a collective responsibility approach to support students. The interview data partly supported these findings. I also explored the connection between teachers' sense of self-efficacy and their comfort level with restorative practices, but I found no significant correlations from my data collection. During the interviews, teachers described their perceptions regarding restorative practice implementation. Several key concepts emerged: the process can be time-intensive, particularly when addressing the most challenging cases; a nurturing mindset is important; teachers must be willing to listen to students and accept accountability when their own actions contribute to conflict; and selective intervention is necessary to prioritize the most significant behavioral concerns. Some teachers expressed perceived negative aspects of restorative practices such as limited ownership of student conduct, impractical resources, and a need for differentiated interventions and a balance of restoration and consequences.

Interpretation of Results

When I interviewed experienced alternative school teachers about restorative practices and how they used them, the overarching theme was building relationships through conversation. That concept is not exactly revolutionary. Teachers have recognized the importance of building relationships through conversation long before the concept of restorative practices was introduced. As Jackson said, “Effective teachers built relationships before they were introduced to restorative practices.” He was the teacher who was most skeptical of restorative practices, so much so that he called the term a “chameleon” because the definition “can change according to who you listen to or how it’s presented.” He was not wrong when he said that. When I began writing this dissertation, my advisors asked repeatedly what restorative practices *were*. It did not matter how many different ways I worded the definition of the term; they did not really understand until I gave them examples. Even then, I could tell they wanted more clarification. I think the experiences of teachers who are learning to implement restorative practices are much the same as those of my advisors. They can be told *what* restorative practices are, but until they learn by example *how* to use them in a way that works for them, the concept will remain nebulous.

RQ1: Teacher Strategies for Restoration

I determined the restorative strategies teachers used at RISE Academy by observing the strategies in use and by asking participants for their input about the strategies they used. Data analysis revealed that teachers oversimplified the strategies they used, perhaps because restorative conversation had become second nature to them, and they did not recognize the significance of their tone, volume, and verbal directionality. However, the analysis of field notes allowed me to extricate some of those significant methods and begin to unpack the complexity of

restorative conversation. In addition to conversational approaches, teachers also relied on environmental strategies such as maintaining calm, predictable classrooms, and they demonstrated a shared sense of responsibility for students across the school. These practices worked alongside restorative conversation to support consistency and emotional safety for students.

Beyond Conversations: The Nuanced Realities of Restorative Practice

While taking field notes, I listened to and carefully observed interactions between teachers and students at RISE Academy. This was a critical element of my research because it gave me personal insight into the conversations that teachers would later tout in their interviews as their most used restorative strategy. During the 300 minutes that I conducted hallway observations, I heard teachers using humor to gain behavioral compliance and to ease the seriousness of a teachable moment: “Look, y’all wanna fight, you gonna have to fight me. These hands are rated E for Everyone.” I heard them redirect students toward thinking about their futures and help them set personal improvement goals: “Just wait until you add eating, keeping a roof over your head [to your bills]. What are you doing after graduation?” I heard teachers remind students, through reflective dialogue, that all actions have consequences: “They [the other student] gonna be here and you gonna be at home with your mama and daddy crying about it [the fight being instigated].” Perhaps most importantly, I saw faculty and staff work together to keep students on track behaviorally, emotionally, and academically. During my interviews with teachers, I specifically asked them which strategies they used most often. Conversation and building relationships were common answers. However, as seen in my observations, conversations and relationship building are oversimplified terms for what teachers actually do.

Cultivating Safety and Calm Through Restorative Classroom Design

Providing a safe and welcoming learning environment was another strategy frequently mentioned by teachers. Leo noted that he “put[s] a high emphasis on promoting a safe and positive classroom culture.” When students feel safe and calm, they are better able to focus on learning tasks (Reyes et al., 2012). At RISE Academy, this emphasis on emotional safety is visible in the physical environment. Visitors who walk through the hallways pass many low-lit classrooms where teachers rely on lamplights or selectively turn off overhead fluorescent lights to create a softer atmosphere. Many classes also have alternative seating arrangements, soft music playing in the background, and calm down corners where students can de-escalate if they are elevated. Teachers in the building understand that low lighting and a calming environment help both students and adults remain centered and focused throughout the day.

This flexibility with classroom setup allows teachers to engage in what might be described as preventative restoration: creating classroom conditions that minimize behavioral escalation before it occurs. I have heard students say more than once when they enter my own lamp lit computer lab that they feel immediately calm.

Teachers new to implementing restorative practices could benefit from seeing visual examples of such classroom environments such as photos of lighting arrangements, furniture placement, or calming spaces such as cool-down corners, along with descriptions of a less visible strategies like background music, snack routines, or personalized doorway greetings. They could also benefit from hearing teachers describe how and why they implemented each feature and what value that teacher believes the feature adds to their classroom. Not every strategy will resonate with every educator, but offering a range of concrete, teacher-tested ideas increase the chance of finding approaches suited to their own style and context. For example, some teachers

may not be comfortable with altering the décor in their rooms but might be willing to try playing lo-fi background music or keeping a candy jar on their desk.

Balancing Restorative Ideals with Classroom Practicality

One of the most familiar strategies for those trained in restorative practices is the use of restorative circles. Circles typically involve gathering students and, at times, adults to discuss topics such as negative behavior, community-building themes, or specific harms that have occurred. Although well-intentioned, teachers at RISE Academy almost unanimously reported that they rarely use circles due to logistical challenges such as scheduling participants and the discomfort some students feel when placed in a group setting. Charlie noted, “That’s not something I would want, and I don’t want to put a student in that situation where they are uncomfortable in that sense too, because I know how it would make me feel.” Participants also noted that circles often required substantial instructional time and may not yield meaningful outcomes. As Zoey reflected in her interview, “Even the feedback I would get from the kid one-on-one later was that it was not very beneficial.” These perspectives suggest that while restorative circles are valuable when led by trained facilitators in appropriate contexts, they may not be practical for day-to-day classroom management.

For most teachers, restorative approaches that are brief, flexible, and easily integrated into instructional routines are more sustainable and effective than time-intensive formal processes. If teachers are asked to complete time-intensive restorative intervention, they will inevitably ask how they are supposed to regain their lost instructional time (Ascher & Maguire, 2011; Garcia & Garcia, 2016). It is true that restoration holds priority that will make some teachers uncomfortable. They will ask how they are supposed to keep their test scores, a measure by which many educators are judged and evaluated, high if they have to take time to work

behaviorally with a kid rather than simply sending them out of the room to be handed a consequence by an administrator. However, the reality is that teaching, at least in the public school setting, is no longer about teachers with ultimate authority employing a sit-and-get instructional model that relies on full behavioral compliance from students. It has to be more relational in order to meet the varied needs of students who are enrolled in the system. Moreover, students who feel nurtured and cared for in the classroom often perform better on tests than those who are situated in a punitive environment (Reyes et al., 2012).

RQ2.1: Teacher Knowledge and Perceptions Regarding Restorative Practices

The International Institute for Restorative Practice (Wachtel, 2016) defined restorative practices as processes “that proactively build relationships and a sense of community to prevent conflict and wrongdoing” (p. 1). Teachers in this study perceived RP as supportive alternatives to punishment, aimed at repairing relationships with dialogue and reflection. The teachers also mentioned that successful RP required multiple stakeholder engagement and criticized that RP have inconsistent definitions and limitations. These findings largely align with what is described in the literature about RP, as noted in Chapter 2. These perceived criteria regarding RP narrow the broader intent of a restorative environment.

Many teachers viewed restorative practices as a response to misconduct rather than a proactive approach to fostering safety, trust, and connection. However, restoration is as much about prevention as it is about repair; particularly in supporting students who experience trauma beyond the school setting. Some students experience such significant trauma outside of school that the educational environment becomes the one place where they feel secure and supported. These perspectives suggest that teachers could benefit from more comprehensive professional learning on restorative practices. Such training could serve two purposes: (1) helping teachers

recognize the restorative elements already present in their classrooms and (2) fostering a shared understanding of preventive strategies that sustain a restorative culture.

Teachers in this study believed there were several elements as consistently uniform aspects of restorative practices. First, they recognized that achieving restorative breakthroughs often requires time both to build trust and to allow students to engage meaningfully in reflection and repair. There are also some restorative breakthroughs that require immediate, sustained, focused attention for a long period of the school day. Those types of interventions cannot usually be facilitated by classroom teachers who have full classes to teach. When Zoey described one such instance of sustained restoration that she conducted, she acknowledged that “a classroom teacher is not going to have 45 minutes to spend with a student to figure that out.” This is where abundance of resources is necessary, and it can be achieved through a well-designed Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

A well-developed MTSS can play a crucial role in ensuring that teachers feel supported when their own restorative strategies have reached their limits. Within an effective MTSS framework, restorative practices operate as part of a broader continuum of interventions, allowing teachers to access additional layers of behavioral and emotional support without feeling that they are giving up on students. When systems are clearly defined and consistently implemented, teachers understand when and how to seek help, and they can do so within a structure that reinforces shared responsibility rather than individual burden. In this way, MTSS helps preserve the integrity of restorative approaches while preventing burnout or frustration among teachers who face persistent behavioral challenges. Moreover, by embedding restorative practices within the MTSS process, rather than treating them as standalone interventions, schools ensure that behavioral and supportive practices are aligned, data-driven, and sustainable. This

alignment reassures teachers that escalation to further levels of support is not a failure of their practice, but a natural part of a collaborative and supportive framework designed to meet diverse student needs.

Participants also recognized that a nurturing mindset supports restoration by creating the emotional safety necessary for students to be honest and take risks in communication. As Bella explained, “I believe in empathy, and that’s a part of... building relationships... A lot of times, once you have built that relationship with your students... [you] can move accordingly based off of how well you know that student.” Some teachers will not have this empathetic mindset and will require either a mindset shift or other restorative strategies to mitigate the deficit.

Participants also described using selective intervention, meaning they choose when and how to engage restoratively based on the situation, and its impact on the students’ readiness and the potential impact it could have on the larger learning environment. Charlie expanded on this notion, explaining “It’s not sweating the small stuff. In a sense, it’s knowing what could cause a major disruption, and... picking and choosing my battles, knowing which ones are my firm stands and which ones aren’t.” Those with an inherently restorative disposition, such as educators who naturally lean toward empathy, patience, and relationship-centered discipline, tend to find restorative practices align closely with their personal teaching style (Payne & Welch, 2015). It follows that teachers who possess an opposing disposition may find it harder to implement restorative practices.

Finally, listening deeply and modeling accountability emerge as central to the restorative process. As Bailey noted:

Oftentimes, I will pull a student to the side and just allow them to express themselves... and just listen... and if [teachers] can say, ‘You know what, I could have handled that

differently, or... Maybe I could have rephrased that.' Just taking ownership, [students] understand that you're... human too, and... make mistakes or need to correct some behaviors.

Teachers see these actions not only as conflict resolution tools but as demonstrations of the values underlying restorative practice itself.

RQ2.2: Relationship Between Teacher Cognition and their Practices

Although this study did not have significant findings in the area, research on the link between educator mindset and buy-in for restorative practices could provide valuable insights into how professional development can be differentiated to meet the needs of varied learners (Payne & Welch, 2015). Restorative practices are different ways to practice teaching that focus largely on preventing future harm, not just repairing newly created harm. All classroom teachers are capable of restorative practice implementation if they are open to new learning. In fact, many teachers who begin to implement restorative practices will find that they have already created a restorative environment by making a home at school that feels safe for kids but also has effective boundaries. Teachers who do not already take this approach should be able to select and refine strategies that best suit their needs.

Leverage Peer Skepticism as a Catalyst for Authentic Buy-In

Use of restorative measures may come more easily for some teachers than others, but this study showed it was possible for even teachers like Bella and Jackson, who were opposed to the concept of RP, to conduct themselves restoratively in the classroom. These teachers and others like them should be part of restorative practice professional development. Of course, they would have to be convinced that their teaching style is, in fact, partly restorative even if they are opposed to the term or concept.

This could perhaps be accomplished by having skeptical teachers share their best classroom practices and asking an experienced restorative practice supporter to file those practices under the appropriate restorative heading. For example, Jackson said that he researched kids' history "as far as their academic background so [he] can know what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are... to recognize their birthdays... Just let them know they they're seen and I care about them." He went on to say, "that's not necessarily what I consider restorative." However, letting students know they are cared for is absolutely restorative, because many of them do not feel cared for at home. Caring for them at school is a way to help heal that trauma. During restorative practice implementation, it will be important to help naysayers understand that many of the things they do that they think are just good teaching are also restorative practices.

Because teachers tend to be most receptive to colleagues they respect and ones with whom they share values, individuals like Bella and Jackson could play an important role in modeling restorative mindsets and increasing buy-in among other skeptical educators. When teachers who are initially resistant to restorative practices engage in professional learning with peers who share their skepticism, the experience can foster trust and authenticity that more traditional training often lacks. Hearing colleagues who once doubted restorative methods but later experienced their benefits allows hesitant teachers to view restorative approaches as credible and attainable rather than idealistic or imposed (Payne & Welch, 2015). This peer modeling helps normalize hesitation, reduces defensiveness, and positions restorative practice as a process of gradual growth rather than an all-or-nothing shift (Gregory & Evans, 2020). Moreover, teachers who adopt more student-centered and relational approaches can effectively communicate the value of restorative practices to skeptical peers, helping bridge the gap between

belief and implementation (Samfira & Sava, 2021; Willower et al., 1973). By intentionally including these voices in professional development, schools can enhance credibility, strengthen teacher buy-in, and promote authentic, sustainable adoption of restorative practices (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2024).

Differentiate Restorative Professional Development through the Ideology Lens

During my data analysis and search for connections between teacher cognition and their practices, I conducted research into why teachers have differing and strong responses to disrespect from students. During this research, I encountered the concept of pupil control ideology (PCI). Pupil control ideology (Foley & Brooks, 1978) refers to a continuum of beliefs that teachers hold about how much control students should have versus how much the teacher should enforce order, with two poles usually described as custodial versus humanistic (Willower et al., 1973). A teacher with a custodial orientation sees students as fairly undisciplined or untrustworthy and believes strict rules, surveillance, and formal discipline are necessary to maintain order; conversely, a humanistic orientation treats students as capable of self-regulation, sees the role of discipline more in terms of mutual respect and responsibility, and emphasizes student autonomy (Samfira & Sava, 2021; Willower et al., 1973). Research shows that ideological factors such as PCI correlate with observable teacher behaviors, including how often teachers refer students for discipline, how rigidly classroom rules are enforced, and the degree to which the learning environment is perceived as supportive (Rodriguez et al., 2024). These patterns are consistent with earlier findings that teacher ideology predicts the overall quality of school life, with humanistic orientations tending to foster more positive and supportive climates (Schmidt, 1992). Teachers' ideology also relates to factors like burnout, stress, and their belief in their own efficacy (Paciello et al., 2022).

The four teacher archetypes identified in this study highlight opportunities to design differentiated professional development tailored to the distinct strengths and challenges of each group. Training could be tailored to teachers' roles, mindsets, and levels of restorative readiness. Specialists could benefit from advanced training on trauma-informed practices and facilitation techniques that increase their restorative expertise. Skeptics may need data-driven sessions, classroom-ready strategies, and opportunities to observe effective RP in action to build trust in the initiative. Inherent restorers could benefit from leadership-focused PD that helps them mentor colleagues and refine their practices. Mindset shifters may need continued support in balancing restoration with appropriate consequences and in developing consistent routines. By aligning PD with each group's needs, school leaders can strengthen implementation and build a more cohesive restorative culture.

RQ3: Transition Process from Punitive to Restorative

The findings of this study reveal several important insights with direct relevance for the implementation of restorative practices in schools. Teachers' experiences highlight both the promise and the complexity of putting restorative approaches into everyday action. These findings suggest that effective implementation requires more than procedural fidelity; it depends on the gradual cultivation of mindsets, dispositions, and relational skills that shape how educators interpret and apply restorative principles. Viewed through the lens of Theory of Change, these results underscore the importance of designing implementation processes that are cyclical, reflective, and adaptive. Rather than treating restorative practice as a fixed set of strategies, schools should approach it as a dynamic change model that evolves through continuous feedback, teacher reflection, and iterative improvement. In this way, each phase of implementation such as training, experimentation, and reflection, becomes part of an ongoing

cycle of learning that deepens both understanding and commitment.

Implications for Practice

The implications of this study fall into three interconnected domains: practical, theoretical, and methodological. Practically, the results provide guidance for teachers, administrators, and districts seeking to embed restorative principles into everyday routines. Theoretically, they contribute to broader discussions about teacher mindset, teacher-student relationships, and cultural conditions that allow restorative practice to thrive. Methodologically, they offer direction for refining research design and sequencing to better capture the complex, iterative nature of restorative implementation. Together, these implications point toward strategies for developing school environments where restorative practices are not only adapted but sustained.

Practical Implications

A successful transition to restorative practice starts with understanding the perspectives teachers bring to the process. According to research, restorative teachers need a blend of relational, reflective, and regulatory qualities (Payne & Welch, 2015). Knowing which areas teachers are weakest can inform their professional development needs. It may also help determine if some teachers simply are not a good fit for a restorative educational environment.

Systematic and Differentiated Professional Development

Based upon research, one key step to determining teachers' suitability for a restorative environment could be to assess their instructional mindsets. There could be many ways to conduct the assessment, and this study did not delve into the nuances of the psychology behind teacher ideology. However, as mentioned earlier in relation to teachers' strong opinions regarding disrespect from students, it could be interesting to assess their views on pupil control ideology.

According to some of my post-data collection research, teachers with strongly custodial views often need more intensive preparation than those with humanistic or mixed perspectives (Dhaliwal et al., 2023; Samfira & Sava, 2021). Teachers who see discipline mainly from a custodial standpoint are unlikely to adopt restorative strategies without first addressing their core beliefs. These teachers should be grouped together so they can participate in structured professional development focused on adjusting their mindsets before learning the technical aspects of restorative practice. This does not mean that all custodial teachers must become humanistic in order to conduct restorative practices. However, they do need to maintain a growth mindset and a willingness to unlearn some of their more punitive habits.

A clearer understanding of mindset differences emerged through the archetypes identified in this study. Participants did not respond to restorative practices as a single, unified group; instead, they demonstrated recognizable patterns in how they interpreted, valued, and enacted RP. The Specialists and Inherent Restorers approached restorative practices with confidence because the work aligned with their existing beliefs, while the Skeptics resisted many of the expectations due to doubt about the purpose or practicality of restorative approaches. Mindset Shifters represented a middle ground, gradually reevaluating assumptions over time. These archetypes illustrate that readiness for restorative practice is not simply a matter of skill, but a reflection of underlying beliefs and dispositions that shape how teachers take up the work.

Targeted Professional Development as a Mechanism for Teacher Buy-In and Restorative Mindset Growth. All teachers new to restorative practices will require targeted training to gain buy-in. This training should include data and real testimonials from educators and schools that have successfully implemented restorative practices, especially stories that recognize challenges and explain how those challenges were overcome (Evans & Vaandering,

2016). Being open about the challenges that many people face when trying to transition away from a punitive mindset and punitive classroom practice will reduce the number of teachers who are dismissive regarding restorative practices.

Professional development should be structured in layers. While initial sessions can be geared toward the big picture and conducted with the entire school or district, beginning with administrators and cascading down to teachers, most of the training should focus on practical, classroom-level strategies (Gregory & Evans, 2020). Teachers will also need focused training on developing their relational mindset, which involves helping them learn to be empathetic, active listeners who have respect for student dignity (Parameswaran et al., 2024). They should also work on developing their emotional intelligence, which involves building their self-awareness, capacity for emotional regulation, and patience. Finally, restorative teachers need to learn to be persistent and resilient, showing a talent for consistency while remaining adaptable (Payne & Welch, 2015). As with students, teachers cannot be expected to be perfect in every category. However, they can demonstrate growth.

Learning Restorative Practice through Modeling and Storytelling. When professional development begins at the local school level, it should be more relational than technical. It should focus heavily on making a mental shift, even for teachers who already possess a large number of restoration-friendly qualities. The importance and effectiveness of trauma prevention should be emphasized. For example, at RISE Academy, Wendy could participate in a professional development session and explain how she operated her classroom differently in the restorative environment than in the punitive environment. She had difficulty answering the question I asked her about how she would handle disrespect from a student, noting that many of her classroom behavior issues ceased when she began implementing restorative practices:

So, this is a tough one, because I don't have a lot of kids who are displaying these behaviors, and that's the thing. I think it starts with your classroom management strategies and the restorative practices you are choosing to use. If you're using them effectively, you won't have kids saying "Stop talking to me." If you're using them effectively, you won't have kids saying "Stop talking to me." Have I had that situation in the past? Yes, and when that did happen, I wasn't using restorative practices. I was probably using more punitive measures to get the kid to be compliant.

Wendy could also discuss how the small changes she made have greatly reduced the issues she must address in the classroom. She said that one of her most effective strategies, the candy jar, was not something that she learned in a professional development session, but something that she figured out on her own:

I learned that just giving them something for free makes them feel like, wow, I'm worthy. You know what I mean? ... They feel affirmed when you give them something, and I leave it here for free, meaning you can come get as much as you want. So just things like that, taking the control off and saying, "Hey, are kids probably taking more than they need to?" Yes, but am I making a big deal about it? No, because I know that some kids may have not eaten the night before, some kids are hungry, some kids may say, "Oh, I ... didn't brush my teeth," and you don't know what they're going through. So just leaving it there for them makes them feel like, okay, so I have this now. Let me do my part. Come on in here and get learning done and be respectful.

Having Wendy share her experience using those exact words could be very effective in a professional development session. If saying 'try a candy jar on your desk' was used as a strategy on a PowerPoint slide, it would be much less meaningful. Teachers need to hear *how* the jar

impacts students from a veteran who uses it. When professional development foregrounds lived examples like these, it moves beyond compliance training and becomes a catalyst for genuine mindset transformation.

While structured professional development provides a foundation for restorative understanding, much of teachers' most meaningful learning occurs through their everyday interactions with colleagues. Observation, storytelling, and modeling among peers extend professional learning beyond formal sessions and allow restorative principles to take root in authentic practice.

Learning from others is vital. During professional development at RISE Academy, teachers engaged in role-playing various student-teacher conversations. These activities were somewhat useful, but I think the real value came from experienced teachers sharing their own stories. Training for restorative practice should focus more on specifics rather than general ideas. Teachers need to see examples of how different conversations addressing similar issues happen. Everyone handles problems differently, but if the outcome is successfully restorative, the specific methods do not matter as much.

Having taught in a co-teaching setting for 15 years, I have found that most strategies I rely on come from observing colleagues. However, as interviews showed, many successful teachers were not always aware of the specific techniques they used. They tended to see their actions as just "conversations" or "building relationships," which were terms too broad to be useful in a practical sense. New teachers learning restorative practices need to see and hear concrete examples of how successful teachers deal with daily classroom situations to prevent behavioral issues and handle them when they occur. A diverse group of teachers is crucial to offer a wide range of strategies. For example, some teachers might not feel comfortable using

humor to build rapport and calm tense situations, but they might find that providing snacks and modeling polite exchanges is effective.

Integrating Teacher Reflection, Administrative Clarity, and Gradual Implementation for Sustainable Restorative Change. Teachers should be encouraged to share examples of restorative approaches they already use, even informally, and to explain why these strategies are effective. This process not only validates current practices but also highlights the continuum between traditional and restorative approaches, helping teachers recognize that they may already be engaging in restorative behaviors (Morrison et al., 2005). Alongside strategy sharing, training must provide teachers with a detailed overview of available services and support resources. For instance, if administrators seek to reduce in-school and out-of-school suspensions by limiting disciplinary referrals, teachers must know what alternatives exist when a student's behavior becomes unmanageable in the classroom. Without this type of clear guidance, teachers may perceive restorative implementation as a loss of authority (Gregory et al., 2016).

To address these concerns, administration should clearly explain how consequences will be combined with restorative measures. Restorative practice does not eliminate accountability; instead, it redefines it to emphasize relationship repair and community responsibility (Wachtel, 2016). Consequences should stay part of the disciplinary system, although they might be less frequent or severe as restorative methods are adopted. Clearly communicating when and how consequences will be applied is crucial for building teacher confidence and preventing more disruptive behavior from students.

Implementing restorative practices should be done gradually and thoughtfully. It can be tempting to make immediate sweeping changes, because many stakeholders share Leo's point of view when he said, "I do believe in the fierce urgency of the moment, and I think that it

[restorative practice implementation] was definitely overdue.” However, a phased rollout that is well communicated and consistent can help reduce uncertainty, increase teacher support, and lay out the groundwork for lasting cultural change across the school system (Payne & Welch, 2015). Lastly, professional development should be ongoing and adjusted based on teachers’ feedback and collaboration. It should be focused on providing many options that allow them to figure out what works best for them, because it will not be the same for everyone. Leaders must be open to negative feedback and be solution-minded (Patuawa et al., 2023).

Theoretical Implications

This study shows that restorative practices represent a multifaceted and dynamic process rather than a single, easily defined set of actions or checklist of tasks. They also, contrary to some beliefs, do not always involve negative behavior. They are implemented with the assumption that all students come to school with some sort of trauma, whether immediate or past, and with the idea that teachers can help ease and/or heal that trauma through the learning environment they create and the resources at their disposal. Restorative practices are largely about relationships. Creating and maintaining those relationships by making students feel safe, comfortable, and valued is a foundational aspect of restorative practices. If all teachers did that, there would be fewer harmful instances to restore.

Methodological Implications

If this study were to be repeated, I would recommend beginning with observations and analyzing that data first to help direct more specific interview questions. Doing so in this study would have provided more detailed findings regarding conversational strategies that teachers use in their restorative interactions. For example, if I were asked about a conversation strategy that I use often to make students feel safe and welcome, it would be using terms of endearment. I greet

students by their names to make them feel seen, but I also tack on a “How are you today, babe?” quite often. By doing so, students get used to me using terms of endearment, and it really helps during redirection. Saying, “Michael, I need you to stay focused, babe,” comes off much gentler than it would without the term of endearment and is almost always met with compliance.

However, I realize that there are plenty of teachers who would not feel comfortable using that strategy, which is why it is important to build a repository of strategies from which teachers can choose.

It would also be valuable to explore potential correlations between teachers’ educational mindsets or ideologies and their attitudes toward or use of restorative practices. Measures such as self-efficacy, pupil control ideology, or other indicators of teacher disposition could provide meaningful insights. Findings from such analyses could inform more targeted and scaffolded professional development aligned with the recommendations of this study.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include a relatively small sample size and the unique context of an alternative school setting. While the alternative school provided a concentrated and data-rich environment for observing teachers using restorative practices, the specificity of this context raises questions about the generalizability to traditional school settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). From a qualitative standpoint, however, the focus is more on transferability and whether the insights gained can be meaningfully applied to similar contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, the research methods may have benefited from a staggered design in which observations were analyzed more fully prior to conducting interviews. Such sequencing could have allowed emerging insights from the observational phase to inform the development of more targeted interview questions, thereby deepening the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Another limitation lies in the high level of institutional support for restorative practices at the study site. The school and its administration had committed substantial resources to restorative practice implementation, which may not reflect the realities of other schools with fewer supports. Furthermore, the researcher's dual role as both participant and investigator introduces the potential for bias in data interpretation. Although reflexive practices and systematic analysis were employed to mitigate this concern, researcher involvement inevitably shapes both data collection and interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, acknowledging the potential influence of positionality and subjectivity when evaluating the findings is essential.

Recommendation for Future Research

Through experience, veteran teachers become highly skilled at having conversations and often no longer view them as exceptional or innovative. Over time, the practice feels automatic. However, that conversational ability is not inherent in some teachers, and those who are expected to conduct themselves restoratively need to have some specific strategies to keep in their restorative toolbox. Had I thoroughly analyzed my observation data prior to conducting teacher interviews, I would have tailored my questions more toward the specific conversational strategies teachers used to de-escalate situations and manage student behavior. If I had asked them to provide examples of recent restorative conversations they had conducted, I might have been able to extract more strategies to mention in this study. Gathering a database of conversational strategies that can work in a restorative capacity would provide teachers with numerous directions to take when practicing restorative interventions. I think further research into those conversational strategies would yield highly beneficial information for developers of restorative practice training. An ultimately beneficial tool would be a comprehensive restorative

practice playbook, a resource that goes beyond written guidelines or slide decks by incorporating testimonial videos from teachers who discuss how they put restorative approaches into action. These authentic narratives would make restorative practice training more engaging, relatable, practical, and credible.

Summary

The findings of this study show that teachers at RISE Academy experienced the transition from punitive to restorative practices in ways that were shaped by their beliefs, instructional demands, sense of self-efficacy, and the level of support provided by school leadership. Teachers relied most often on restorative conversations and relationship-based interactions, yet they also described the limits of those strategies when working in a high needs environment. Their perceptions of restorative practices ranged from confidence and openness to skepticism and uncertainty, which reflected both their instructional identities and their prior experience with punitive systems. Survey results supported these patterns by showing that disciplinary efficacy was the area most closely related to comfort with restorative practices, although not at a statistically significant level. Teachers also identified practical challenges during the transition, including time limitations, an uneven understanding of restorative concepts, and an initial overcorrection away from firm behavioral expectations. Together, these insights reveal that restorative practices are most effective when teachers receive differentiated training, structured administrative support, and opportunities to build skills that align with their classroom realities. These findings offer direction for leaders who want restorative practices to take root in sustainable and meaningful ways within alternative school settings.

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Appendix A:
Recruitment Email

Subject: Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

Dear [Recipient],

I hope this message finds you well.

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Cindy Long, a doctoral candidate at Valdosta State University. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of alternative school teachers who implement restorative practices.

Before deciding whether to participate, please take a moment to review the attached informed consent document. It provides detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and your rights as a participant. There are no known risks or anticipated discomforts associated with participation. Your responses will remain completely anonymous—no identifying information will be collected, and pseudonyms and case numbers will be used to ensure confidentiality.

If you choose to participate, please sign and return the consent form to me. Once received, I will contact you to schedule a 45–60 minute interview at a time that is convenient for you.

Thank you for considering this invitation and for the valuable work you do with students every day. Your insights and experiences are essential to understanding how restorative practices are implemented in alternative school settings.

Warm regards,

Cindy Long
Doctoral Candidate, Valdosta State University

Appendix B:

IRB Approval

DocuSign Envelope ID: 493C8B07-3DD7-4307-BA92-C79C3196B628



Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

Protocol Number: 04590-2025

Responsible Researcher(s): Cindy Long

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Taralynn Hartsell

Dissertation Research Member: Dr. Jiyoung Jung

Project Title: *Changing It Up: Exploring the Lives of Alternative School Teachers Who Implement Restorative Practices.*

Institutional Review Board Determination:

This research protocol is exempt from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under 45 CFR 46.101(b) of the federal regulations, category 2. If the nature of the research changes such that exemption criteria no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research study.

Comments:

- *Your research study may begin at the following approved research locations: Gwinnett Intervention Education Center, East (03.18.2025).*
 - *The IRB protocol number (04590-2025) must be included at the bottom/end of consent, correspondence, and recruitment documents.*
 - *Pseudonym lists must be maintained in a separate, secure file from corresponding data.*
 - *According to the exempt protocol guidelines, interview sessions may be recorded to create an accurate transcript. However, it's important to note that the guidelines strictly prohibit the collection, storage, and sharing of these recordings. Therefore, it is imperative that once the transcript is created, the recorded interview session must be deleted immediately from all recording and storage devices used.*
 - *To comply with consent guidelines, audio recordings must capture the researcher reading the consent statement aloud, ensuring the participant's understanding and willingness to participate. The transcript must document the researcher's reading of the consent statement and the participants' consent.*
 - *Upon completion of the research study, all data (e.g., data, pseudonym/email lists, field notes, transcripts, etc.) must be securely maintained (e.g., locked file cabinet, password-protected computer, etc.) and accessible only by the researcher for a minimum of 3 years. At the end of the required time, collected data must be permanently destroyed.*
- Proposed modifications must be submitted to the IRB Administrator at tmwright@valdosta.edu for review and approval before implementation is permitted.*

Elizabeth W. Olphie

03.18.2025

Elizabeth W. Olphie, IRB Administrator

Date

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.

Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.

Revised: 06.02.16

Appendix C:

Research Site Approval Letter



(Revised 9/25/2023)

LOCAL SCHOOL RESEARCH REQUEST FORM

Name of School: Gwinnett Intervention Education Center, East

Name of Researcher: Cindy Long

Position or Grade: teacher

A. Research Project

a. Title: Changing It Up: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Alternative School Teachers Who Implement Restorative Practices

b. Statement of Problem and research question: A qualitative methodology, with a case study design, will be utilized to (1.) explore the experiences of the alternative school teachers who are immersed in an environment saturated with restorative practices and (2.) to understand how those teachers experienced the transition from a punitive to a restorative environment.

c. Subjects or population for the study: teachers at GIVE East

d. Reason for doing this research:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Graduate Study at <u>Valdosta State</u> University/College |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Publication/Presentation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please specify) _____ |

e. Dates research will be conducted: 03/01/25 to 05/25/2025

B. All research and researchers must a) Protect the rights and welfare of all human subjects, b) Inform students and/or parents that they have the right not to participate in the study, c) Adhere to board policies and applicable laws which govern the privacy and confidentiality of students records. Researchers requesting to conduct research across our school district must complete a GCPS Research Proposal to be reviewed by the Gwinnett IRB. Please visit our [GCPS Research, Evaluation, and Analytics website](#) for details and instructions.

C. This form must be completed by school employees requesting to conduct research only at the school where they work. Co-researchers participating in this request must also be employed at the same school as the researcher. **Principals ONLY need to approve/sign Local School Research Requests from their school employees.**

D. This form may also be completed by principals requesting to conduct research only at the school where they work. The assistant superintendent assigned to the principal must approve/sign the request form.

E. A copy of all Local School Research Requests must be forwarded to the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Analytics - ISC for our files. Please send via the information below.

| |
|--|
| Via Email: Dr. Shanna Ricketts, Shanna.Ricketts@gcpsk12.org & Ms. Irma McClarity, Irma.McClarity@gcpsk12.org |
|--|


Principal's Signature

8/29/24
Date of Approval

Assistant Supt. Signature (only if principal is the researcher)

Date of Approval

Appendix D:

Teacher Interview Protocol

The interview will be held individually either in a private office or in the interviewee's classroom. Researcher will record the interview, taking notes along the way. Researcher will schedule interviews after students have left for the day or during a digital learning day to ensure minimal outside distractions.

Interviewer: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This is the **Research Statement** I have to read to you. [Reads the Research Statement]. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

Participant: No. (If yes, respond to the question/concern.)

Interviewer: Before we start, I would like you to complete this survey on self-efficacy. This helps me to better understand how you feel about many things that are going on in this school. You don't need to write your name, but I will mark this only to associate the information with your interview. [Presents the Survey and give the participant time to complete. Collect the Survey. Mark only participant ID for anonymity]

Interviewer: Great. Now I am going to start the recording for some questions. [Starts the audio recording. And asks the following questions.]

1. On a scale from 1 – 10, with 1 not at all and 10 being completely, how comfortable are you using restorative practices?
2. In your own words, tell me what restorative practices are.
 - a. What does it mean to you personally, if anything?
 - b. How did you first learn about the concept?
3. Which part of the restorative practices do you think are "effective" or "ineffective," or both? Why?
4. Can you give me examples of restorative strategies you often use in your classroom? Why?
5. Can you give me examples of restorative strategies do you rarely, if ever, use? Why?
6. Over the past 5 years, this school has been in the process of switching from a punitive to a restorative environment. Let's talk about some successes and failures. This will require you to think back over the last few years. Keep in mind that what you share in this meeting will be anonymized and will not be shared with others in this school.
 - a. What elements of the changeover process do you think have been done well? Why?
 - b. What do you think should have been done differently? Why?
 - c. From your perspective, what has been the most challenging part of switching from a punitive to a restorative environment?

Thanks for your thoughtful responses to those questions. In this final part of the interview, I'm going to present you with a few scenarios and get you to answer a couple of questions about each of them.

1. Academic Scenario:

You are administering a test in class and one of your students has her head down, sleeping. When you wake her and quietly ask why she isn't taking her test, she says her baby sister was sick last night and she had to stay up and take care of her because her mom works the night shift.

1. How would you handle this if it actually happened in your room?
2. Would you consider this to be a restorative response to the behavior?
 - If yes, please explain why.
 - If no, please explain why you are using a non-restorative way.

2. Behavioral Scenario:

You have a student who is being defiant and every time you give him a directive, he says "Stop talking to me."

1. How would you handle this if it actually happened in your room?
2. Would you consider this to be a restorative response to the behavior?
 - If yes, please explain why.
 - If no, please explain why you are using a non-restorative way.

3. Social-emotional Scenario:

You have a student who comes in crying first thing in the morning. When you ask her what's wrong, she says some girls have been bullying her on social media.

1. How would you handle this if it actually happened in your room?
2. Would you consider this to be a restorative response to the behavior?
 - If yes, please explain why.
 - If no, please explain why you are using a non-restorative way.

Interviewer: Thank you for your time.

Appendix E:

Teacher Self-Efficacy Survey (TSES)

Bandura Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale

Directions: This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities. Please indicate your opinions about each of the statements below by circling the appropriate number. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will not be identified by name.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--------------|---|------------------|---|---------------------|---|------------------|---|-------------------|
| Efficacy to Influence Decision Making | | | | | | | | | |
| How much can you influence the decisions that are made in the school? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you express your views freely on important school matters? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| Efficacy to Influence School Resources | | | | | | | | | |
| How much can you do to get the instructional materials and equipment you need? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| Instructional Self-Efficacy | | | | | | | | | |
| How much can you do to influence the class sizes in your school? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to promote learning when there is lack of support from the home? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to keep students on task on difficult assignments? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to increase students' memory of what they have been taught in previous lessons? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to get students to work together? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to overcome the influence of adverse community conditions on students' learning? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to get children to do their homework? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| Disciplinary Self-Efficacy | | | | | | | | | |
| How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to prevent problem behavior on school grounds? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |

| Efficacy to Enlist Parental Involvement | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--------------|---|------------------|---|---------------------|---|------------------|---|-------------------|
| How much can you do to get parents to become involved in school activities? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you assist parents in helping their children do well in school? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to make parents feel comfortable coming to school? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| Efficacy to Enlist Community Involvement | | | | | | | | | |
| How much can you do to get community groups involved in working with the schools? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to get churches involved in working with the school? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to get businesses involved in working with the school? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to get local colleges and universities involved in working with the school? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| Efficacy to Create a Positive School Climate | | | | | | | | | |
| How much can you do to make the school a safe place? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to make students enjoy coming to school? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to get students to trust teachers? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you help other teachers with their teaching skills? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to enhance collaboration between teachers and the administration to make the school run effectively? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to reduce school dropout? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to reduce school absenteeism? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |
| How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork? | 1 Nothing | 2 | 3 Very Little | 4 | 5 Some Influence | 6 | 7 Quite a Bit | 8 | 9 A Great Deal |

