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The Implementation of Restorative Justice Practices: An Exploration into Administrators' Experiences

Sacha Starr Helling-Christy
Seattle Pacific University

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

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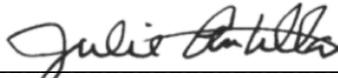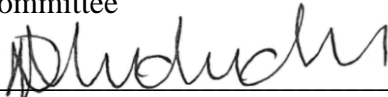Of the requirements for the degree of

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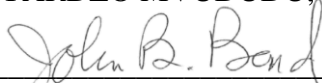
Seattle Pacific University

Approved by _____

JULIE ANTILLA, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Chairperson, Dissertation
Committee

_____

NYARDZO MVUDUDU, Ph.D., Dean of Doctoral Programs

_____

JOHN BOND, Ph.D., Doctoral Faculty

Program Authorized to Offer Degree ___Seattle Pacific University_____

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Dedication Page

I dedicate this writing, first and foremost, to my husband, Luke, and to our four children: Alyana, River, Cyprus, and Vienna.

When Luke and I met as undergrads, we were young, foolish dreamers who saw the world as our oyster. We're not so young anymore, but we are still dreamers, and we do still enjoy this big, beautiful world.

When I told Luke shortly after returning to school to earn my principal certificate, "I've always wanted to earn my doctorate, so since I'm in school anyway, I may as well do it," naturally, Luke supported that dream, and many times during this years-long project, he gave me the confidence to keep going. I remember once when I was particularly overwhelmed with classes, my full-time job, and raising our children, I told Luke that I was going to stop my program for a while and maybe continue when all of the kids were grown. He said "what kind of message would that send to our children? That their mom quit when times got tough and gave up on her dream?" Needless to say, I didn't quit; I kept working; and I worked to make this dream a reality.

And to you kids . . . it's hard to explain the excitement you showed me (almost:) every step of the way, from when I passed my Comps exams to when I lost (and then found) the thumb drive that holds all of my dissertation work, to when I graduated . . . you are unbelievable in your support and enthusiasm for me. I am so proud to be raising such great people.

Luke, Alyana, River, Cyprus, and Vienna—you are the best team of dreamers, adventurers, learners, and teachers I know. I am so incredibly grateful for each of you.

Acknowledgements Page

I am grateful for the many people who have been a part of this journey. Thank you to Dr. Bond who, when I was earning my principal certificate, encouraged my interest in restorative justice practices and who was an enthusiastic and reflective member of my committee. Thank you to Dr. Mvududu who, while I struggled to narrow my lofty ideas, worked with me to define a solid focus for my dissertation and who remained on my committee when I shifted from a quantitative to a qualitative study (due to in-person school closures during the Covid pandemic). Also, thank you Dr. Antilla for not only chairing my committee, but for working with me for years, offering many suggestions for further readings into qualitative research, and helping me transition and refine my study's focus. I enjoyed our weekly Zoom sessions together as you challenged me to grow as a qualitative researcher.

I also would like to thank the principals who dedicated their time and energy to participate in this study. Not only did your participation make this idea a reality for me, but the time you dedicated to me showed me just how passionate you are about making positive change for students. I hope your experiences and ideas inspire others, because they truly inspire me.

Additionally, thank you friends and family who supported me during this process, believing in me, cheering for me, and making me feel like I was moving mountains. Thank you to my village who picked up, dropped off, and took care of my kids during my many late nights and weekends studying or attending classes. Thank you also to all of my students, past and present, who inspire me on a regular basis, and who make me want to be a better teacher. Lastly, I have to especially thank the specific senior I had in class during the 2016-2017 school year who, when I was talking to this class about the prospect of starting my doctoral journey, smiled and said, "I can see you doing that," from then on calling me "pre-PhD HC." Thanks for believing in me, kid!

Kindly, HC, PhD

Abstract

In this paper, transformative learning theory and restorative justice practices, as well as the empirical research done to link theory to practice, are explored. As Mezirow (2018) stated, transformative learning is "the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference (mindsets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives)—sets of assumption and expectation—to make them more inclusive, . . . open, reflective and emotionally able to change" (p. 116). In other words, people's life experiences help shape their opinions and worldviews, and most people are resistant to change these ideas the more solidly they are planted in one's minds as being correct. However, due to the reality of classrooms today coupled with recent legislation regarding school suspensions, adults within schools are being required to transform their ideas about student behavior, and more specifically, "misbehavior," as well as the appropriate response to these behaviors. One shift occurring locally as well as internationally is from exclusionary discipline practices to restorative justice practices. This shift, like many shifts, can prove to be challenging; therefore, this study focuses on the implementation of restorative justice practices in schools. Specifically, this study seeks to understand the following questions: 1) How do school administrators implement restorative justice practices? 2) How do administrators create buy-in by staff for adopting restorative justice practices? 3) What transformative experiences do staff undergo in the shift from exclusionary to restorative practices? This study consists of semi-structured interviews of five administrators who have implemented restorative justice practices in their schools. Additionally, in the years since the intentional implementation of restorative justice practices, schools are conducting and publishing impact studies. Those studies, focusing on the implementation process, are summarized in Chapter 2.

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

Background

At the time of this writing, achieving equity in schools is of the utmost importance across the nation. Doing this, however, requires systemic change, so the question that school leaders are now asking is: How do we effectively make change? De jure change—changing practices and laws—happens every day. But how do we make *real* change—de facto change—the changing of hearts and minds? Afterall, no real change happens if people do not believe in it, so how do leaders convince others to buy into changed practices? How do they change hearts and minds?

Every person who enters a classroom enters with self-held beliefs based on the course of their lives as well as their diverse individual experiences. These beliefs shape their frames of reference and affect how individuals view the world and each other. Teachers are no exception to this. As do their students, teachers enter a classroom with assumptions about how the world is and should be, sometimes determining how they view and treat their students. Because these assumptions can limit one's perspective, learning how to transform one's beliefs can help teachers better understand, relate to, and instruct their students.

The need for teachers to critically evaluate their worldviews has become increasingly apparent due to the changing experiences and demographics of students. Despite those student demographic changes, Hinchey (2008) wrote that teacher demographics are shockingly homogenous, and that their similar backgrounds and experiences contribute to similar expectations about schooling, students, and student behavior. However, because many of their students come from racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups that are different from their teachers, their backgrounds and experiences also differ, which means that students likely "bring different assumptions, expectations, and norms to the classroom" (Hinchey, 2008, p. 24). These

different ideas about schooling and behavior norms may cause conflict between teacher and student.

For example, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), during the 2017-2018 school year, 79% of schoolteachers were White, while 7% were Black, 9% were Latino, and 2% were Asian. However, during that same school year, fewer than 50% of students identified as White, and the NCES estimated that 46% of students would identify as White during the 2020-2021 school year, a percentage that is expected to decrease yearly. On the other hand, the NCES estimated that during the 2020-2021 school year, 28% of students would identify as Latino, and 15% would identify as Black, and these percentages are expected to continue to rise yearly (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Derue (2013) further explained that, according to census data, by 2050, no racial or ethnic group will hold "majority" status, as almost half of all children under five are currently considered to be "minorities."

Additionally, according to the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (2021), during the 2019-2020 school year, in Washington State, 86.8% of teachers were White, while .7% were American Indian Alaskan Native; 2.8% were Asian; 1.5% were Black/ African American; 5.2% were Latino/ Hispanic; .3% were Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander; 1.7% were two or more races; and 1% did not provide their race or ethnicity. During the 2020-2021 school year, student demographics were much different. Of all students, 50.1% were White; 1.3% were American Indian/ Alaskan Native; 8.5% were Asian; 4.7% were Black/ African American; 25.2% were Latino/ Hispanic; 1.3% were Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander; and 8.9% were two or more races (Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction). The following graph (Figure 1.1) illustrates trends regarding race and ethnicity by school year in Washington state.

Figure 1.1

Student Race and Ethnicity by School Year
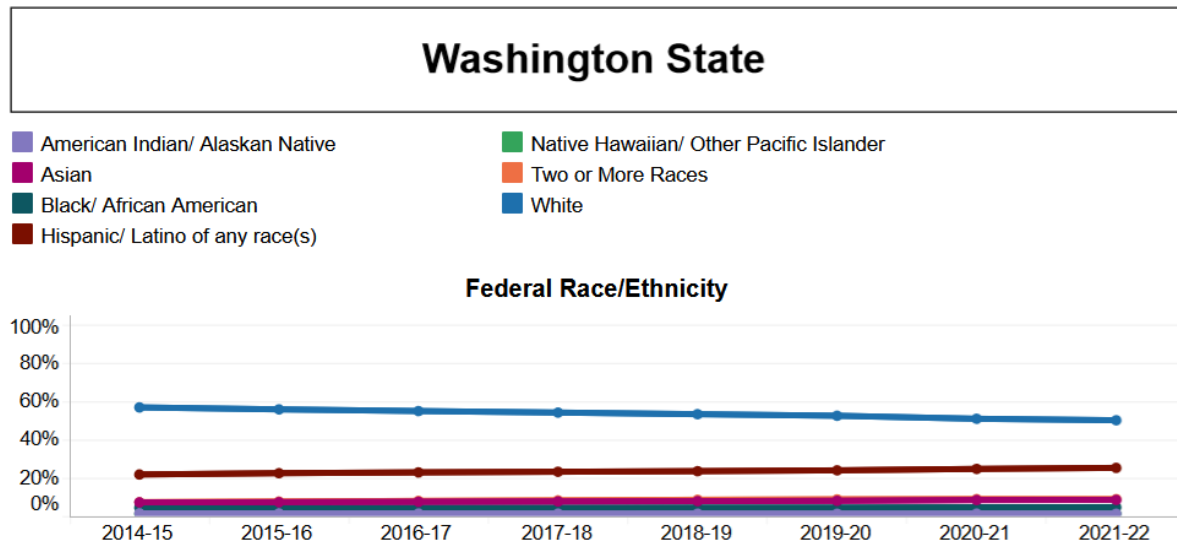
Note: Reprinted from *the Washington State Report Card,* by the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (2021)

Having mismatched demographics between teachers and students, alone, is not necessarily problematic. However, according to Hinchey (2008), "we act based on what we believe, and what we believe depends in large part upon evidence drawn from our own life experiences" (p. 23). When what we believe to be normal conflicts with the ideas of others, this can cause conflict, and teachers who build their classroom instruction, practices, and behavior expectations based on their own experiences and frames of reference alone, will likely create an atmosphere that conflicts with that of many of their students. Because past experiences and cultural practices influence ideas about what is right and wrong, when teachers' beliefs differ from those of their students, those students with differing beliefs are more likely to experience

discipline for acting in ways that the teacher may find to be "disobedient" or "disrespectful," with little shared understanding about what those terms mean.

This is especially problematic because these exclusionary discipline practices disproportionately affect Black and Brown students and are said to contribute to the "school to prison pipeline," which asserts that students who are suspended and expelled from school are essentially pushed out of school (Fabelo et al., 2011). Feeling disenfranchised and disengaged, these students are more likely to drop out of school or not graduate on time, ending up in the criminal justice system (Gregory et al., 2014). Thus, policies that exclude them from school are the same policies that push these students into prison.

Though the demographic differences between teachers and students are not new, attention to these differences and the impetus for making change are more recent. In 2014, the Obama Administration launched the Supportive School Discipline Initiative, which called on schools to reform their zero tolerance policies toward discipline (U.S. Department of Education). These discipline policies, which stem from zero tolerance toward drugs policies, dictate punishments for behaviors that have yet to occur, requiring that schools have zero tolerance for certain behavior infractions regardless of context. Although some school staff members support school policies that remove students who exhibit misbehaviors, the zero tolerance policies have proven to disproportionately affect Black and Brown boys, suspending them and removing them from an academic atmosphere at much higher rates (Lustick, 2017). For example, according to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (2021), during the 2018-2019 school year, in Washington state, 8.3% of Black students were suspended from school, compared to 3.4% of White students and 1.1% of Asian (non-Pacific Islander) students. Similarly, the Washington State Legislature passed House Bill 1571 in 2015, which, in an attempt to "close the educational

opportunity gap," will "develop standard definitions for causes of student disciplinary actions taken at the discretion of the school district" and will also "develop data collection standards for disciplinary actions that are discretionary and for disciplinary actions that result in the exclusion of a student from school" (Washington State Appropriations, 2016). This House Bill affected schools in Washington State with little warning, challenging the practices that teachers and administrators had been using with relative comfort for years.

In this shift away from suspensions and punitive disciplinary practices, some districts have sought to implement restorative justice practices in their schools. According to Gregory et al. (2016), restorative justice practices bring together those who are affected by an infraction to discuss how the action affected them, as well as how to repair harm done by that action. The focus is on giving voice to all affected, and on mending relationships through collaborative action. Gregory et al. (2016) explain that "fundamentally, RJ's core underlying value is respect" and that its roots are from a "range of diverse cultures (e.g., American Indian, Māori) and religious traditions (e.g., Judaism)" (pp. 327-328). Rather than remove students from the classroom in a punitive and exclusionary way (which has nearly no preventative effect), restorative justice practices seek to engage, rather than exclude, students.

Problem Statement

School districts, in their push to implement restorative justice practices, are experiencing varying degrees of effectiveness, and studies suggest that the main determinant of fidelity of implementation is teacher support for these practices (Pane et al., 2014). However, a shift in practices is rarely effective without a shift in mindset, which can potentially cause disequilibrium for teachers. As Hinchey (2008) argued, "many teachers, for example, are privileged themselves, and they need first to develop an awareness of their own privilege, a difficult and threatening

undertaking" (p. 21). Because of this, "Some discomfort for those who currently enjoy a variety of privileges is inevitable, . . . so resistance is to be expected" (p. 15). This shift toward restorative justice practices in schools requires a degree of transformative learning on the part of schoolteachers and administrators, as well as students and their families. Without a transformative learning experience, adults in schools may not buy-in to restorative justice practices, and without staff buy-in, restorative justice will not be implemented effectively.

Theoretical Construct: Transformative Learning Theory

This study seeks to understand how change is made within schools, not just at the policy and procedural levels, but within the mindsets and beliefs of the adults who work within those schools. Because change is much more difficult to attain at this "normative" level, the theory that guides this study is transformative learning theory.

What is Transformative Learning Theory?

Mezirow (2018) defines transformative learning as the process by which a person shifts or "transforms" their frames of reference, assumptions, and expectations to make them more inclusive and capable of change. These frames of reference include one's mindsets, perspectives, and habits of mind, and by expanding these frames, one is more likely to be guided by beliefs and opinions that consider the experiences and perspectives of others. More recently, transformative learning theory has been described as a "teaching approach based on promoting change and challenging learners" (Schnepfleitner & Ferreira, 2021, p. 39) to "critically question and assess the integrity of their deeply held assumptions about how they relate to the world around them" (Mezirow & Taylor, 2011, p. xi).

Considered the pioneer of transformative learning, Mezirow's theory focuses on adults' ability to change in fundamental ways, and it evolved from Mezirow's "white paper," which

reported the results of a study about women re-entering the work force or beginning community college after a hiatus. Published in 1978, Mezirow's grounded theory study coined the term "perspective transformation," which explained the changes that some of these adult women experienced during this re-entry (Hoggan, 2016; Mezirow, 1978b). During this study, Mezirow (1978b) reported that the women's return to school and the workforce often resulted in "consciousness raising," and that the process of perspective transformation consisted of three vital elements: an individual experience (often called a disorienting dilemma), critical reflection, and voluntary discourse. Specifically, Mezirow (1978b) wrote that this perspective transformation was a result of the emancipatory process that these women underwent as their new experiences were "assimilated and transformed by [their] past experiences" (p. 6), which caused them to critically reflect on their internalized assumptions about their own gender roles. Also vital to this process was understanding the perspectives of others and critically evaluating assumptions related to roles and beliefs (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). As a result of this study, Mezirow (1978b) identified the following ten steps commonly experienced by women during their "perspective transformation." These steps can be seen in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2

Mezirow's Ten Phases of Transformative Learning

Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b) Ten Phases of Transformative Learning	
Phase 1	A disorienting dilemma
Phase 2	A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
Phase 3	A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
Phase 4	Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
Phase 5	Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
Phase 6	Planning of a course of action
Phase 7	Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
Phase 8	Provisional trying of new roles
Phase 9	Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
Phase 10	A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective

Note: The ten phases of transformative learning. Reprinted from "The Evolution of John Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory," by Kitchenham, 2008, *Journal of Transformative Education 6*(104).

Over the years, Mezirow continuously refined and renamed this concept, later known as "transformation theory" and now "transformative learning theory," but the focus remains on the "transformative potential of learning," rather than on merely acquiring skills and knowledge (Haggen, 2016). The process of transformative learning often begins with what has been called a "disorienting dilemma," a "powerful human catalyst" or a "forceful argument" that shakes a person and forces them to reconsider their ideas and their place in the world (Christie et al., 2015, p. 11). The catalyst for this transformation, however, need not be so sudden. It could fall on either end of the spectrum; it could be a life-changing event that completely rattles a person's understanding of themselves and the world around them, or it could be something more subtle,

such as a collection of insights that gradually change a person's point of view (Schnepfleitner & Ferreira, 2021).

After feeling that initial discomfort, a person moves through the process of critical self-reflection, whereby they consider the source and consequences of their beliefs and assumptions, as well as the beliefs and assumptions of others (Mezirow, 2018). This critical self-reflection is then followed by fully engaging in discourse with others to understand one another's perspectives, because at its core, transformative learning is a metacognitive process by which people reconsider the reasons for their sometimes-problematic perspectives (Mezirow, 1978a). According to Christie et al. (2015), this discourse must be rational, and it cannot be forced. Rather, it demands truth; it must remain free of coercion and self-deception; it must remain objective so one can weigh arguments and evidence effectively; it must remain open to opposing points of view; it must ensure equal participation; and it must consist of critical reflection where participants are willing to accept different viewpoints (Christie et al., 2015).

Mezirow (1978a) further explains that "our expectations powerfully affect how we construe experience," (p. 119), and that "[i]nfluences like power, ideology, race, class and gender differences and other interests often pertain and are important factors" (p. 119) However, with critical reflection, these expectations and influences can be assessed rationally, and change can be made when necessary. In this sense, transformative learning theory requires one to first, think critically about one's perspectives, and second, to act to change those perspectives.

Further, Stephen Brookfield (1991) wrote that for an experience to be truly transformative and a true act of critical reflection, the person "must engage in some sort of power analysis of the situation or context in which the learning is happening" (p. 121). One must also try to identify their own assumptions and consider how those assumptions may harm or serve

others, while also analyzing the power structures that create and enforce those assumptions. An analysis of these "hegemonic assumptions" will encourage one who engages in this critical self-reflection to recognize how their power and dominance stem from historical and present-day policies and institutions that continue to maintain the status quo.

In this sense, transformative learning requires a deep shift not only in one's understanding of power structures, but also in how one thinks, feels, and acts. O'Sullivan et al. (2002) explain that this is akin to "a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our being in the world," and that "such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and the natural world; [and] our understanding of the relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender" (p. 122). This type of shift is far from easy, as it requires authenticity and the willingness to view others' perspectives. Ultimately, according to Christie et al. (2015),

> The aim of transformative learning is to help individuals challenge current assumptions as they act and, if they find them wanting, change them. This includes a mental shift as well as a behavioral one. The hope of transformative learning is that better individuals will build a better world (pp. 10-11).

Theoretical Underpinnings

Though Mezirow is credited with developing this theory, it is more likely a result of multiple theories related to a similar phenomenon: a change in how one sees themselves, the world, and one's relationships with others in that world. Figure 1.3 identifies some of the influences on Mezirow's transformative learning theory, though other influences likely exist.

Figure 1.3

Influences on Mezirow's Early Transformative Learning Theory

**The Influences on Mezirow's Early Transformative
Learning Theory and Its Related Facets**

Influence	Transformative learning facet
Kuhn's (1962) paradigm	• Perspective transformation • Frame of reference • Meaning perspective • Habit of mind
Freire's (1970) conscientization	• Disorienting dilemma • Critical self-reflection • Habit of mind
Habermas's (1971, 1984) domains of learning	• Learning processes • Perspective transformation • Meaning scheme • Meaning perspective

Note: The influences on Mezirow's early transformative learning theory and its related facets. Reprinted from "The Evolution of John Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory," by Kitchenham, 2008, *Journal of Transformative Education 6*(104).

Mezirow developed transformative learning theory during his "discovery-oriented" research, whereby he sought to understand the realities and experiences of others, rather than to prove an hypothesis. Because constructivist research is a meaning-making activity, it acknowledges the existence of various interpretations and constructions of reality, and it seeks to discover the realities of the participants involved (Merriam & Kim, 2012). It posits that what humans know, believe, value, and feel all depend on that person's context—their background, culture, and history—and that these are all able to transform (Mezirow, 2000). In this sense, Mezirow was likely influenced by the constructivists before him, including Piaget, Dewey, Bruner, and Vygotsky, who all argued that knowledge is never neutral, that it is personal and constructed in the minds of learners, and that it is affected by a learner's schema—their

environment, beliefs, and past experiences. Because of this, transformative learning theory asserts that a person's "taken for granted frames of reference are, in fact, capable of change" (Schnepfleitner & Ferreira, 2021, p. 39). Similarly, according to Mezirow (2000), "formulating more dependable beliefs about our experience, assessing their contexts, seeking informed agreement on their meaning and justification, and making decisions based on the resulting insights are central to the adult learning process" (p. 74).

Transformative learning theory also relates to humanism, Kuhn's (1962) theory about paradigms, Freire's (1970) ideas about "conscientization," Habermas (1971) critical theory, and Bruner's (2005) ideas about cultural psychology. For example, during the formation of his theory, humanism was popular as it related to adult education (Mezirow, 2000). This learning theory emphasized the idea that perceptions are centered in experience, and that the goal of education should be self-actualization, which is a result of growth and change. Thought of in this way, humanists believe in the best in each other and the need to support one another, and that in this supportive environment, self-actualization can occur as a result of searching for one's identity, critically questioning one's beliefs, participating in a disorienting dilemma, and being willing to change (Bélanger, 2011).

Kuhn's (1962) theory about paradigms also informed Mezirow's theory about transformative learning. During a study about the nature of science, Kuhn realized that a discrepancy existed between the beliefs of social and natural scientists regarding what constituted scientific inquiry. This led to Kuhn's theory about the significance of paradigms, which Kuhn defined as "universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners" (p. viii). Kuhn's concept of

paradigms likely became Mezirow's concept of "frames of reference," both which vary depending on one's background, education, belief system, and culture (Kitchenham, 2008).

Freire's (1970) concept of conscientization also influenced Mezirow's initial ideas about transformative learning theory. Like Mezirow, Freire worked with adult learners, teaching them literacy skills, which, he claimed, was a key to emancipation (Freire, 1970). In his work with impoverished villagers in South America, Freire facilitated critical reflection through dialogue (Baumgartner, 2012). His theory was based on the idea that traditional education relies on the "banking" method of instruction, where students passively receive information while teachers "deposit" it into their brains. This reliance on others for knowledge is the opposite of what Freire said education should enable students to do—develop a critical consciousness as they engage with and transform the world (Freire, 1970). Therefore, Freire argued that teachers should empower students by creating democratic classrooms where transformative relationships are formed.

This "conscientization," then, occurs through three levels of growth (Kitchenham, 2008). The first level, called "intransitive thought," is when a person feels out of control, similar to Mezirow's "disorienting dilemma." The second stage, "semitransitive," includes a person feeling a need for change, but not knowing how to enact that change without a leader to guide them. Then, at the highest level of this consciousness growth, called "critical transitivity," people think critically about what actions they can take, which becomes a catalyst for change. These stages echo Mezirow's stages of transformation, including a disorienting dilemma, critical analysis and reflection about one's assumptions, and then critical discourse with others (Kitchenham, 2008).

Freire's work focused on liberation through education. After all, Freire (1998) wrote that education is never a neutral act; rather, that all educational practices imply "a theoretical stance

on the educator's part" and that "the process of men's orientation in the world" involves "knowing through his praxis, by which man transforms reality" (p. 480). Mezirow himself stated that Freire "identif[ied] the development of critical consciousness as prerequisite for liberating personal and social action" (1978b, p. 103). In this sense, Freire's "critical consciousness" is similar to Mezirow's "critical reflection," whereby a person, through some experience or insight, reconsiders their past, their beliefs and frames of reference, and their place in the world.

Jurgen Habermas's critical theory also helped shape Mezirow's transformative learning theory. According to MacIsaac (1996), Habermas identified three different domains by which humans learn and generate knowledge, depending on what area is relevant to the learner: work knowledge, practical knowledge, and emancipatory knowledge. Specifically, emancipatory knowledge connects to transformative learning theory because of its focus on "self-knowledge" or "self-reflection," and the belief that one's background shapes how that person views themselves and their role in the world. Only through this critical self-awareness can emancipation occur because the insights gained through this process allow the person to recognize the correct reason for their problems. Ultimately, "knowledge is gained by self-emancipation through reflection, leading to a transformed consciousness or 'perspective transformation'" (MacIsaac, 1996).

Also influential to Mezirow was Jerome Bruner's ideas about cultural psychology, which Bruner (2005) stated is the study of "situated" mental health. Similar to the ideas of transformative learning theory, Bruner wrote that a person's mind is deeply impacted by their culture and context, and that to understand an individual mind, one must study where it is situated. Specifically, he stated that there are three simple ways culture affects mental functioning: The first is that it "shapes our conception of what can be taken as customary or

ordinary" (Bruner, 2005, p. 56). The second is that "it limits and shapes our conception of what is possible and creates means for limiting possibility," while the third is that "it provides us with means for relating the ordinary and the possible through narrative conventions" (Bruner, 2005, p. 56). He goes on to explain that one's mind cannot be separated from one's culture, and that every mind is a result of the culture in which it exists. These concepts relate to Mezirow's "frames of reference," acknowledging the fact that every person views every situation based on his or her frame of reference—their background, beliefs, and culture. In this sense, a person's "mind" or mindset exists intricately bound to the time and place where it is situated.

Why Transformative Learning Theory Matters

The importance of this becomes clear when considering the aforementioned demographics of teachers and students. Because teachers often serve as the gatekeepers to their own classroom, and thus, the knowledge shared within, removing a student from the classroom through exclusionary discipline prevents that student from gaining the skills and knowledge taught in that classroom. Thus, teachers also become the gatekeepers to future opportunities for students. If teachers and students do not share similar frames of reference—experiences, beliefs, and mindsets—then their understandings about right and wrong, as well as about the world around them, can be misaligned. In this regard, a student whose background and beliefs differ from their teachers' may face more exclusionary discipline.

Therefore, a shift from exclusionary to restorative justice practices in schools not only requires a shift in practices and policies, but more importantly, it requires a shift in beliefs. Engaging school staff in a transformative learning experience may help shift their beliefs and their frames of reference to make them more inclusive and open to change.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of this study is to discover the lived experiences of administrators who have worked to enact change in their schools, specifically the transition from exclusionary (also called "punitive" or "traditional") discipline practices to restorative justice practices (also called "restorative practices" or "RJ"). Current research suggests that implementation is dependent upon teachers' support for these practices (Liberman & Katz, 2017; Sumner, et al., 2010; Pane et al., 2014).; therefore, experiencing a transformative experience may affect teachers' level of support for restorative justice practices.

This study will contribute to educational research in multiple ways. Firstly, as more schools seek to implement restorative justice practices in their schools, the effectiveness of that implementation has been inconsistent. Therefore, this study will seek to understand the experience of administrators as they work to implement restorative justice practices effectively. Additionally, the studies included in Chapter 2 posit that a teacher's mindset strongly impacts the fidelity of implementation of restorative justice practices; therefore, before schools can effectively transition their practices from exclusionary to restorative, teachers must buy into and understand the need for the change. In this regard, this study will seek to understand how administrators work with school staff to create a shared belief about the need for change. Lastly, because the studies in Chapter 2 suggest that implementation of restorative justice practices is dependent upon teacher support for these practices, full implementation relies on a shift in teachers' mindsets about discipline. Therefore, research regarding transformative learning theory and transformative experiences helps explain how this shift in mindset can be accomplished.

This study does not focus on the effectiveness of restorative justice practices because that effectiveness varies by school, and research exists in that regard. Rather, this study focuses on

the *how* of implementation—how administrators enact change in their schools and how they establish the *why* with their staff. As the scholarly literature in Chapter 2 indicates, these are the necessary first steps to effective implementation.

Research Questions

The questions this study seeks to answer regard how change is made at the school level regarding beliefs and practices. As schools try to remediate countless years of damage done by practices rooted in structural racism, how do they shift from the way things have always been done—from the traditional and punitive—to practices that seek to heal harm—that are restorative and just.

This study seeks to understand the following questions. The first research question is: How do administrators implement restorative justice practices? The second question asks: How do administrators create buy-in by staff for adopting restorative justice practices? A secondary question asks: What transformative experiences do staff undergo in the shift from exclusionary to restorative practices? Within these questions, I am also seeking the answer to: What are barriers to implementation of restorative justice practices?

Definition of Terms

Restorative Justice Practices: Practices that seek to build a community of people where others' feelings and experiences are shared and valued, via community circles and discussions. They also aim to restore relationships after a harm has been committed, by bringing together all people affected by an action and seeking ways to repair harm.

Transformative Learning Theory: A belief that people must experience a transformative experience before they can change their mindsets and understand the lives and perspectives of others.

> *Transformative Experience:* An experience that is life or thought-changing, that puts someone outside of their own frame of reference so they can better understand the perspectives of others.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the background and problem of current disciplinary practices, as well as the purpose of the study. Chapter 2 includes a description of restorative justice practices, the theoretical concept of transformative learning theory, and a review of the literature regarding the implementation of restorative justice practices. Chapter 3 explains the methodology used in this study to explore the experiences of administrators during implementation. Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the study, as well as the themes that emerged from the responses provided by the study participants. Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the data and seeks to address the research questions based on the data collected in the study.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

Topic of Investigation

The topic being investigated is the implementation of restorative justice practices in public schools. Specifically, the focus is narrowed to how administrators create buy-in for these new practices among the teaching and administrative staff. This research is based on Transformative Learning Theory, which posits that staff need to transform their mindsets before change can be effectively implemented. This is important because research indicates that Black students are three times more likely to experience exclusionary discipline, such as suspensions, than White students (Losen & Gillespie, 2012) and as a result, to be removed from the classroom and lose out on instruction twice as many days as White students (Vincent et al., 2012).

To remedy the practices that result in inequities, many school districts are incorporating restorative justice into their systems. However, because the transition has been so rapid, not all districts had a thoughtful implementation plan in place. Therefore, the transition has not been effective in many schools because of a lack of intentional implementation and buy-in by staff (Liberman & Katz, 2017; Sumner et al., 2010).

Literature Search Description

Pertinent literature for this empirical research centers on restorative justice practices in schools. After having researched the implementation of restorative justice practices in schools, it became apparent that those involved in the implementation process needed to buy into the practices by undergoing a transformative learning experience to make the transition more effective.

The researcher utilized databases available through the university library, including Eric (education) and Ebscohost ("Academic Search Complete" and "Education Source"). Search

terms included "transformative learning theory" combined with "Mezirow," "social justice in education," "educational inequality," and "social justice." Other search terms included "restorative justice" and "restorative justice practices" combined with "implementation," "implementation in schools," "implementation strategies," "schools," "results," "outcomes," and "discipline." She also used an alert via Google Scholar, and any time an article was posted that included the search term "restorative justice implementation," a link was sent via email.

All results were filtered to include only peer reviewed studies, and for studies regarding restorative justice implementation, only results within the last 10 years are included, though most are five years or newer. Results were further filtered to include only public schools in the United States. Because the transition from exclusionary to restorative justice practices in schools is relatively new in the United States, peer reviewed studies of their implementation are limited, and research into this field seems to be in its infancy stage.

Implementation Problems

As schools transition from exclusionary to restorative practices, various problems in implementation have come to the surface. Problems include: a reliance on more familiar, punitive practices; the long-standing belief that any practice is meant to control student behavior, conflicting frames of reference among school staff and students, and a focus on technical aspects of implementation over normative aspects.

In response to a growing awareness of inequities present in our schooling and discipline practices, many districts are moving toward restorative justice practices to not only respond to behavior infractions, but to also prevent them in the first place by building relationships and communities of care within the schools. However, despite their intentions, studies indicate that schools often fall back on "taken for granted" systems of discipline and control in school

(McCluskey, 2008). In fact, some researchers point out that the historical roots of schooling were to control the masses, with authoritarian, hierarchical structures that taught obedience and conformity, and that these structures of control are "deeply embedded in schooling and highly resistant to change" (Harber & Sakade, 2009, p. 173). With this history, then, staff members view restorative justice practices as a different means to control student behavior, rather than a means to build relationships and empower students to take ownership of their behavior. Vaandering (2014) points out that even framing restorative justice as a response to behavior legitimizes adult authority over students.

Additionally, with the traditional structures already in place, incorporating restorative justice practices is not a seamless transition. In Vaandering's (2014) interview with staff members, one stated "[restorative justice] is opposite from the way our whole system works" (p. 72). She goes on to explain that "in the busyness of everyday teaching, feeling the weight of curriculum expectations and testing," she "defaults to an approach that is attentive to instructional detail, transmission of knowledge and student academic success, but seemingly indifferent to the emotional and relational concerns of her students" (Vaandering, 2014, p. 73). However, to fully address student behaviors that often detract from this transmission of knowledge, students' emotional and relational needs must be understood, and this starts by understanding the root causes of particular behaviors. The needs of an individual, then, must be situated within that person's social context, because transformation is only possible when the cause of conflict is understood (Lederach, 2003). This requires an analysis of root causes of conflict, rather than simply responding to conflict in a punitive, traditional way.

Another issue with implementation regards one's reliance on how things have always been done, which comes into conflict with new ideas and practices. According to Clandinin et al.

(2006), individual teacher knowledge and background impact their understandings and willingness to embrace change, such as a transition to a new philosophical belief about relationships and behavior. Schools cannot transform from rule-based, hierarchical institutions into relationship-based places of empowerment without systemic change, which starts with all participants understanding the structures that constrain them. Participants must also understand and acknowledge their own frames of reference, how their ideas differ from those of others, and how their beliefs may contribute to the disempowerment of students.

A last issue with implementation involves the process of implementation itself. Because changing rules and policies is easier to accomplish than changing people's thoughts and ideas, many implementation plans and processes focus on the technical aspects of changes rather than the normative, philosophical aspects. However, when people don't believe in a change, that change is less likely to occur meaningfully. Without experiencing effective and transformational professional development, staff members' philosophical concepts will likely remain static, and they will maintain their reliance on traditional approaches to discipline. Transformation rarely happens on a technical level until a shift occurs philosophically.

What is Restorative Justice?

Restorative justice is rooted in the belief that we are all interconnected, and that "a harm to one is a harm to all" (Zehr, 1990, p. 29), which must be amended somehow. Though the United States criminal justice system first began incorporating restorative justice in the 1970s, the basis of these beliefs and practices goes back much further than then, with roots in Native New Zealand and Native North American traditions. Within the United State criminal justice system, the restorative justice movement began as advocates voiced their concerns about traditional practices, which did not meet the needs of all people affected by crime. For example,

if a person harms another and is made to pay a fine to the government or serve time in jail, the needs of the victim are not addressed. In fact, they are often left out of the "justice system" altogether. Instead, in restorative justice, the "justice needs" of the victim are central, and the people who cause the harm are held accountable by acknowledging their responsibility to the people they harmed. While the traditional criminal justice system focuses on offenders and making sure those offenders get what they "deserve," restorative justice practices focus on "needs," –the needs of those who are harmed, of those who cause the harm, and of those who are impacted by the harm (Zehr, 1990).

The three pillars of restorative justice include 1) a focus on harm, 2) the belief that harms result in obligations, and 3) a focus on engagement or participation by all those involved in the harm (Zehr, 1990). Unlike in traditional criminal justice or punitive practices, restorative justice begins with a concern for the needs of the victim, listening to what the victim needs, as well as looking at the root causes of the crime. After all, the goal is healing for all people involved. Secondly, restorative practices emphasize obligations, accountability, and responsibility for the harm-doers to make things right. Punitive practices rarely result in understanding the consequences of one's behavior on another person; however, in restorative justice practices, the wrongdoer not only recognizes the harm they have done, but they also work to repair that harm. Lastly, to repair harm requires engagement and participation. In restorative justice practices, those who suffer the harm—as well as the community around them—have the opportunity to participate in the justice process. They are given information and encouraged to speak with one another to share their stories and discuss what steps should take place next, all in an attempt for all stakeholders to heal from the experience.

Although restorative justice practices aim to make things right, Zehr explains that forgiveness is not always the result, because it depends on the participants involved. Further, the result of restorative justice cannot always be a return to the past, depending on the harm done, because a return to the past may not always be a healthy result. Additionally, there is no blueprint for how restorative justice is done because all models are culture-bound, and restorative justice practices should be built organically, from the ground up, based on the needs and principles of the communities experiencing the situation. Lastly, restorative justice is not a panacea for all discipline problems, nor should it always replace punitive measures. Instead, it is another option to address harm and to heal from that harm (Zehr, 1990).

Wachtel (2016) explains how restorative practices build social capital through democratic and participatory practices, and therefore, improve human behavior; reduce crime, violence, and bullying; strengthen communities; and foster relationships by repairing harm. However, for restorative practices to have these effects, social capital or a "network of relationships" must be present, because these practices rely on the binding together of people based on the existence of shared values, mutual understandings, and trust, which make cooperation possible (Cohen & Prusak, 2001). The objective of restorative practices is to proactively deal with conflict by developing the relationships necessary to develop a sense of community, where conflicts can then be managed by coming together, repairing any harm done, and restoring the already-created relationships.

Figure 2.4

Social Discipline Window
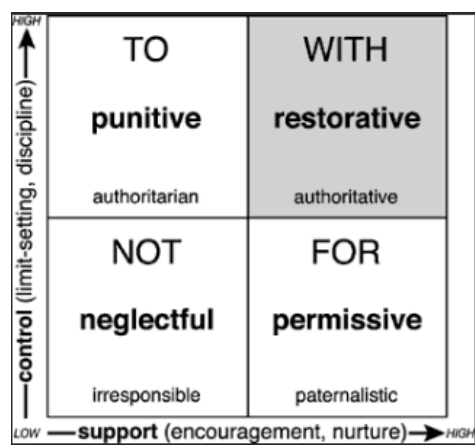
Note: The Social Discipline Window. Reprinted from *Defining Restorative*, by Wachtel, 2016.

https://www.iirp.edu/images/pdf/Defining-Restorative_Nov-2016.pdf

According to Wachtel (2016), the Social Discipline Window (Figure 2.4) is a basic model that describes the various ways to maintain social norms and behavior expectations, from high to low control and high to low support. Restorative practices exist in the top right quadrant, where high support meets high control, and actions are done *with*, rather than *to*, people. Wachtel hypothesizes that the effectiveness of restorative practices stems from the belief that humans are more cooperative, productive, and willing to change their behavior when their bosses and principals do things *with*, rather than *to*, them.

Restorative Justice Practices

The International Institute of Restorative Practices has identified processes that are the most helpful when implementing restorative practices. These include 1) restorative conferences, 2) circles, 3) family-group conferences or family-group decision making and 4) informal restorative practices (Wachtel, 2016). Restorative conferences are meetings between an

offender(s), her victim(s), and both parties' family and friends. Not to be confused with mediation or counseling, this type of conference is an opportunity for all of those affected to discuss how to repair the harm that was done and decide upon correct consequences. According to O'Connell et al. (1999), this conference focuses on the victim, but involves all those affected by the harm, and is a problem-solving method that shows how people can resolve conflict when giving the opportunity and forum to do so. Participation in these conferences is voluntary, but once it is decided upon, a facilitator invites all people impacted and then runs the meeting, allowing all participants to speak, be heard, and hear each other. The facilitator often sticks to a script, asking questions, addressing the wrongdoing, and eventually, asking the victim what outcome she would prefer. Oftentimes, afterward, the facilitator will follow up with the participants to see if they are adhering to the agreed-upon reconciliatory actions.

Unlike restorative conferences, circles are often used as a proactive approach to build relationships and a sense of community with others. Circles give voice to all participants who would like to speak or listen to one another, telling their own stories in a safe atmosphere where decorum and equality have been established. These circles can take many forms, including a sequential format where one person speaks at a time about a particular topic or a non-sequential format where participants can speak freely. Another type of circle is called a fishbowl, where students are placed either in an inner circle or an outer circle. Then, when a topic is introduced, only the participants in the inner circle can speak while the participants in the outer circle listen, until the students swap positions and speaking and listening roles.

Similar to restorative conferences, family-group conferences or family-group decision making bring together the families and friends of the focus person or people, but includes the greater support networks, including neighbors and grandparents. Used less often in schools,

these practices are based on various laws, and often involve social workers who leave the room for the family to decide what is best for the often-young people who are the foci of these meetings. Once a family creates a plan, a professional (i.e., social worker) evaluates the plan for legal and safety issues, and then works to help implement the approved plan.

Lastly, informal restorative practices are those acts done each day in every classroom across the world. These take many forms, but can include using affective statements, such as "it really hurts my feelings when you disrupt my teaching," or asking affection questions, hoping to make a student aware of how their actions directly affect another human. However, it does not include shaming or removing a student from the learning environment. Therefore, students can "keep face," while not losing out on learning opportunities as a result (Wachtel, 2016).

Theoretical Construct: Transformative Learning Theory

According to transformative learning theory, to shift a person's mindset, that person often needs to critically reflect on their own frames of reference, and eventually understand differing perspectives of others. Mezirow (2018) explains that this process requires that people reflect critically on their own assumptions and those of others', as well as the sources and consequences of those assumptions. This process involves two important elements: 1) critical self-reflection of one's assumptions and habits of mind, and 2) full participation in dialectical discourse. Because humans' worldviews and assumptions are often so ingrained, they will have difficulty changing them. This change may require some sort of "disorienting dilemma"—a strong catalyst, forceful argument, or thought-provoking experience—to challenge a person's assumptions and potentially change them (Christie et al., 2015). After this transformative learning experience, a person is better able to transform problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive and capable of change, resulting in beliefs that are better able to guide action (Mezirow, 2018).

Review of Research: The Implementation of Restorative Justice Practices

Research regarding restorative justice practices can be grouped into three stands: the first assesses how restorative justice practices affect school discipline practices; the second analyzes how they affect school climate and safety; and the third strand focuses on the methods and stages of implementation of restorative justice practices (Gonzalez et al., 2018). For the purpose of this study, the researcher will focus on the third strand: how schools and school districts work to effectively implement restorative justice practices. According to the research, implementation occurs on three levels, also called "dimensions." These dimensions include the 1) normative, 2) technical, and 3) political (Wiley et al, 2018). While the normative dimension refers to the changing of beliefs and mindsets, the technical dimension refers to the changing of practices. The political dimension, then, refers to changes in staffing to better match the staff to the goals of the school. However, because the political dimension of implementation cannot be easily observed by researchers, and because human resources decisions are confidential within school districts, the focus here is on the normative and technical dimensions of implementation.

Normative Dimension

The first strand of implementation, the normative dimension, relates to a person's beliefs, and in the process of implementation, to the shared beliefs by all people involved in the change. In the context of exclusionary discipline versus restorative justice practices, some common beliefs regard those about behavior, the role of discipline, the importance of building relationships, and the need to understand racial components to traditional discipline practices. This dimension lays the groundwork for all later work because it requires that all stakeholders share common beliefs about students, behavior, frames of reference, and expectations. These beliefs, then, are what initiate the transition in discipline practices.

Feuerborn et al. (2014) discuss various normative steps to successful implementation of change, which start with staff completing a needs assessment to identify their beliefs and perceptions. By identifying staff beliefs, change-makers can anticipate needs and concerns, create effective professional development, and mitigate barriers to achieving change. Before change can be made effectively, then, staff must perceive a need for that change, and they must view the change in practice as compatible with the school culture and the needs of students and staff. There must exist shared ownership and a sense that staff are working toward a common goal—a culture of collaboration, and a climate of trust and support. Lastly, there must be a compatibility between the underlying philosophy of the innovation and the philosophy of the staff.

Studies of Normative Practices

Normative changes are not easily visible; however, when reviewing the literature about school districts that have transitioned away from exclusionary discipline to restorative justice practices, the research shows that some districts have initiated change at the normative level, which starts by creating shared beliefs among all stakeholders. The shared beliefs are sometimes a result of understanding the "why' behind the need for change, understanding the philosophy supporting the new practice, and then aligning beliefs to practices. These shared beliefs are often the result of participatory democracy, where voices of all stakeholders are heard and valued. The shared beliefs, then, become a part of the school's mission, and all work done at the school is done to support that mission. Lastly, a collaborative relationship is built between all stakeholders who work together to support the school's mission. The following studies all included implementation that involved change at the normative level.

Alliance Charter High School. One example of normative practices comes from a case study of Alliance Charter High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. According to Gonzalez et al. (2018), since its inception, Alliance has focused on tier one behavior interventions: a whole school approach, which works to create a restorative culture grounded in shared values by engaging all community members and developing the necessary skills to build and foster relationships. The school has a mission to use restorative practices at the whole school level to build healthy, trusting relationships, and to connect all participants within the school. This whole school implementation of restorative practices at Alliance began even before the school opened, building on an already formed foundation. As early as 2000, the Milwaukee County District Attorney's office created a collaborative relationship with Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), training MPS teachers and social workers to facilitate classroom circles. Then, once Alliance opened in 2005, they were able to continue building on methods that proved to work, avoiding those that didn't work as well. By 2011, Alliance committed to continue their whole school approach, choosing to continue to use these circles as their primary method of restorative practice, which was "grounded in a shared belief that circles provided a critical entry into the continuum of practices, formal and informal" (Gonzalez et al., 2018, p. 5). This commitment to democratic and restorative practices remained at the forefront of the school's focus for the entire 7-year descriptive analysis.

In summary, Gonzalez et al. assert that the implementation of restorative practices at Alliance was successful because of a shared commitment held by all stakeholders, as well as the many intentional steps taken during the many years of implementation. First, the entire staff had a shared belief, and this was led by the school leadership who trusted her teachers and exemplified the idea that "leadership leads to empowerment and empowerment leads to

leadership" (Morrison et al., 2005, p. 341). Further, there existed collaboration with outside practitioners, alignment between beliefs and practices, and voice given to all stakeholders, which helped maintain the democratic ideals, encouraging participatory engagement and planting restorative approaches throughout the community. For these reasons, Alliance's approach can be viewed as a model of implementation for other schools hoping to incorporate restorative practices in a meaningful way.

However, what is not addressed in this report was exactly how the school created full buy-in by the entire staff. Because the implementation started before the school opened, it is possible that staff were hired at least partially due to their already shared beliefs about discipline practices, which is not a practice available in already established schools. Also, unlike traditional school settings, the leadership at Alliance is nonhierarchical, which leads staff members to be more invested in decision-making and then to support those decisions. In fact, because of its format, restorative practices are seen as less of a program or process, and more a "way of being." The researchers acknowledge that resistance to implementation existed initially; however, rather than focusing on rules, Alliance shifted the focus by reconsidering the roles of healing and justice. Because this is a case study, the results cannot be generalized to other schools and contexts. However, ultimately, the researchers state that schools must "examine how the interventions and systems put in place to support students do not operate in a way that replicates structural oppression and marginalization" (Gonzalez et al., 2018, p. 12).

Central Falls School District. A second example of normative practices can be seen in the process and impact evaluation done by Liberman and Katz (2017), who evaluated the restorative justice implementation done in the Central Falls School District (CFSD) in Rhode Island, which received a grant from the National Institute of Justice for this purpose. In this

example, collaboration between stakeholders is evident by CFSD's choice to implement family-group conferences as their primary restorative justice model, which includes conferences between offending students and their families, along with victims and their families, and any necessary school staff. The project, a partnership with the Youth Restoration Project, originally began in the secondary schools in CFSD, but quickly spread to the secondary schools in another Rhode Island School District: Westerly Public Schools, as well as two charter high schools. The process evaluation sought to "document the intervention as designed, assess the degree of fidelity in implementation, and understand implementation requirements and challenges" (Liberman and Katz, 2017, p. 1). The impact evaluation, then, sought to "compare disciplinary and academic outcomes of students who participated in a family-group (FG) conferences in the participating schools with similar students in comparison schools" (Liberman and Katz, 2017, p. 1).

The school district had been working with the Youth Restoration Project for many years prior to this study, beginning the discussion and training about restorative justice practices, and building partnerships between the schools, police, social services, families, and communities since 2008. The implementation of restorative justice practices in CFSD, as well as Westerly and the two charter high schools, officially began in the 2015-2016 school year, though the practices were piloted in CFSD the year before.

The Youth Restoration Project implements restorative justice practices on three levels. Level one is related to normative practices and includes "establishing a schoolwide RJ climate and integrating the restorative framework, language, and philosophy to the school" (Liberman and Katz, 2017, p. 10). The focus here is on communication and building relationships, fostering a culture that focuses on the relationships between students and their school community.

Working toward a shared philosophy and building a culture of collaborative relationships all fall under the "normative" umbrella.

To begin implementation, the Youth Restoration Project engages teachers and behavior management staff in a nine-hour training (which is a technical dimension), with the normative goal of integrating the "restorative framework, language, and philosophy into the school to help adapt the school culture" (Liberman and Katz, 2017, p. 13). This training includes theoretical and historical information, which can lead to shared beliefs by all stakeholders by understanding the necessity and rationale for the change.

What the training didn't necessarily accomplish, however, was complete staff buy-in. As some respondents explained, "it is important to shift philosophy first and then proceed with shifting action" (Liberman and Katz, 2017, p. 14). For some teachers who have been using punitive approaches for many years, a sudden shift feels too sudden to make in any meaningful way. Additionally, some staff stated that their own leaders needed to demonstrate buy-in to the practices as well, by attending conferences, meeting with facilitators, and participating themselves.

Cole Middle School. In a third analysis that included normative practices, researchers at the Thelton E. Henderson Center for Social Justice at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law, assessed the implementation of restorative practices at Cole Middle School, in the Oakland Unified School District (Sumner et al., 2010). After becoming concerned about the effects of traditional discipline practices on students and the school's culture, the principal of Cole Middle School petitioned the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) to receive permission to pilot a restorative justice program in 2005. The restorative practices incorporated at Cole included shared values, circles, and circle keepers. Shared values were developed at Cole

to "guide behavior for the entire school, one classroom, or one circle" (Sumner et al., 2010, p. 11), and include respect, empathy, and compromise. Then, within a restorative circle, a circle keeper reminds participants of their shared values and works with them to develop different shared values to guide their circle, if necessary.

The study ends with "considerations for schools wishing to implement restorative justice" (Sumner et al., 2010, p. 22), which includes suggestions discussed in the "Conclusion" section of this paper. However, it is important to note here that these final suggestions support the idea that without buy-in by staff and students as a part of an intentional plan for implementation, restorative practices will not be successfully incorporated into a school's practices.

Denver Public Schools. A fourth example of the normative practices of building collaboration and creating shared beliefs comes from a study done of Denver Public Schools, which began their discipline reform ten years before the Obama Administration required districts to do so in 2016 (Wiley et al., 2018). Rather, in response to parents, students, and community members voicing their concerns about racial disparities in exclusionary discipline, the district guidelines encouraged school administrators to minimize use of exclusionary practices, and expand their use of alternative practices, such as restorative practices. Wiley et al. (2018) partnered with Denver Public Schools and the University of Denver, while also collaborating with policy makers, administrators, teachers, and local stakeholders "to identify research questions, interpret results, and disseminate findings" . . . while also working to "strengthen and sustain efforts to connect research with local policy reform and advocacy efforts" (p. 282).

During implementation, school staff are provided the opportunity to receive training in restorative justice practices. Though professional development falls within the technical dimension, the two-day training also seeks to explain the rationale behind restorative justice

practices, which has the potential to build shared beliefs. Specially, the training addresses: 1) an overview of origins and key principles of restorative justice practices (including racial disparities historically evident in discipline), 2) a review of empirical evidence of the effectiveness of restorative justice practices, and 3) restorative justice practices as they relate to the district discipline policy regarding students' code of conduct. In this example, the collaborative team included various stakeholders, and the training sought to first create a common understanding, both normative in their purposes.

Nonetheless, the study failed to include what shared beliefs were held by all stakeholders, if any. Also excluded from the findings is the effectiveness of the implementation.

Technical Dimension

Compared to normative changes, technical changes are, arguably, easier to make and to identify. The technical dimension of implementation relates to what changes need to be made to the school day and to the school practices to facilitate change. The first technical aspect of implementation is time: time to train teachers, time to train students, time to incorporate restorative justice practices into the school day, time to analyze restorative justice practices data, time to re-train teachers, etc. It also includes professional development, which prepares staff and creates buy-in for making a change.

Participants in Wiley et al.'s study (2018) reported using programs, particularly social-emotional learning (SEL) curricula, Positive Behavioral Interventions Support (PBIS), and restorative practices as a school-wide system, to expand their knowledge and competence. To facilitate this training, districts must dedicate the necessary time to build this new knowledge among teachers, knowledge being another technical aspect of implementation. Schools must also allocate instructional time for community building (classroom-based, grade-level, or all-school

meetings during the school day with dedicated time). Teachers, then, are encouraged to use this time for this purpose, especially in the fall. Though some teachers view this as an unacceptable use of time in today's high stake's testing environment, others "viewed the dedication of time and resources to community building as a way to strengthen, rather than diminish, students' academic success" (Wiley et al., 2018, p. 287). The last technical aspect of implementation concerns budgeting, specifically, using site-based budgeting to support efforts. This includes hiring additional support service providers, social workers, psychologists, restorative justice coordinators, and family liaisons to create a safety net and "catch students before they fall" (Wiley et al., 2018, p. 287).

Feuerborn et al. (2014) identify similar "technical" steps to effective implementation. First, staff must believe their administration is invested in the change and will provide all necessary resources, while also recognizing the risks associated with change. Then, all resources must be secured, including materials, space, technology, time, and training. This training, or professional development, is vital for effective implementation, according to the research. After all, staff need to feel confident in their knowledge and ability to implement the change before they fully embark on it.

Studies of Technical Practices

Research into the implementation of restorative justice practices in schools indicates that most school districts that have implemented it have implemented it at the technical level.

Alliance Charter High School. At Alliance Charter High School, the implementation was very intentional, including continued professional development, frequent development of plans, reflection, and feedback, and supports offered, as necessary (Gonzalez et al., 2018). Further, a committed teacher served as a restorative facilitator, and she embedded practices

within the school, assisting others rather than asserting power over them. Lastly, because it was

embedded throughout the school, restorative practices didn't seem like an add-on practice; rather,

they are seen more as a philosophy or "way of being." In this regard, Alliance High School

dedicated technical supports, such as time, professional development, and other financial

supports, such as professionals to assist in the implementation. For these reasons, Alliance's

approach can be viewed as a model of implementation for other schools hoping to incorporate

restorative practices in a meaningful way.

Central Falls School District. The analysis of Central Falls School District also

identified technical dimensions to implementation (Liberman & Katz, 2017). Here, the

implementation required training and time, whereby the Youth Restoration Project engaged

teachers and behavior management staff in a nine-hour training, which worked to integrate the

"restorative framework, language, and philosophy into the school to help adapt the school

culture" (Liberman & Katz, 2017, p. 13). This training included theoretical and historical

information, as well as practical application ideas of restorative justice practices. The nine-hour

training was broken into three-hour segments, held over three consecutive weeks. After each

three-hour training, staff were instructed to apply and reflect on the ideas learned during the

following week, and before the next training. During interviews, respondents stated that this

training approach was beneficial, but that refresher trainings later would be helpful.

Then, the Youth Restoration Project implemented restorative justice practices within the

school on three levels, levels two and three requiring technical aspects of implementation. For

example, the second level, which looks at low-level behavior issues, such as demonstrating

disrespect or causing a disruption, required training and time to deal with it in a way consistent

with restorative justice practices. In these situations, the approach was to engage the student in a

discussion using "I statements," working to de-escalate the situation and move the student back into the classroom quickly. This may have included engaging a student in a "walk and talk" or a "dialogue circle," where the student had an opportunity to share their ideas and be heard. The third level, then, was meant for more severe situations, and included the family-group conference, which sought to repair harm and hold the offending student accountable. In this partnership, these conferences were led by the Youth Restoration Project facilitator, who also followed up with the students afterwards. Level three, then, required not only training and time, but financial resources to hire facilitators.

Overall, the conclusion drawn by Liberman and Katz (2017) is that the participating schools made good strides in transitioning to restorative justice practices, but the Youth Restoration Project recognizes the need to adapt their implementation practices. That said, once the Youth Restoration Project facilitators leave, one must wonder if the schools will continue to use restorative justice practices with such fidelity. Additionally, for other schools who have not been granted money or resources, and who do not have external facilitators in-building to help train and host the family-group conferences, this example may not be a realistic one to emulate.

Cole Middle School. The implementation of restorative justice practices at Cole Middle School in the Oakland Unified School District included similar technical aspects, including professional development, time, financial resources, and an adjusted school schedule. For example, the implementation of the program began with all teachers and staff participating in training sessions, and initially, students only participated in disciplinary circles. However, as staff learned more about restorative practices, "they extended its philosophy and methodology to non-disciplinary community building activities" (Sumner et al., 2010, p. 10). By 2007, restorative justice was the primary discipline program at the school, and the disciplinary case

manager devoted her time to implementing the program school-wide. Teachers and staff continued their training, and restorative practices extended beyond discipline to include community building. Students were also offered a class about restorative justice. In 2008, the school added a second restorative justice leader, on a voluntary basis at first, but eventually earning a stipend. During this school year, staff continued training and participated in circles; however, only the most enthusiastic chose to attend.

The technical aspect of time was required for this implementation, as circles at Cole were held in the morning during advisory to build community, as well as outside of advisory to address disciplinary infractions, when needed. These circles could be called by anyone and were an opportunity for all participants to share their perspectives and come to an understanding about what had occurred, why it occurred, and how any harm could be repaired. Initially, circle keepers were adults, typically a restorative justice leader, teacher, or administrator, but eventually, they included students who had participated in restorative justice training. In this sense, the technical need for money and resources were also required.

When students at Cole committed a behavior infraction, they had the option of declining the use of restorative practices and instead experience traditional discipline. However, sometimes restorative practices were not an option, and traditional discipline was used first, such as when the safety of students or staff was threatened. Regardless, restorative practices were always offered as a way to repair harm and reintegrate the student back into the Cole community.

Overall, staff, students, and families felt that the use of restorative practices strengthened the feeling of community within the school, created a more peaceful atmosphere with fewer instances of harmful behavior, allowed students to express their feelings, and helped students

mature and gain social skills. However, two years after the implementation, the school closed

due to decreased enrollment, so the long-term impact of the implementation cannot be assessed.

Additionally, the researchers assert that they cannot draw a causal conclusion; other factors may

have also contributed to the decline in expulsions at the school (including a smaller student body

size during year two). Further, they recognize that they only analyzed one school and the results

cannot be generalized to other schools.

Denver Public Schools. The study of the implementation of restorative justice practices

in the Denver Public Schools indicates that most changes there were technical, including staff

training (Anyon et al., 2016). In this example, however, staff training is voluntary and available

to any employee of the district. Though district leaders strongly recommend the training during

their monthly staff meetings, they do not require it. Two trainings, then, are available to staff.

The first is a four-hour introductory training about preventative restorative justice practices, such

as classroom community-building circles. The second option is two days long and is about

responding to discipline issues by using responsive restorative justice practices. In addition to the

aforementioned normative elements, the two-day training addresses the following technical

dimensions: 1) an introduction to preventative restorative justice practices (dialogues and

proactive/ community circles), 2) a longer introduction to intervention-oriented restorative

justice practices (reactive circles, mediations, and conferences), 3) an overview of core elements

of all restorative justice practices (problem solving, paraphrasing, and reframing), and 4)

"strategies to monitor the implementation and success of restorative approaches" (Anyon et al.,

2016, p. 1672). After the training, participants receive a handbook with ideas and supports, as

well as an offer for on-site coaching and support from the district coordinator. The time and

resources necessary for these trainings are all technical in nature.

Also falling within the technical dimension are the restorative practices done with students after an offense has been committed. Though optional, the district strongly suggests that students be offered restorative justice in instances when it is appropriate and can be an option instead of or in addition to punitive discipline. However, building administrators ultimately decide which to offer. If the administrator offers the restorative option and the offending student is willing to take responsibility for the harm he causes, the student may participate in a restorative circle, mediation, or community conference with all those involved. At the conclusion of the restorative justice practices, all participants create an action plan to which they all commit to repair the harm done. As Anyon et al. (2016) indicated, the willingness of students to participate in restorative justice practices in the first place is dependent on the trust and relationship the students have with the person implementing the practices. The time and training it takes to complete the circle, mediation, or community conference are all technical.

Because the technical aspects of implementation of restorative justice practices in the Denver Public Schools is optional, it is hard to assess the effectiveness of the implementation. Teachers are encouraged to participate in training, but the study mentions no incentive to do so. Nor do we know when training is offered; because it is optional, it is likely outside of the school day, which means that even some teachers who would like to participate do not have the option due to family and other obligations. Further, when something is optional for staff, the implicit message is that it is not important.

Los Angeles Unified School District. The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) enacted discipline reform that embodied multiple technical dimensions, with reform occurring in three stages (Hashim et al., 2018). Phase one included the implementation of schoolwide positive behavior intervention supports (SWPBIS) in 2006-2007. Phase two,

launched in 2011-2012, included the district ban on suspensions for students demonstrating willful defiance, "a category used to describe a range of nonviolent misbehaviors such as rolling eyes, coming to class late, and talking back to a teacher" (Hashim et al., 2018, p. 175). After this ban, the district reviewed discipline data and centralized all discipline decision-making. They closely monitored data and practices at schools that had a history of disproportionately suspending Black students, while also continuing SWPBIS. Phase three, then, started in 2013 with the formal adoption of the School Discipline Policy and School Climate Bill of Rights, which emphasized restorative justice as a way to manage student behavior.

To align with SWPBIS, the district developed a similar three-tier implementation plan for restorative justice practices. Tier one, whole-school strategies, serve to build community, such as celebrating accomplishments and promoting strong teacher-student relationships. Tier two strategies, for smaller groups, include practices to repair harm after conflicts, such as discussion circles and peer mediation. Tier three strategies, reserved for more severe incidents, are meant to reintegrate students back into the classroom after having been removed or truant. In this regard, LAUSD partners with community and other organizations to address students' social/ emotional needs, and the district dedicated 4.9 million dollars in funding for necessary restorative justice training.

Implementation of the School Climate Bill was rolled out slowly, beginning with a memo to school administrators in 2014. The memo explained the phased rollout, with training to be completed with cohorts of schools based on demographics and discipline data, prioritizing schools with a higher enrollment of students who are Black, who qualify for special education services, or who have a history of disproportionately suspending these students, with training to be completed by the 2019-2020 school year. By sorting schools this way, "district leaders

directly signaled to school leaders which sites were most in need of reforming their discipline practices" (Hashim et al., 2018, p. 178).

The technical elements of implementation started with providing training to Cohort 1 schools, or those deemed most "at need," in the early years. This also included hiring a restorative justice coordinator and five restorative justice counselors to lead trainings. Schools that receive training receive in-depth professional development developed by the restorative justice coordinator and counselors on "[restorative justice] principles, empathy/ team building, defusing disruptive behavior in the classroom, and procedures for training school staff members on [restorative justice] practices" (Hashim et al., 2018, p. 178). The training, time, and money needed to complete these goals are all technical.

Principals of the school not included in Cohort 1, then, participated in a "Positive School Climate Awareness Kick-Off" meeting and received a principal toolkit with guidelines about how to incorporate restorative justice practices into their school, as well as how to communicate the district's discipline philosophy at their school sites. Then, 25 high schools were chosen to lead the district in developing best practices among Cohort 1 schools, with each school being staffed with a restorative justice teacher advisor (full time teacher on special assignment) to plan and coordinate the implementation and evaluation of restorative justice practices. This person was also given technical assistance from a restorative justice consulting firm. Lastly, the district hired an auditor and created a taskforce to monitor implementation and provide feedback to the superintendent. The toolkits and staffing all require the technical aspect of money.

The conclusion of the study is that these Cohort 1 schools had the greatest decrease in suspensions. "This suggests that restorative justice training may reinforce the goals of suspension bans to lower suspensions" (Hashim et al., 2018, p. 187). However, despite the

progress made to reduce exclusionary discipline practices overall with implementation of restorative practices, "suspension gaps between Black and non-Black students, and between special education (SPED) and non-SPED students, still persist in data, suggesting that districts may need more time and comprehensive strategies to fully resolve these inequities" (Hashim et al., 2018, p. 174). The researchers state that these persistent gaps indicate a need for an ongoing focus on both the causes and consequences of disproportionate discipline. They also claim that their study points to the need for more qualitative studies that analyze what happens "on the ground" during implementation.

New York City Secondary Schools. Lastly, a year-long multi-case ethnography of secondary schools in New York City identified technical aspects of implementation as well (Lustick, 2020). Principals at all schools followed the Citywide Disciplinary Handbook, which required them to use restorative practices to handle certain behaviors, and to use suspension to handle others. Each school also has a restorative coordinator who oversees the facilitation of restorative practices. Serving under these coordinators are restorative deans who handle both restorative and traditional discipline. The restorative practices, then, include peer mediation, community-building circles to build relationships, restorative circles to repair harm, and restorative chats to address disruptive behavior informally. All these elements require the technical elements of time and money.

However, according to the study, incorporation of restorative practices varied across schools and principals had leeway to decide when and if to use them. As Lustick explained, "principals implementing restorative practices were conscious of their image in the eyes of both internal and external stakeholders. They perceived that, while restorative work was preferable, displaying an orderly school environment . . . was first priority" (Lustick, 2020, p. 12). Further,

as one of the three principals explained "you have to know that what is best for the individual is not necessarily what's best for the community, and you have to come up with something in the middle . . . knowing that you're sacrificing at both ends" (Lustick, 2020, p. 12). Another one of the principals prides himself on being seen as "the hammer," and his job as "a means of order-keeping," with a focus on "punitive discipline, whereas he casts his restorative coordinator in the role of dialoguing with the student" (Lustick, 2020, p. 13). Furthermore, rather than being a part of the school culture, teachers chose whether or not to incorporate community-building circles within their homerooms. Therefore, because the use is optional, the effectiveness of restorative justice practices cannot be adequately assessed. Further, the results cannot be generalized to other schools.

In summary, Lustick (2020) stated that research into principal decision-making is warranted, especially if it helps us understand what causes principals to implement restorative practices and why. Lustick also said that research into implementation and how administrators create buy-in would be useful.

Summary

Even with these studies, gaps do exist. Because change starts at the normative level, it is important to know how schools foster a shared belief about and create buy-in for a need for change in discipline practices among their staff. However, many of the studies noted that there was no explanation about how that was done (Gonzalez et al., 2018; Liberman & Katz, 2017). In fact, Liberman & Katz (2017) cite a participant who, after going through training, stated that "it is important to shift philosophy first and then proceed with shifting action" (p. 14). Additionally, some staff stated that their own leaders needed to demonstrate buy-in to the practices as well, by attending conferences, meeting with facilitators, and participating themselves (Liberman & Katz,

2017). Sumner et al. (2010) also emphasized the need to gain support for restorative practices

from those in the school before implementing the change. They also stated that school

administrators must be prepared and willing to invest a great deal of time and energy, especially

during the initial implementation stages, while also working purposefully and continuously to

support the goals of restorative practices. Additionally, Wiley et al. (2018) stated that the shared

beliefs need to be clear to all stakeholders. Lastly, Lustick (2020) asserted that "further research

should more deeply investigate principal decision-making, especially if it allows us to

understand what allows principals to implement restorative practices with orientation toward

relational responsibility rather than accountability" (p. 18). With these gaps in mind, my own

research will focus on how administrators in school districts and in school buildings implement

restorative justice practices, with a focus on creating shared beliefs and buy-in by teachers and

other administrators.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the methodology used to understand the lived experiences of school administrators as they work to implement restorative justice practices in their schools. This chapter includes the research questions and design, participant and sampling procedures, measures of validity and reliability, and the data collection and analysis processes. The chapter ends with a discussion of the limitations of the study.

Research Questions

This study sought to explore the experiences and perspectives of administrators as they transitioned their building discipline practices from exclusionary to restorative. Through exploration and description, the researcher aimed to identify themes that emerged regarding the implementation of restorative practices. The questions sought to capture the differing experiences, remaining broad enough to allow participants the opportunity to elaborate on their distinct experiences, while also reflecting on the mindsets of others involved in the implementation process. The research questions that guided this study include:

1: How do administrators implement restorative justice practices?

2: How do administrators create buy-in by staff for adopting restorative justice practices?

Secondary Question: What transformative experiences do staff undergo in the shift from exclusionary to restorative practices?

Within these questions, this study also seeks the answer to: What are barriers to implementation of restorative justice practices?

These questions echo those from an earlier study by Vaandering (2009), who asked:

What does RJ look and feel like in schools? What do the voices of teachers and principals

reveal about the practice of RJ and its philosophy? How can this knowledge contribute to the effective implementation and sustainability of restorative practices in school communities in such a way that its transformative potential can be experienced? (Vaandering, 2009, p. 2).

Research Design

The research design utilized for this study took a qualitative approach, where "researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). Creswell (2013) states that "qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/ theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 44). Stake (2010) goes on to explain that "by qualitative we mean that it relies primarily on human perception and understanding" (Stake, 2010, p. 11) and that "those studies with emphasis on personal experience in described situations are considered qualitative" (Stake, 2010, p. 14). Special characteristics of a qualitative study are that "1. It is interpretive. 2. It is experiential. 3. It is situational. 4. It is personalistic" (Stake, 2010, p. 15). To distinguish between qualitative and quantitative research, Stake (2010) says, "if researchers choose to gather experiential data more than measurements, they call their research 'qualitative'" (p. 19). Further, he explains that the most important distinction between the two methodologies is "two-fold: the difference between (1) aiming for explanation and (2) aiming for understanding, and the difference between (1) a personal role and (2) an impersonal role for the researcher" (Stake, 2010, pp. 19-20). In qualitative research, the researcher seeks to understand a personal, lived experience.

For this research, a phenomenological approach was selected. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), "a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (p. 75) and that in this type of study, there is "an emphasis on a phenomenon to be explored, phrased in terms of a single concept or idea" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 76). For this research, I will study the common experience of implementation, specifically moving from punitive to restorative practices in school. Van Manen (2014) explains that "phenomenology is primarily a philosophic method for questioning, not a method for answering or discovering or drawing determinate conclusions" (p. 29) and is "a meaning-giving method of inquiry" (van Manen, 2014, p. 28). Therefore, my focus will be on learning about implementation, as it is experienced by different administrators, to see what common themes emerge.

Participants

In a phenomenological study, researchers identify a group of individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon, collecting data by interviewing them, and analyzing data by moving from narrow, individual statements, to broader "meaning units," to "detailed descriptions that summarize two elements: 'what' the individuals experienced and 'how' they experienced it" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 77). Therefore, I identified five school principals who experienced the same phenomenon: the implementation of restorative justice practices in their schools. The participants come from different schools in Washington state. One is an elementary school principal in a suburban district, and another is a middle school principal in that same district; two are middle school principals in the same urban district; and the fifth is a middle school principal in another urban school district. Three are female and two are male. The years of experience at their current principalship range from five to 18 years.

Sampling Process

In a phenomenological study, all participants must have experience with the phenomenon being studied; therefore, criterion sampling was used (Creswell & Poth, 2018). From there, the researcher used convenience sampling by contacting principals she knew, and then snowball sampling, as principals she knew referred her to other principals who had implemented restorative justice practices. Lastly, the five participants fall within the 3-10 participants recommended by Duke (1984) for a phenomenological study.

Measures

The primary method for data collection was individual interviews, which is a means to learn about and gather information about an experience. The phenomenological interview "first serves the very specific purpose of exploring and gathering experiential narrative material, stories, and anecdotes that may serve as a resource of phenomenological reflection and thus develop a richer and deeper understanding of the human phenomenon (van Manen, 2014, p. 314). Creswell and Poth (2018) also state that phenomenological research involves collecting data from "individuals who have experienced the phenomenon by using in-depth and multiple interviews" (p. 79). The researcher, therefore, determined that one-to-one semi-structured interviews, whereby all participants are asked the same questions, was most appropriate for this study.

The two essential interview questions for a phenomenological study, as suggested by Moustakas (1994), ask "what have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" (p. 19). The researcher used these questions as a base for her own open-ended questions. From there, other open-ended follow-up questions were asked to allow participants to share their experiences

and perspectives and to clarify information. Interview questions for this study were developed based on information from research and were related to the implementation of new practices in the school. They were also carefully worded and open-ended, not directing participants toward certain answers. These interviews were recorded using the Zoom record function as well as a recording application on the researcher's phone and were transcribed using the Otter Artificial Intelligence application.

When possible, other forms of data were collected as well, including artifacts such as student handbooks, posters, and information from the school websites, to name a few.

Two important aspects to consider while conducting a research study are the reliability and validity of that research. In qualitative research, reliability and validity look different than in quantitative research. For example, "reliability" refers to the degree to which we can believe that the results of a research study will be similar to another study in a different circumstance, assuming nothing else is different (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, in a phenomenological study, researchers do not attempt to generalize their findings; rather, they explain the experiences of particular participants in their particular settings, without implying that the lived experience of that same phenomenon will be the same for all people experiencing it. That said, this study will seek to establish inner-study reliability. All participants will be notified about the study's purpose, the interview questions, the format of the interview, and their interview date and time in advance. All participants will be asked the same core questions in the same order, though follow-up questions may differ depending on the responses of the participants.

To address validity, qualitative researchers work to validate their research, by assessing the "accuracy" of their findings, "as best described by the researcher, the participants, and the readers" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 259). Some ways to ensure accuracy is through the

closeness of the researcher to the participants, using detailed and thick description, and by collaborating data via triangulation of multiple sources (such as interview and artifact analysis). For example, one participant stated that the guiding principles of her school are listed in the student handbook and on posters throughout the school. The participant showed one such poster to the researcher, and the researcher found the student handbook on the school's website. The principles were, in fact, included in that handbook. Another participant shared that he carries a laminated copy of the school's restorative questions on his lanyard; this participant showed the researcher the lanyard and emailed her a copy of the questions. The researcher also had the participants review the interview data to clarify any misconceptions or misinterpretations.

Another way to ensure accuracy is for the researcher to situate herself, "disclosing their understandings about the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to the study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261). To eliminate possible concerns of the researcher inserting her ideas into the analysis, Moustakas (1994) suggests that researchers "epoche" or "bracket" themselves out of the research, which is when they "set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination" (p. 34). When bracketing, the researcher discusses her experiences with and perspectives about the phenomenon as her own, separate from those of the participants. The reader, then, can identify the differences between the ideas and voice of the researcher and those of the participants. In this regard, the researcher did ask focused pre-arranged questions, not inserting her beliefs into the interview process. Additionally, although the researcher knew three of the participants on a professional level, she purposely did not interview principals who she knew on a personal level, seeking to maintain objectivity in the interview process.

Data Collection

After securing permission from the Internal Review Board and the dissertation

committee, the researcher contacted the participants to schedule an initial interview, held via

Zoom. The purpose of the interview is to obtain "unique information or interpretation held by the

person interviewed" (Stake, 2010, p. 93), through a social interaction based on conversation.

Qualitative interviews are described as "attempts to understand the world from the subject's

point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world" (Creswell

& Poth, 2018, p. 164).

The semi-structured interview consisted of seven open-ended questions and lasted 30-45

minutes, which met the criteria of no more than eight open-ended questions, with the goal of the

interview lasting no more than an hour (Stake, 2010). An interview protocol was created and

shared with the participants ahead of time. The same questions were asked of all participants,

with follow-up questions as necessary to ensure clarity and understanding. With the permission

of all participants, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Then, the researcher coded the

interviews according to emerging themes, with a second coder utilized to verify themes.

Data Analysis

The researcher reviewed each transcript multiple times and coded the responses two

different ways, first by interview and then across interviews by interview question. Coding is the

process by which a researcher breaks data into smaller segments of information and assigns

names to each category (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher chose to utilize inductive

coding, whereby the researcher used no prepared codes; rather, the codes emerged from the data.

After coding each section, the researcher identified emerging themes based on the commonalities

within the smaller groupings of data.

To address issues of reliability, the transcripts were reviewed independently by another qualitative researcher who has experience coding qualitative data. This process enhances interrater reliability, which is created by having multiple people analyze and code the same document (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The codes and themes were then compared to those from other interviews. They were also analyzed to ascertain if conclusions could be drawn, or recommendations could be made for administrators who seek to implement restorative justice practices in their schools.

Limitations

This study explored the experiences of school administrators in five different schools in Washington State. These are the experiences and perspectives, then, of these participants alone, and cannot be generalized to other schools and locations, though common themes did emerge from all participant interviews. However, because qualitative research is specific to the experiences of the participants alone, caution should be used before making assumptions about this data. Another limitation is that participation was voluntary, and some participants are those with some sort of connection to the researcher, so they may have participated because they have a strong opinion regarding the topic or may feel some sort of obligation to the researcher. Therefore, their experiences may not be representative of all administrator experiences.

That said, understanding the experiences of actual administrators during the implementation of restorative justice practices can be a good starting point for others who are planning to engage in a similar process. If a school or school district seeks to adopt and implement restorative justice practices in their schools with fidelity, they may want to consider what has worked and not worked for others.

Summary

The research method utilized in this study was a qualitative phenomenological study to explore the experiences of administrators as they lived through the same phenomenon: the implementation of restorative justice practices in their schools. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews of all participants and then coded the transcripts of the interviews, identifying common themes. The results of the study are addressed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Overview of the Study

This qualitative research study investigated the experiences of administrators as they implemented restorative justice practices in their schools. Specifically, this study sought to understand the processes and challenges involved as the participants transitioned discipline practices in their schools from exclusionary to restorative. The research methodology used in this study was a qualitative phenomenological design, whereby the researcher sought to understand the phenomenon of implementation by identifying participants who had experienced that phenomenon. Once those participants were identified, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews during an agreed upon meeting time, and then followed up with participants in a second, subsequent interview to clarify any questions remaining after the first interview.

The study took place in Washington state, with participants from different school districts, including three from urban school districts and two from suburban school districts. Additionally, four participants were principals at middle schools while one participant was the principal of an elementary school. Three of the participants were female and two were male, and the years of experience as principals in their current schools ranged from five to eighteen years. Criterion sampling was used for this study, as all participants needed to have experienced the phenomenon of implementation of restorative justice practices. Within this criterion, the researcher used convenience sampling first, identifying contacts known to the researcher, and then snowball sampling, where contacts referred the researcher to others who had experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To protect the privacy of the participants, pseudonyms will be used in place of participant and school names. The demographic information about the participants can be found in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Demographic Information of Participants

Participant Pseudonym	Urban/ Suburban District	Gender	School Level	Years as Principal in Current School
Abe	Urban	Male	Middle	6
Bo	Urban	Male	Middle	18
Joss	Suburban	Female	Middle	13
Jo	Suburban	Female	Elementary	5
Cath	Urban	Female	Middle	9

The researcher collected data via semi-structured interviews in an attempt to answer the main research questions: 1) How do administrators implement restorative justice practices? 2) How do administrators create buy-in by staff for adopting restorative justice practices? Within these two primary questions, the researcher was also hoping to understand the answers to the following two secondary questions: 1) What transformative experiences do staff undergo in the shift from exclusionary to restorative practices? 2) What are barriers to implementation of restorative justice practices? The interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

The interviews were conducted via Zoom and were recorded using the Zoom record function as well as a secondary recording application. The interviews were then transcribed using a secure artificial intelligence application. Once the application produced a transcript, the researcher made all necessary corrections to the transcript and then coded the interview transcripts, looking to discover common patterns and concepts, which developed into themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A second coder also coded the interview transcripts to verify themes.

The themes and their subthemes can be found in Appendix B. The themes that emerged during this coding process are also discussed in the following sections.

Findings from the Participant Interviews

All participants were asked the same seven questions during the semi-structured interviews, with follow-up questions and interviews to clarify information, as necessary. The first question sought to identify what restorative justice looks like in the participants' schools; the second sought to understand the history of these practices and why the schools transitioned to them; and the last five sought to understand the implementation process, including trainings and challenges to implementation. Some of the responses to question four will also be included within the responses to question three in this report, since they are often viewed as the first step of implementation. Within each of these questions, common themes arose.

Question One: What Do Restorative Justice Practices Look Like in Your School?

Although the focus of this study is on the implementation process, the researcher thought it necessary to establish what restorative practices exist within each school before understanding how principals transitioned to these practices. When asked this initial question, similar ideas were shared by participants, such as "innovative," "more inclusive," "less punitive," "involve everyone," "student support," "social emotional learning," "restore relationships," "repair harm," "proactive," "get to the root of the behavior," "lowest level of discipline," "bring kids together," "build community," and "understand expectations." The goal for all participants as they discussed restorative justice practices appeared to be the same: to keep kids in school. Amidst the responses, three prominent themes arose. These themes and their subthemes can be found in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Proactive and Reactive Restorative Justice Practices

Restorative Justice as a School-Wide Practice	Proactive Practices	Reactive Practices
Connect to Schoolwide Practices	Community (Relationship) Circles	Engaging with a Support Team
Involve All Stakeholders	Guiding Principles	Answering Restorative Questions
	Peer Mediators	Conferencing/ Participating in Restorative Circle
	Homeroom/ Advisory	Holding Students Accountable

Restorative Justice as a School-Wide Practice. When discussing restorative justice

practices in their schools, multiple participants explained the need for it to occur school wide.

For example, Cath stated the following:

> The biggest thing I would say that we have really tried to establish is that if you can run it
>
> [restorative justice practices] school-wide, you'll have more success. If it's tried as a
>
> siloed practice and you only try to do it with discipline, then it's not going to work.

A similar sentiment was expressed by Joss, who said, "it can't stand alone. It's a 'thing' versus a

'mindset' and a 'way to do business.' If you're going to do restorative practices well, it has to be

a part of a system, not a separate thing." She went on to explain that when the district discussed

hiring a restorative justice person, her response was:

> No. To have a restorative justice person implies that that person alone is doing restorative
>
> practices. It should be how we do things; it should be a critical part of how we do

business. So the throughline for me with restorative practices is people—your admin

team, your counseling team, your teachers—they all need to be on board and understand,

have the same beliefs about what we're trying to do with these practices, because then

when we're bringing it to the kids and when we're dealing with the kids, we are all using

the same mindset about how we're handling it.

Abe discussed the need for everyone involved to participate in the process, because restorative

justice is meant to be more inclusive. As he explained, "it really is about teachers agreeing and

parents kind of agreeing and everybody coming along, as well as the victim, because that's a big

part of it—everybody being in agreement." In this sense, he stated that within this process,

students aren't going to feel beat up; instead, "they kind of get to know that we're trying to work

with them," instead of against them.

Proactive Practices. Proactive practices are those that attempt to build community and

thus, prevent behavior issues before they occur. Four of the five participants discussed proactive

measures, including the following practices from the "Proactive Practices" list in Table 4.2.

Community Circles. The first proactive practice, community circles, was discussed by Jo,

the principal of the elementary school, and Abe and Cath, both principals at middle schools. Jo

explained that restorative justice is tied into the social emotional learning (SEL) focus of the

school, and that "the first half hour of every day in every classroom is set aside for SEL

learning." In this school, all teachers are trained on different SEL curricula, which guide the

community circles, and "we sometimes spend that time doing some restorative work with

students." Jo said that these community circles are a way to build relationships *with* and *among*

students, as the teacher poses a question and each student is given the opportunity to respond.

The school year starts with rather simple questions, such as "what is your favorite food and

why?," and while students share their responses, all students learn the expectations of the circle, such as "one person gets to talk at a time and really working towards respectful listening of one another." Then, when a conflict may arise in the classroom, these circles are also used at the classroom level to address that conflict, and students will already have the "background of the expectations."

Cath explained the three levels of community circles within her school, the first of which is proactive and done in the classroom as a relationship circle. She said she encourages the use of these circles especially at the beginning of the school year so students and teachers can have the opportunity to know and build relationships with one another. Although they take place in advisory every week throughout the school year, on the first day of school, students participate in these relationship circles in every class period to build relationships from day one. Cath also explained that these circles need to be held in classrooms regularly, because it is so important that these restorative practices take a "schoolwide approach" so students understand that "this is a part of our schooling."

Guiding Principles. Joss explained that when she became principal of her school, she introduced the "Guiding Principles" and started using the "Guiding Principles Rubric" with staff and students as a proactive measure. She stated that these Guiding Principles are posted around the school, and include, for example, "belonging; safety in words and actions; free of bias, intimidation, and prejudice, etc." Although they are meant as a proactive measure, she embeds these principles in conversations with students after conflict as well, asking, "how did your actions make the other student feel safe? Did it make them feel like they belong?" These principles led into conflict mediation well before Joss heard about restorative justice practices, and they continue to guide her work today.

Peer Mediators. Another proactive measure is the peer mediator program, which was discussed by Bo. According to this participant,

> We try to use [peer mediation] so that as things start bubbling up, kids over-refer for
>
> different issues that are starting to happen. Then . . . peer mediators are able to work with
>
> other students to resolve issues at a lower level, so that they don't become bigger things
>
> that involve school officials.

Bo explained that his school is partnered with an organization that trains these peer mediators, as well as staff members who participate. Toward the end of the interview, when I asked Bo if he had anything he wanted to add, he stressed that he has really found this peer mediation to be a positive aspect of his school. As he said,

> Not only does it help us address some behaviors at a lower level that don't need to
>
> involve administration. It [also] gives students the opportunity to be in leadership
>
> positions and then they are able to model this type of thinking and behavior with their
>
> peers. And hopefully, then, this is a lesson in itself, not only for the mediators, but for the
>
> kids they are mediating. I think at the end of the day that helps the school climate.

When asked who serves as peer mediators, Bo explained that it's open to all students, not just "leadership-type" students, and that it's more of a "cross-section of the population, which is really good because, honestly, I need some kids who are kind of squirrely to be part of that process."

Homeroom/ Advisory. A follow-up question to the first question, "what do restorative justice practices look like in your school?" asked, "how are students trained in this?" Multiple participants explained that this training occurred in homeroom (also called advisory). Bo explained that "When every kid comes into sixth grade, they get assigned a teacher for

homeroom that teaches their homeroom all three years. We use homeroom as a vehicle to teach those types [SEL and restorative] of lessons." Cath stated that relationship circles happen every week during advisory time, and Joss explained that the students spend the first 30 minutes of every Monday with their advisory class, where advisory teachers teach a "den lesson," such as intentionally teaching expectations.

For example, a timely issue during the interview was the state rescinding the mask mandate, so Joss's administrative team anticipated behavior problems around this change. Therefore, the Friday before the change, all sixth period teachers discussed behavior expectations, and this was followed-up on Monday during advisory. Joss explained that during this lesson, teachers all used the same PowerPoint presentation to lay the groundwork for expectations, which included "be kind to each other" and "respect each other's choices to either wear a mask or not wear a mask." Anticipating possible behavior issues is vital, according to this participant, because, as she said, "If we're not proactive and aren't intentional about setting the expectations, then the kids will create the culture they want, and then we're in a reactive mode."

Reactive Practices. Although most participants stated that restorative justice practices need to take on a school-wide approach and that they are useful in building relationships and thus, decreasing behavior incidents, all participants shared the reactive nature of these practices as well. Within the "reactive practices" theme, a few subthemes appeared. These include practices from the "Reactive Practices" list in Table 4.2

Engaging with a Support Team. One common theme from the responses is the importance of personnel, and building into one's budget the funding for a team to support students, teachers, and administrators. Bo, Abe, and Joss all discussed the necessity of these supports.

Bo explained how he changed the entire building model to establish a Student Support

Team, so rather than teachers sending students to the office for misbehaviors, the teacher calls

and requests a member of the support team to come to the classroom to work with the student.

This team consists of a student support and reengagement person, a social emotional intervention

specialist, and the assistant principal. Counselors may be included when the issue is related to

social emotional health, but not when it is about discipline, to avoid blurring the line between

counseling and disciplining. As the head principal, Bo only becomes involved as the last line of

defense, when all other team members are busy. This student support team member, then, checks

in with the teacher to see if they would like to speak with the student privately while the support

member teaches the class; if the teacher is not in the place to do that, the support team member

asks the student a set of restorative questions, with the intent of redirecting the student, getting

them back on track, and returning them to the learning environment so they don't miss

instruction. Bo shared that he uses his Title I/ LAP (Learning Assistance Program) categorical

funds to hire both the student support and reengagement person and the social emotional

intervention specialist, but he worries what will happen if he loses this funding.

Abe also uses some of his LAP money to support students in a similar way. In his school,

rather than assigning an out of school consequence for behavior infractions, Abe assigns more

schooling for the student, in the form of after school tutoring with a teacher. Similar to an RTI

(Response to Intervention) model, Abe pays a teacher with LAP money to run after-school

tutoring. As Abe explained,

> If the kid is behind in grades, why send him out of school? Maybe the kid stays in school
>
> as a punishment. We work with the parents and say, "we're going to keep the kid at
>
> school two hours every day after school." Instead of the kid getting suspended, the kid

will actually be in a room with a teacher or someone doing work for two hours, right? I use my LAP money and pay teachers to run tutoring sessions at the school, and so I'll put them into those tutoring rooms instead of suspending them. And then we really make it clear when we will use that particular restorative model that the kid understands . . . [the kid may say] "I don't like school." "Why don't the kid like school?" "Well, I don't do my work." "Well, you just got yourself a sixth day of school, because now you're going two hours after school every day, that's the equivalent of another day. So, either you clean it up and you go five days, or you continue and you go six days with us." And so, they start realizing that "I don't want to go to school six days, I don't even want to go five days." So, they start, maybe, you know, doing their work. So we start aligning our restorative justice with something like an RTI model. So it works to fix something that is broke, to fix something that needs to be repaired.

It's important to note that Abe laughs while he says this . . . that "kids don't want to go to school six days, they don't even want to go to school five days."

Unlike the other two participants, Joss shares the fact that she used to have a Dean of Students in her building. This person had served as the point person for these practices, but since the funding for that position was cut, the counselors and administrators are trying to balance their work with the important tasks of restorative justice practices.

Answering Restorative Questions. Another essential element of restorative practices is that of self-reflection. Students engage in this self-reflection via restorative questions posed to them after a conflict has occurred. Bo, Cath, and Joss all discussed the use of restorative questioning within their practices.

For example, Bo shared that when a student support team member is called to a classroom, either the teacher will step outside to speak to the student, or the support team member will speak to the student about why the member was called in for support. Regardless of who conducts the questioning, the same questions are asked. In fact, Bo has the question card placed in the back of his lanyard so he always has them for a reference, though he says, "when you've asked them enough times, you no longer need to refer to the card." These scripted questions include: 1) What happened? 2) What were you thinking at the time? 3) What are you thinking now? 4) Who has been affected by what you've done? 5) What do you think you need to do to move forward? Bo explained that the questions, especially number one, are open-ended to allow the student to talk until they have nothing more to say about it. After the student has answered the questions, the team member tries to assess if they are ready to reengage in the classroom in a productive way, because that is always the goal: to return the student to the learning environment.

Cath also shared a set of scripted restorative questions, which came from the National Center for Restorative Justice. These questions include: 1) What harm occurred? 2) What is your responsibility in this? 3) What are we committed to moving forward? She said that question number one allows every single person to share their view of what occurred, which is important because perspectives may vary. Question number two is the hardest but is especially important because it allows students to own their behavior, and once everyone shares their responsibility in the occurrence, the adult thanks everyone for taking ownership. Cath said the last question has the potential of making the victim feel safe and allows for closure, "because it's the unknown for the victim, sometimes they don't know if it's going to continue."

Lastly, Joss shared that after a conflict occurs, and when meeting with students, she asks questions such as "What were you thinking when this occurred?" "How are you going to fix this or make this better?" "What could you have done differently?" and "How to you think the other person felt?" Sometimes the students provide the responses verbally, while other times they write their answers in journals or processing guides, but they are always meant to get students to feel empathy for others.

Conferencing/ Participating in a Restorative Circle. One of the hallmarks of restorative justice practices is holding a conversation with all people affected by a behavior, allowing each participant to voice their thoughts and how the event affected them personally. Abe, Cath, and Jo all shared ways this occurs in their schools.

Abe said that the process of transitioning to restorative practices involved circles with all stakeholders who were affected by a behavior. Initially, all who were available were invited to attend because, as he explained, it was important for everyone to see the dynamics of the process and be involved in the decision making. This meant that the administration would buy out teachers' planning periods so they could be involved; however, he said that these circles no longer require teachers to participate because teachers have come to understand the possible outcomes and trust whatever decisions result from the circles.

Cath shared that her school runs circles on three levels, and the first level—relationship circles—was discussed in the "proactive section." The next level is as an intervention, similar to multi-tiered system of supports. At this level, the school has partnered with a men's group called the Journeymen, who approached the school to run circles with a restorative focus. Cath explained that this group identifies schools with high levels of discipline, especially for boys of color, and comes into the school once a week to work with these boys, discussing topics such as

responsibility. Cath said data proves the effectiveness of this partnership for the boys who are involved.

The last level in Cath's school is for disciplinary purposes. In these circles, restorative practices are used to mediate between a victim and aggressor, though it is always the victim's choice to participate or not. However, Cath strongly encourages the victim to participate because, she says,

> Their voice telling the person what you did to me, how it impacted me socially and emotionally [is powerful] . . . everybody gets to share their voice . . . and they leave, I'm not going to say as friends, because we leave it on the table that you don't have to be friends, but you need to be respectful community members within our school. But a lot of kids leave and you can see that they have some type of closure. And both parties have left learning, which is what our job is.

Cath also shared that whenever a teacher is struggling with a class, they are encouraged to conduct relationship circles to discuss the problems at hand. For example, she said that a teacher came to her and said "I'm so mad at my kids right now. I got the worst report for my fifth period class from this sub, I don't even know what to do." In response, Cath said "why don't you run a whole restorative circle with them, tell them what the harm is?" She added that teachers often invite the administrative team to participate in these circles with them, when appropriate.

Jo also explained the roles of community circles and conferencing in her school. Always striving for the lowest level of discipline, Jo said circles first occur within the classroom to resolve any classroom issues, but administrators will use similar practices to support students too, when needed. These practices may include conferencing with students, conferencing with students and parents, or conferencing with groups of students, if needed.

Holding Students Accountable for Their Actions. Although two participants shared the

concern by some stakeholders that restorative practices do not provide the necessary

consequences for misbehaviors, all participants shared the view that, unlike exclusionary

discipline, restorative practices actually do hold students accountable for their behaviors. This is

done by having students: 1) Restore with a teacher or student and 2) Express remorse by

understanding who is affected by behaviors.

One of the goals of restorative justice practices is to restore a relationship while repairing

the harm that resulted from a conflict. Bo and Joss both talked about restoration or "reparation."

Bo said, "let's say there had been a fight or something where we're using restorative justice

practices to restore and repair the harm in that situation," this is important because the students

are "going to have to exist in the same school community, even after the event took place. And

even after whatever administrative action has been taken, they still have to be able to exist

together." Therefore, rather than the principal simply assigning a consequence, the students

involved in a conflict try to come to an understanding of what occurred and why, so that they can

continue to exist together within the school community.

Joss talked about "reparations," and how:

Kids make mistakes, we all are human, especially in middle school, and even the adults,

we all make mistakes. Things are going to happen every single day . . . somebody is

going to unintentionally or intentionally harm someone with words or actions.

When this harm occurs, she said they "weave into whatever that discipline is, a reparation." At

this point, she asks the student, "how are you going to fix this, or make it better? You maybe

broke some relationships in this behavior, how will you repair that?" Again, she says the goal

here is for students to arrive at a feeling of empathy.

Another essential element of restorative justice practices is for an "aggressor" to understand the experience and perspective of the "victim." Abe explained that "understanding the human-side of the victim" allows students to truly experience and express remorse.

For example, when explaining what restorative justice practices look like in his school, Abe said:

> In actuality, it's kids doing all kinds of different things, showing that they are remorseful for what they did, instead of us just saying "we know they are remorseful because we sent them home for three days." Kids get a chance to really show that they feel bad about what they do.

Unlike truly being held accountable for one's actions, expelling a student and sending them home does not teach them about who their behavior affected, nor does it get to the root of the problem. Rather, as Jo explained, some of the kids just go home and play video games, which is probably what they want anyway.

Abe shared a story about how restorative practices not only hold students accountable, but teach them the human-side of their actions as well. He said this story best illustrates the power of restorative justice practices in his school:

> I have two boys who wrecked the bathrooms—this year, there was a TikTok challenge to destroy your bathroom—so we found out who the two major culprits were who destroyed our bathrooms. So, you know, you got a custodian who's doing extra work all the time with the situation. So, we had to involve him in this too, because he was the one who was being victimized because he has to do all the cleaning. He's the one who has to pull all the toilet paper out of the toilet when they flood the bathroom or whatever. So, we included him. We include the kids, parents. Both boys are struggling academically so

suspending them wasn't a really good option anyway. And so, we came up with the idea

that, "you know what? Maybe we just let the boys work with the custodian out of

school." So, the custodian, you know, the parents, all of us decide, "these are the things

it's okay for them to do. They can't do everything, but they can do this. They can mop,

they can do this." So, we all kind of put it all together, what they can do, and they work

with the custodian after school. And probably two days into the work I walked up to the

boys when they just working with the custodian, and I'm like "what's going on? How's it

going?" And they told me, "Man, that was wrong because Q is cool," because he goes by

Q not Mr. Q, he's a young dude, you know. "Q is cool and for us to make him have to do

all the extra work is kind of," the kid said it's kind of f'ed up, you know. So now the

bathrooms haven't been screwed up since they got restorative justice because I think they

kind of spread the message throughout the school that "man, it's not cool. No man, Q is

cool." You know, so we worked with them and they got the chance to see the human side

of who they were dealing with and who they were victimizing.

Abe went on to explain that one of the chores the boys were assigned was to clean the scuff

marks that students were purposely making on the school floor. He said they had tennis balls at

the end of sticks and they had to scrub the marks off the floor, but that he thinks they were

thinking "we probably shouldn't be doing this too." So, they talked to their friends about not

doing this, because they now understood how this affected Q and gave him more work to do.

Question Two: What is the History of Restorative Justice Practices in Your School (or

District), Including the Impetus for Change and How it was Initiated?

The second interview question sought to understand why schools transitioned to

restorative justice practices. Similar to some of the responses in the next section, understanding

the "why" behind an action can be very powerful because it starts the process of true understanding. After coding the participant responses, two themes emerged. These themes and their subthemes can be found in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

What was the Impetus for Change?

Administration Recognized the Need For Change	The State Changed Laws Regarding Exclusionary Discipline
Had High Levels of Punitive Discipline	To Close the Educational Opportunity Gap
Recognized the Disproportionality in Discipline Data	Passed House Bill 1517
Engaged in Critical Self-Reflection	

Administration Recognized the Need for Change. Every administrator in this study moved into a building that already had discipline practices in place, and at some point, each participant recognized a need for change.

High Levels of Punitive Discipline. Abe explained that when he was first hired in his school, he was the hammer and therefore, the school had a high level of punitive discipline and suspension. Joss and Jo shared that the discipline within their buildings was much more traditional and punitive. Lastly, Cath shared that when she moved into the school, there were high levels of discipline referrals, especially against a particular demographic group of students.

Disproportionality in Discipline Data. With these high levels of discipline within every school in this study, each participant recognized a need for change, and this was initiated by the analysis of data and the recognition of the disproportionality in discipline data.

Abe stated that when he came into the building, student behavior was out of control; however, once it was reined in, they began looking at who their students really were and who

was experiencing disciplinary action, and they noticed the disparity with Black and Hispanic boys. They realized the need to see students individually and to help them individually. This realization resulted in them knowing they needed to do something differently.

Bo also said that his team recognized the need for change before the law changed, and that process was already underway. He said he let his staff see the data for themselves, and he told them, "If we never change how we're doing things, then nothing is going to change in our outcomes." Bo continues to utilize different tools to track data and to identify trends, including the School Wide Information System (SWIS) and Skyward. These tools allow him to see 1) who has required administrative attention, 2) what behaviors are occurring, 3) when they are happening, and 4) where they are happening. He said this data is also broken down by demographics, so they can be "cognizant of trends."

Joss stated that when her process began, she made the "intentional decision to reduce discipline." Having experienced cultural competency training in her previous district, she understood the importance of data analysis. She knew staff and students alike were not feeling successful, so they disaggregated the data, looking at different subgroups. When looking at discipline data, she noticed it was skewed toward different groups of kids, so she asked, "why is it that our Hispanic males only make up 10% of our population but have 40% of discipline?" Her staff also analyzed academic and discipline data to see where they intersected, and she said they were able to see so many "throughlines" in the data. They noticed that White students outperformed other groups, and they knew this should not be the situation, so she asked her staff, "Why are our 'minority' students having a higher proportion of discipline than others? Is this because they're not feeling connected?" Once they came to this realization and made changes to

their discipline practices, Joss said their academic scores improved dramatically, so she told her staff:

> You guys . . . see what happens when we create a safe environment for the kids and the
>
> staff and where kids know that they're going to make mistakes, but we're not going to
>
> put the hammer on them, but help them work through it in a meaningful way? They are
>
> able to find more success!

Joss said how powerful it has been to see discipline and academic data walk hand in hand, and prior to the pandemic, she believed they had been narrowing the gap in all areas.

Cath also recognized when she became principal of her current school that the high levels of discipline referrals were skewed, mostly against African American boys, so she shared this data with her staff. As a scientist in background, she said, "It's an easy way to make people understand and learn and so I just started dropping data." This data analysis also began the implementation process in many of these schools.

Critical Self-Reflection. Once the participants recognized the disproportionality in data, many of them engaged in critical self-reflection, which is a vital component of transformative learning.

For example, Abe asked, "how can we address this issue that's going on with the number of boys of color getting suspended? Can we do some different things here?" Again, Joss asked her staff, "Why are our minority boys having higher proportions of discipline than others? Is it because they're not feeling connected?" Lastly, Cath shared that after her staff did walkthroughs analyzing the wording other staff members used when writing student discipline referrals, she asked them, "Is this really teaching and learning with our students? Or are we just trying to be

punitive?" This critical self-reflection also led into the formal implementation of restorative justice practices.

The State Changed the Laws Regarding Exclusionary Discipline. In 2015, the Washington state legislature changed the laws regarding exclusionary discipline, making it much more difficult for schools to suspend and expel students. This was done in an attempt to "close the educational opportunity gap," by keeping kids in school (Washington State House of Appropriations, 2016). However, both Abe and Bo discussed how they had already begun the process, and the change in laws just pushed the process along and moved them toward restorative justice. Bo explained, however, that according to this new House Bill (House Bill 1517), in-school suspensions were viewed as exclusionary as well, so he had to change his building model in response, moving toward the Student Support model.

Question Three: What was the Implementation Process?

This question addresses the heart of this study: the implementation of restorative justice practices. Because most participants mentioned it as a necessary step of the implementation process, also nested within this section are the responses to question four: *what is the history of buy-in for restorative justice practices, and what was your role in that?* When analyzing the responses to this question, three themes emerged. These themes and their subthemes can be found in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Dimensions of Implementation

Normative Dimension	Technical Dimension	Political Dimension
Explain the Why	Change Practices	Staffing Decisions
Create a Shared Belief That Change is Necessary	Allot Time	Interview Questioning
Model Different Ways Of Thinking	Facilitate Professional Development	
Create Buy-In/ Build Capacity	Provide Resources and Funding	

Normative Dimensions of Implementation. As discussed in the literature review from

Chapter 2, the first strand of implementation, the normative dimension, relates to a person's

beliefs, and in the process of implementation, to the shared beliefs by all people involved in a

change. The process of implementation, then, often begins with staff identifying a need for

change. As discussed in the previous section, this frequently results from analyzing data and

recognizing the disproportionality of discipline. All participants discussed the shift in mindset, as

well as buy-in, that is necessary when transitioning to restorative justice practices.

As mentioned in the previous section, Joss had the staff disaggregate data to see the

disproportionate levels of discipline for different subgroups, while drawing the throughline

between discipline and academic success. When analyzing this data, they noticed that

"Caucasian students were way outperforming other subgroups," and Joss said to her staff,

"Come on you guys, we don't believe this. They should be performing as close as possible" to

other demographic groups. So, she said they dug into the data even deeper, and it took a real

team effort to start to transform the culture and make the school more student-centered. As Joss explained:

> [The implementation] needs to have the why behind it. Why would we be doing this?
> And everyone who's part of it has to buy into that. So that involves the office team, the
> teachers. Again, the why would be we serve kids and kids are the ones we are helping
> achieve their self-actualization through academics, through understanding who they are.

Understanding the "why" is often the first step in a shift in mindset and practices.

Cath also explained the walkthroughs that she facilitated among her teaching staff. In this process, she took actual student referrals and posted them around the school, with names removed, so staff could see what other staff members were saying about students and the wording they used to describe them. After the walkthrough, she said they "had some really honest, like down and dirty conversations" based on this data, and she told them, "This is not okay." She said that many teachers were on board with that, saying, "yep, we agree with you. This is not okay. We need to do things differently." In the interview, Cath stated, "let's be honest, these are little kids who are trying to become adults, so this is just as much an adult problem as it is a kid problem." This was a first step in changing the staff mindset at her school.

Jo also shared the process she and her assistant principal used to transition practices, which started with them deciding that discipline looked one way, but they wanted it to look a different way. This mostly consisted of modeling different ways of thinking about student behavior, and this response, she said, worked to change the culture and attitude within the school.

Bo shared the story about the transition in his building starting with analyzing the data, seeing the disproportionality that exists, and bringing his staff together. Here he told them:

If we don't do something different, nothing's going to change. So, it's up to you. If you

don't want to do this . . . we have to decide this as a staff. We all have to do this or not.

So, either we keep doing what we're doing, and we get the same results, or we look at

doing something different, but it's up to you.

He explained that after he said this to his staff, he had to go bargain so he just walked out the

room, which, he said was great because the staff was left having to decide whether or not they

wanted to get on board to make change, and most decided "okay, we want to do something

different." So, he says, "I had buy-in for the most part."

Lastly, Abe spoke about beginning with a book study with six staff members, which

started the whole "buy-in process." However, through his own studies, he said he has moved

away from the term "buy-in" because "buy-in is fleeting." Rather, he works to "build capacity"

among his staff, explaining:

Because if you believe in it and you studied about it as a leader, then your staff has to

learn what you learn. You can't just get them to buy into what you believe. That's why

we started with the book study. And then we thought about professional development so

they learn back the way I learned the value of it. So, we started getting staff buy-in that

way—that was huge. A lot of professional development, a lot of teaching, building their

capacity.

Ultimately, Abe stressed the importance of transparency, so everybody fully understands that

"you are going be trying something different."

Similar to Abe, all participants engaged their staff in meetings and professional

development sessions to share data, discuss the need for the change, and build the mindset

necessary for change to occur. Because the normative dimension includes creating shared beliefs, nested within this section are the responses to the next question:

Question Number Four: What is the History of Buy-In for Restorative Justice Practices and What Role Did You Play in That?

The responses shared previously within this section relate directly to the buy-in factor of implementation: sharing data, having hard conversations, and creating shared beliefs; however, the researcher wanted to give participants the opportunity to respond to this question directly.

Abe expounded on his ideas about "building capacity," stating that when you build capacity among your staff, restorative justice just becomes a part of practice. He said that to build capacity, teachers need to know what the principal is learning, but they don't need to read all of the books and articles. As Abe said, "I'm the principal, that's my job." Instead, he provided summaries to the staff so that teachers could understand the information, rather than just "buying into" his beliefs. Again, he stated that "buy in is fleeting. People just float for a while and then go back to what they were doing." Instead, when capacity is built among the staff, teachers truly understand what and why change is happening. They might say "this is what's going on with the data. That's why he didn't get suspended." Abe is so confident that he has built capacity that if a teacher were to leave for another school that was transitioning to restorative justice practices, they would be leaders on the team. He said they "probably don't see some of the interesting things that I did to make it happen, but they got the knowledge of what restorative justice really is."

Bo stated that buy-in in his school is mixed because people are in many different places. However, as he says, "this isn't optional. This is what we're doing." Again, he shared data with his staff, but he also shared different models that were being used by principals with whom he

had partnered. They, as a staff, analyzed the data and then discussed different options with the goal of having different outcomes.

Joss shared that her building is guided by "Guiding Principles," which are posted around the school, are taught to students and staff, and are also found in the student handbook. Whenever decisions are made, she tries to bring them back to the guiding principles. She also added that "we, as a staff, were committed to saying 'this building needs to be a student-centered, not adult-centered, building.'" She said that she has staff who have worked in adult-centered buildings and they're not good places to be. In fact, she said that when others come into her school, they often discuss how the school feels like home, like a community, while other schools sometimes feel sterile or unfriendly. Joss also said that this shift occurred because of the data analysis and hard work done by staff and teacher leaders.

However, Joss admitted that she has worked with some more "traditional" teachers who don't necessarily want to get to know the students; they just want to teach the content. When this occurs, Joss said she tries to help them to see the whole student, and one way to accomplish this is through incident statements, where, when referred to the office, students write down what caused the referral. She said she will share these statements with the teacher, saying "This is what they're thinking; this is how they're feeling." Joss said this is important because "kids are more than this little person sitting there, this empty vessel, but they are just this conglomeration of all these different experiences and thoughts." Similar to how she aims to have students arrive to empathy after conflict, she strives to help teachers arrive to empathy as well.

Jo shared that buy-in wasn't easy; in fact, there was a high level of turnover the first year of her principalship. However, for the teachers who remained, she stated that she believes they

are whole-heartedly bought in, because they see how these practices work with kids, especially

kids dealing with trauma. For example, she explained:

>So, I'm thinking right how of a first grader that's had some struggles this year and gone
>
>through some trauma. So I would say in the past, maybe, you know, five years ago, the
>
>student would have some behavior struggles, escalate, get frustrated, yell at the teacher,
>
>throw something and it would be an immediate teacher response . . . "he needs to be
>
>suspended or he needs to be out of here for the day." And the way it works now with this
>
>student is he leaves the classroom, he's able to reset, he's able to get back on track,
>
>apologize, if needed, take responsibility for his actions, talk through things. We always
>
>try and make it a learning opportunity. So, we talked about, "What could we do
>
>differently next time?" Or "What zone were you in this time when you were feeling that
>
>way? And what are some strategies that you could use instead of throwing your book at
>
>your teacher or dumping your desk?" And I know when we started at the school that
>
>would not have flown if we would have done that. Now our goal is we get kids back in
>
>class as soon as we can.

Although it took some time to get to this point, Jo said that she thinks teachers appreciate that

students are learning how to regulate their emotions, that students are not missing out on

learning, that they're building stronger relationships with their students, and that they're building

trust with their kids.

Lastly, Cath shared that besides analyzing the wording in student discipline referrals, they

had done a great deal of equity work in their building prior to this, which helped with the

conversation. She said that her school had started with AVID as the main support but are now

using the anti-racist continuum to support their equity work. Cath said this work started prior to

her principalship, so when she came into the building, she met with the school-centered decision-making team (SCDM) and told them, "Drop on me like the ten things that you guys think are really important here that you want to have happen." Because AVID and equity were always on the list of the top ten, Cath said she would return to those during every staff meeting "to support things they had said were here at school, but were not, not everybody was being held accountable to." Building on what the staff had already started and what they identified as being a priority helped create the necessary buy-in. Then, as principal, Cath said her "job is to make sure everybody's rowing in the same direction and that we're all being held accountable to the same standards." As she said to her staff, "this is the work we're going to do, you guys have been doing the work, I want to continue the work, but here's how we need to pivot." Cath acknowledges that the teachers in her building were ready for change and were ready to look at a lot of things differently, so that just helped move things along regarding creating buy-in.

Technical Dimensions of Implementation. As discussed in Chapter 2, technical changes are, arguably, easier to make and to identify. They include making changes to practices, allotting time to fit restorative practices into the school day, facilitating professional development, purchasing curricula to expand teacher knowledge, and reallocating funds and resources to hire support staff. All participants in this study have engaged in the technical dimension of implementation.

Making Changes to Practices. Implementing restorative justice practices means changing how school functions, and all participants have made that change within their schools. Joss explained that at her school, rather than teachers sending kids down to the office when an issue occurs in the classroom, a new process exists. Though the staff has identified egregious offenses that require immediate administrative intervention, for non-egregious offenses, staff are

expected to get to know students, talk to them to understand the root of the problem, and intervene with families before referring students to administration. Then, if a teacher sends a student to office, the administrative team expects that the other steps have been taken first, so they try to support the teacher and student, and work toward reparations if necessary.

Jo shared her school's slow roll-out of change, explaining that the practices really started to transition because of the different approach she and her assistant principal have taken to discipline. Although her district is not as far along in the process of implementation as some of the others, she decided to make a change herself. She said that during their first year, "rather than focusing on punitive discipline, it was more working with kids and making a learning opportunity out of misbehavior. So, just modeling that for staff." This modeling helped change how teachers respond to discipline issues, knowing the ultimate goal is to keep students in class.

Bo said that before the state changed the laws regarding exclusionary discipline, his school had already shifted from assigning out of school suspensions to assigning in-school suspensions. He explained that this was modeled after a neighboring district, with the focus that the person assigned to run in-school suspensions would:

> Work with them to get to know the student, understand kind of who they are, where they're coming from, what they want to accomplish, and then work with them to really recognize the behaviors that had gotten them into trouble, and how those behaviors are counterproductive to what they're trying to get to.

However, once the law changed and in-school suspensions were viewed as exclusionary, Bo explained that they had "already partnered with some folks to start looking at restorative practices . . . so it made sense for us to continue in the direction we were going and build on it." Therefore, he changed his building model to a student support model, where, when an issue

arises with a student, rather than a teacher sending the student to the office, the teacher calls for someone from the student support team to come to the classroom. As discussed earlier, this is a time when a restorative conference takes place, with the goal of reengaging the student back into the learning environment as quickly as possible.

Abe also changed his building practices, but he says they are now to a point where restorative justice is simply a part of practice. However, he added that when transitioning from exclusionary to restorative practices, transparency is vital, so this implementation became a part of their school improvement plan, which is posted on the school website for parents and other stakeholders to see. He said they included links to show how folks could learn more about their changed practices.

Allotting Time in the School Day. Every participant shared the fact that this process takes time, but to make restorative practices work, proper time must be allotted.

For example, Joss shared that in her school, if a consequence is ultimately warranted for a behavior infraction, "we spend time trying to figure out the why behind that. Instead of just simply suspending the kids and saying, 'don't do that. We'll see you again in four days,' we put the time into trying to figure out the 'why' to reduce future incidences."

Cath, Jo, and Joss all said that time has been built into their master schedules to allow for community circles, either at the beginning of every school day (Jo), or during homeroom (Cath and Joss). Bo also said advisory allows the time for SEL and restorative justice lessons, while all participants said that circles to mediate disciplinary issues are also a part of the school day.

Facilitating Professional Development. To transition one's practices, people involved in the transition need to be trained in the new practices to make the transition effective. After all, as

aforementioned, all staff need to feel confident in their knowledge and ability to implement the change before they fully embark on it.

Cath explained that in 2017, her school earned a grant that really jump-started their transition. Through this, they partnered with the National Center for Restorative Justice, and a team of counselors, interventionists, and administrators participated in an initial, intense training, where they learned to facilitate circles and other restorative practices. Cath said she took the whole team because she knew what a huge shift it would be on their end when it came to implementation. Then, trainers from the National Center for Restorative Justice came in and trained the whole staff, with the small group in partnership, and restorative practices expanded from there, into classrooms and advisories. She added that one of the most powerful aspects of this professional development is that she took her staff off campus to complete it, and, based on feedback, she believes this enabled her staff to look at restorative justice practices differently. Cath also claimed she is fortunate because she works within a district that has a strong SEL focus, and they have facilitated trainings in schools year-round to support restorative justice practices. Cath feels so strongly that administrators have to be willing to invest time and energy into professional development, stating "if you're not willing to do the PD work, because, some principals think that it's [restorative justice] just going to happen, it doesn't. You have to be willing to do the PD work and support and model it."

Abe, who works in the same district as Cath, also shared that once the state changed the laws about exclusionary discipline, his district started hosting professional development sessions on restorative justice practices during their district waiver days. This training, run by the SEL team, really pushed restorative justice practices as a board initiative. He said that a lot of buy-in happened during this professional development time.

Jo explained that restorative justice is really tied into the SEL focus of her district, so teachers have had a great deal of training around SEL practices and curriculum. Additionally, her district has slowly rolled out a 4-year equity plan, and last year was the first year they started discussing restorative practices. She stated that the district has been very "intentional about hitting all the different groups, the teachers, paraeducators, even office staff has had some training." She added that "at least one of our whole day equity trainings that we had with staff was based around equity through the lens of restorative justice."

Providing Resources and Funding. To transition practices, schools need to secure the necessary resources and funding to effect change. Professional development and training are aspects of this area because they include financial aspects—trainers and resources—as well. Beyond that, Abe and Bo both discussed funding that pay for the personnel necessary for their restorative practices.

As they began incorporating restorative circles to mediate discipline problems in their school, Abe stated that he wanted all people affected by a behavior to participate, which meant that he had to budget to buy-out teachers' planning periods. Additionally, because, as a consequence, he assigns students to after-school tutoring instead of to exclusionary discipline, he uses his LAP funds to pay teachers to tutor students after school.

Bo also shared that he added two positions to his building to support the student support model—the student support and reengagement position and the social emotional intervention specialist. Both positions are paid for using his categorical funds, including Title 1/ LAP money. However, he says that he worries what will happen to these positions if his funding is cut, which he fears based on new Census data.

Political Dimensions to Implementation. The political dimension of implementation includes decisions regarding staffing, which, because of its confidential nature, was not addressed in the studies within Chapter 2. However, multiple participants discussed this dimension within their responses, including Jo, Joss, Abe, and Cath. For example, although not a decision made by Jo personally, she stated that after her first year in her school, as she worked to change the way discipline looked, quite a few teachers chose to leave, but that those who remained are "whole-heartedly bought in" to the changes she is working to enact. On the other hand, Joss shared that some staff turnover is, in fact, her decision. For example, when discussing how to shift teachers' mindsets about students, Joss explained that:

> Luckily for me, I have that option of, "if you don't have the right mindset, you're not welcome in this building." And they'll learn, like, "no, this is not the right fit for me." And we have enough staff who will say [about punitive discipline], "no, that's not how we do things here."

On a more proactive side, both Abe and Cath shared that restorative justice-type questions are included in interviews for positions in their schools. As Cath explained:

> I'll be honest, when we hire staff, we're very direct in regard to some of the questions we ask about. "What is your diversity training?" and things like that. And we really hire people who just come in and they understand the work, and we don't have to convince them. So, I think that's helpful, too. One of our questions is, "We are a restorative justice school, what does that mean to you? And what does that look like?" So, we built it [restorative justice] in as part of who we are in all aspects.

Question Five: What On-Going Training and Supports Does Your School or District Have to Support Restorative Justice Practices?

Washington state changed the laws regarding exclusionary discipline in 2015, and although some schools had already shifted away from using punitive responses to behaviors, not all schools are in the same place as far as implementation is concerned. This is evident in the vastly different responses to this question. When reviewing the responses to this question, various themes emerged. These include professional development done in building, professional development done with outside supports, and restorative justice becoming a fiber of the school.

Professional Development Done in Building. Bo, Joss, Jo, and Cath all shared that they continue to offer various supports for restorative justice practices within their buildings. For example, Bo stated that they use some of their "Smart Wednesday" professional development time to address different aspects of restorative justice with staff. He added that the administrative team also works to encircle and implement other restorative practices with their staff as a way to model the practices. Cath shared that her staff also engages in restorative practices, such as relationship circles, during every single staff meeting, because "what we say, we do, and we do what we say." Not only does this model restorative practices, but it also builds community among staff. She explained that even though some people think these circles are a little forced, she believes:

> Sometimes conversation has to be forced so that you can really have a connection with everybody. Because time is so limited, we don't get time to break bread and have coffee and get time to catch up as much as we'd like to. So these are ways that we can have quick communication and connection. And it makes a big impact for community.

Jo also stated that not only does her administrative team model restorative practices for staff, they also continue to offer trainings around the SEL curriculum that all teachers use.

Joss stated that she meets with her building leaders to plan professional development and everything they do connects back to their "two big buckets," which are their schools' two main goals: 1) student learning, and 2) a safe and supportive learning environment. Then, when they work with their staff during staff development, they might say, "you guys, we're focusing on our positive supportive environment, which means we're talking about PBIS. We're talking about our guiding principles; we're talking about discipline." She added that as far as training, "in terms of restorative justice practice, actual trainers, we have not had come into our building, and definitely would be open to that." However, Joss stated that she would want an outside team to look at the practices they have in place, identify where they're on the right track and where they could improve, knowing not all schools are in the same place. She stressed that she does not want their work to be derailed; rather, she would like to build on their strengths.

Lastly, Bo, Jo, and Cath all stated that even though they might not have to do the initial training for restorative practices, they do often see the need to review information and provide refreshers. Bo explained that they review the student support process every year, and that they revisit it throughout the year, when necessary, which is more necessary this year because "the pandemic kind of threw a wrench in the whole work." Jo said that they began this school year with a refresher about SEL and restorative justice tools, and that more in-depth training was provided for new teachers. Cath also claimed that because students and staff were out of school for so long because of the Covid pandemic, they have needed to restart and reteach practices to support students and staff.

Professional Development Done with Outside Supports. Both Cath and Abe work in a district that offers year-round trainings for restorative justice. Additionally, Cath explained that she is also using her Title 1/LAP money to build partnerships and hire a consultant now that they're starting the process again, post-Covid. She said that even though they had been to a point where restorative justice was a part of their school, Covid threw a kink in everything. As she explained, everyone was out of practice for 1 ½ years, so "some kids are struggling just in that learning environment, how to handle themselves." She added that even the adults are struggling to get back to normal. Bo also explained that his school is still partnered with folks from their grant, and that they just applied for another stint with this outside organization to support them in their efforts with restorative practices.

Restorative Justice as a Fiber of the School. Abe, Bo, and Cath all claimed that because of the work that they have been doing over the years, restorative justice has simply become a part of how they do school. Abe went a step further to say that because of this, they no longer do much professional development within the school. He went on to explain:

> We don't do a lot of on-going training because I think you have to get it to a point where it's a part of practice. And I think that with any implementation program that you put into a school, principals move it through, you know, move it and move on. If it's a practice that's really good and you build capacity with staff, it's just part of the fiber of the building.

He explained that this is the result of working hard for three years, "putting in the time, effort and training to a point that it is just a part of what we do now." He said that if new staff come into the building, they will learn through osmosis because the staff is so knowledgeable. He also feels so confident that even if he leaves the school, restorative justice practices will stay.

Question Six: What Have Been Some Challenges to Implementation?

Each participant expressed that implementation is a difficult process. From their responses, two themes emerged as challenges to implementation. These themes and their subthemes can be found in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Challenges to Implementation

Resources	Buy-In
Time	Teachers and Staff
Staffing	Parents and Families
Money	

Resources. One of the first challenges to implementation is time, which most participants stated. Jo explained that restorative justice takes a lot more work. As she said, "to practice restoring relationships and working in-depth with students that way, it's much easier to just provide a consequence." Cath concurred with this idea saying that restorative practices take a lot of time and that "honestly, it's easier to suspend a kid in 15 minutes, then to do a restorative circle, which could take 45 minutes if you're letting kids really have voice." She went on to explain that, "it's kind of changed the dynamics of what time looks like in regard to discipline." Joss also said that time is one of the biggest challenges, stating "if you're going to do a conflict mediation, like sit kids down to talk and to repair, that takes time." She also said following up with parents and partnering with families takes even more time. Finally, Bo added that "it's a much more time-consuming, labor-intensive process."

The fact that this process is time-consuming and labor-intensive brings in the second challenge to implementation: funding for staffing and personnel. Two participants in this study, Bo and Cath, applied for and earned grants to support their restorative justice work, which, according to Cath, is what initiated her school's transition to restorative justice practices in the first place. Bo said that because restorative practices are so time-consuming and labor-intensive, he had to add some staffing. Joss also said that staffing is the biggest challenge because it does take time. In fact, during the interview, she was interrupted multiple times, and she shared that "as we're talking, I have all these sticky notes and things I need to get to and kids that, similar situations that we're talking about, and I don't know if I'm going to be able to get to them in the way that I need to." Jo also stated a challenge was personnel at her school, because there was only her, her assistant principal, and a counselor to intervene with students and to loop back with teachers, and with all three often so busy, doing the hard work well is challenging.

Unlike in a couple of other schools, staffing has not been added to Jo or Joss's schools, which may be compounding the challenges. Both shared the unusual nature of this school year, and the fact that this year is proving to be even more challenging when it comes to finding time to do restorative practices well. Jo said that behavior issues have really ramped up in her school, especially since February, while Joss explained, "it's just been the most challenging of years. We are seeing behaviors that we've never seen before." Because of this, she stated:

> The other main challenge, I would say, would just be, continuing to, we know that being proactive and being purposeful, and reteaching expectations is important. This year, especially, has been so reactive that at times it just feels like we're just putting out fires all the time. And we're not even looking to see, like, how can we prevent the fires from starting in the first place?

Buy-In by Teachers and Staff. Jo stated that one of the biggest challenges for her was those teachers who do not agree with restoring relationships and who had a "more punitive approach to discipline." She went on to explain:

> It was hard because it was the beginning of my principalship and so, in some instances, it felt very much like "oh my gosh, they don't think I'm leading. I'm not doing a good job as a leader. I'm, you know, letting behaviors fall by the wayside."

She said that that first year, she had a lot of turnover in staff, but now her school is in a different place.

> Cath also said that there are some staff who believe that if a punitive consequence is not assigned, then the student isn't learning anything. To this, Cath responds:

> Well, then, you've never sat in a pretty intense restorative circle where there has been harm, and you watch both people communicate with each other. And for me, it's the learning you see kids having to process that's more impactful than saying, "bye, you're going home for five days."

Abe also discussed the challenge of buy-in, or as he calls it, building capacity, among staff. He said there are simply some people who will not buy in, "I don't care if you have professional development every three months and you focus all on this and you got the whole staff there, some people just are not going to buy in" because some people just "want blood." He stated that the challenge is getting people who just want to "nail kids" to understand "that we don't have to nail them all." He explained that this is a culturally responsive piece, "that's what we're trying to change in school is years and years of 'this is how we do it.'" Abe went on to explain:

> And that's the challenge with restorative because restorative practice takes you away from the real traditional. When we think about what we've been dealing with the last

summer, with Black Lives Matter, traditional injustice, *misjustice*, in our system, it starts

in our schools. And so restorative justice is kind of trying to change that. I tell my staff,

especially after what happened this year, we talked about restorative justice, I said "guys,

that's what's going on, that all that misjustice we see in the justice system, it starts with

us. It starts with some traditional things we have done with discipline, in the way we

handle kids, criminalize them when they're in junior high. And by the time they get in

high school, they've been suspended. And they so conditioned to punishment, they ready

to go to jail, they ready, you know, because they know it's going to happen. . .. So this

starts really with our practices, our discipline practices in school are kind of early

criminalizing kids to the point, it just kind of filters out into the community." And so that,

that's the part that changes, the ones who don't see it. We kind of put it in real terms and

what we're doing when we consistently punish kids, and they miss school, and they're

not here, and it makes our job easier, but it makes their life incredibly harder, and it

makes our community a little bit worse.

Buy-In by Parents and Families. Abe shared that the first buy-in is with teachers, but

the second is with parents who "want blood." Bo also shared that one of his biggest challenges

has been with parents who don't understand the practices that his school has adopted. As he

explained:

So all of us who went through school, there was a system that if something happened, this

is what happened. And that's not the system anymore. So if there's a fight, my child gets

beat up, then I'm expecting that kid to be out of school, and that's not necessarily going

to happen.

He went on to explain that part of the process involves educating parents, but since schools had not been in-person for so long, there had been a lapse of communication, so parents don't understand the rationale behind decisions. So, he said, they come to him angry, and he has to explain the laws and how things work now.

Question 7: What Have You Learned About the Process of Implementation Based on Your Experience?

Because this question was individualized for each participant, the responses varied with no emergent themes.

Jo stated that it is "definitely good to take baby steps, depending on where the building is starting." She said it is vital that staff understands the why behind restorative justice and that as a building leader, she continues to model these practices with students because "people really are watching. And it has a lot more impact, sometimes, than I realized." She added that something that she struggles with personally is that she was a consequence-based teacher, so she has learned a great deal about herself and the need to calibrate her own ways of thinking and behaving.

Joss said, "it's the right work for sure." She added that when students know that adults are on their side, not expecting them to be perfect and teaching them how to fix mistakes when they make them, it can be very powerful. Teachers can also teach this by modeling, by admitting when they make a mistake and apologizing for it. She added that every day is a fresh start but when we make a mistake we repair it, and "then we're going to be better people for it." Joss went on to explain how she sometimes works to change the mindsets of teachers who put content over relationships, adding "no content should ever be more important than the mental health and well-being of a child."

In response to this question, Bo responded, with a laugh, saying, "it's not easy. That's what I learned." He went on add:

But a lot of times, things that are worthwhile aren't easy. So at the end of day, it's making a difference in our outcomes and keeping our kids in school. And you know, and if honestly, if we want to focus on academic growth, you could have the best lessons in the world, but if they're not there to benefit from them, then they're not going to benefit.

In response to the last question, Cath stated:

I have learned that it's a learning tool. And I, if you have never worked with a middle school brain, it functions between, "I think I want to be an adult, so I'm going to try to act adult," yet then when you hold them to adult accountability, they want to be a little kid again. And so I think that that's my responsibility as an educator is to try to get them to understand, like, yes conflict occurs in the world. And if you think it won't, you're living in a utopia that doesn't exist. So, when there's conflict, you cannot put fist to face because you will be in jail. And the best way to deal with this is to have a conversation. And we do it in a very structured way. And once kids know that, then they have trust, and they have belief, and they are willing to take the risk to say, "you hurt me because you said this, or you did this." And it's a learning process, which is what our job is, is helping kids to learn behavior, academics, a little bit of all of it.

Lastly, in response to the final question, Abe explained that restorative justice practices have to be the right fit for the school. As he explained:

Restorative practices were not the tool for me when I got hired. My discipline was way, way too high. Everything was really out of control. The staff was demanding something to be done, you got to fix this, right? And restorative wasn't going to work in that, and

the kids had already kinda, the expectations had been lowered for them. So the

expectation had to be, you know, raised up about behavior. So all that was different. I

think it really works in the place that you've kind of got control of the discipline and the

staff is strong. And now we can start really thinking about how do we handle our kids to

really save more kids, where we really started talking about growth and moving more

kids across the goal line. . .. So I think more schools are in that point where they're trying

to figure out "how do I serve the state law? How do I start?" and it's about being real

honest with staff, it's a culture, restorative, it's a culturally responsive measure. . ..

because you're looking at every discipline issue and you look at every kid, who that kid

is, and how do we respond to this kid, and his behavior in a manner that's going to bring

the kid to remedy, not just "I'm going to nail you because this is what the book says."

Abe went on to say that he's proud that Washington state is one of the forerunners of change

"when it comes to trying to break the system of misjustice that has happened so much." He

explained that schools are no longer allowed to use progressive discipline, which he believed

didn't work anyway. As he said, "Quit telling me this kid did this 18 times, because, he'd been

doing it 18 times because you haven't handled it, you haven't done anything to respond to it, you

just keep suspending him." Rather than repeatedly suspending students, Abe said it's necessary

to look at kids closely, learn about their culture, and remedy problems instead of just punishing

them.

Summary

This qualitative study sought to explore the lived experiences of administrators as they

underwent the same phenomenon: the implementation of restorative justice practices in schools.

Through the lens of transformative learning theory, the researcher sought to understand how

these administrators shifted beliefs and practices prior to and during implementation (Mezirow, 2018). The researcher identified five participants and interviewed each during one formal session, asking them the same seven questions, with follow-up questions, as necessary. She then interviewed some of them a second time to clarify responses and increase reliability. The researcher coded the interview transcripts, and from these codes multiple themes emerged. Each of these themes were discussed in this section and will be addressed further in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Chapter Introduction

The goal of this research study was to investigate the phenomenon of implementation by learning about the experiences of administrators as they worked to implement restorative justice practices in their schools. Through criterion, convenience, and snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018), the researcher identified five building principals who participated in one formal semi-structured interview, with follow-up interviews conducted as necessary to clarify responses. The principals came from different schools in Washington state. Four were principals of middle schools, while one was a principal of an elementary school, and their experience in their current administrative roles ranged from five to 18 years. Three participants were female, while two were male.

The researcher collected data through interviews in order to answer the two primary research questions. The first research question asks: 1) How do administrators implement restorative justice practices? The second question asks: 2) How do administrators create buy-in by staff for adopting restorative justice practices? A secondary question for this study includes the following: What transformative experiences do staff undergo in the shift from exclusionary to restorative practices? Within these questions, the researcher also sought the answer to this final question: What are barriers to implementation of restorative justice practices? The researcher analyzed the responses to these questions through the lens of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2018), focusing on how building principals change the mindsets of staff as they work to enact change and implement restorative justice practices in their schools.

Through analysis of the interview transcripts, the researcher identified multiple emergent themes related to the questions posed during the interview. Each of these themes related directly

to restorative justice practices, the implementation of these practices, how to create buy-in for these practices, challenges to implementation, and what was learned through the implementation process. These themes and subthemes, arranged by interview question, can be found in Appendix B. The themes and subthemes, as they relate to the research questions, the concepts discussed in the literature review, and the theoretical framework, are discussed in the following sections of Chapter 5. Also included in this chapter are reflections regarding implications for practice, limitations of this study, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the experiences of administrators as they implement restorative justice practices in their schools. This topic is important because as schools work to adjust their practices in response to clear disproportionality in discipline data as well as the changed laws regarding exclusionary practices, administrators are seeking alternative ways to prevent and respond to discipline issues. Many have decided to transition to restorative practices and have done so with varying degrees of success. Therefore, this study not only looks backward to investigate the past experiences of principals, but it also provides insight to other principals as they look forward to implementation within their schools.

How do Administrators Implement Restorative Justice Practices?

Because the effectiveness of change often depends on how that change is made, a primary question this study sought to understand is how do administrators implement restorative justice practices in their schools? To that end, question three of the interviews asked participants "what was the implementation process?" After analyzing the responses, three themes emerged: practices related to the normative dimension, the technical dimension, and the political dimension of implementation. Within the normative dimension, the following subthemes

emerged: explain the why, create a shared belief that change is necessary, model different ways of thinking, and create buy in/ build capacity. Within the technical dimension, the following subthemes emerged: change practices, allot time, facilitate professional development, and provide resources and funding. Lastly, within the political dimension, the following two subthemes emerged: staffing decisions and interview questioning.

As emphasized in the research and by the participants, the normative dimension is vital to lay the groundwork for effective implementation. Once the staff is all on board, then the practices within the technical dimension follow more meaningfully. The political dimension, then, ensures that new staff believe in and support the efforts and practices already in place during and after the implementation of restorative justice practices.

Restorative Justice Practices. Although the focus of this study is on the implementation of restorative justice practices, the researcher thought it necessary to identify and understand the practices that had been implemented within the participants' schools, to better understand the implementation process itself. Restorative justice practices look differently within different schools, as evidenced by the participant responses; however, according to Zehr, who is viewed as the "modern pioneer of restorative justice" (1990), there is no blueprint for how restorative justice should be done, because all practices are culture-bound, and restorative practices should be done organically, from the ground-up, based on the needs of the community where they reside.

Based on the responses in the study, the researcher arranged this section according to proactive and reactive approaches. However, in Chapter 4, she added "Restorative Justice as a School-Wide Practice" because multiple participants emphasized the importance of this in their responses. For the purpose of this discussion, the researcher has decided to move "Restorative

Justice as a School-Wide Practice" to fall under "Implementation," since the scholarly research discussed it within that section.

Though restorative practices take both proactive and reactive approaches, from the study it appears that each participant primarily uses them as a response to behavior infractions. These reactive measures include engaging a student with a support team, having the student respond to restorative questions, conferencing with the student, having the student participate in a restorative circle, and holding the student accountable to restoring a relationship, repairing harm, and expressing remorse. The goal, then, is not only to return the student to the learning environment as quickly as possible, but also to help the student learn how their behaviors impact others, how to better respond to conflict in the future, and how to repair any harm they created. Three participants stressed the importance of making learning opportunities out of misbehaviors, because students are young people learning how to be and exist in the world. Another participant stated, even after a conflict occurs, the students are going to have to exist within the same school community, so the job of the adults in the building is to help them learn how to co-exist. This connects to what Zehr (1990) said is the root of restorative justice—the belief that we are all interconnected and that "a harm done to one is a harm to all" (p. 29), which must be amended somehow.

Amending the harm often involves the three pillars of restorative justice, which include 1) a focus on the harm, 2) the belief that harms result in obligations, and 3) a focus on engagement or participation by all those involved in the harm (Zehr, 1990). The results of the study imply that the practices within the participant schools involve these three pillars—a focus on the harm, repairing that harm, and involving all stakeholders. For example, the student support team in one participant's school comes to the classroom when an issue arises and asks

the student specific restorative questions, including, "Who has been affected by what you've done?" and "What do you think you need to do to move forward?" Similarly, the restorative questions in another participant's school ask, "What harm occurred?" "What is your responsibility in this?" and "What are we committed to moving forward?" In this second instance, the questions are posed during a restorative circle involving both the aggressor and the victim, which aligns with pillar number three. As mentioned in Chapter 2, although restorative justice practices aim to make things right, forgiveness is not always the result, because it depends on the participants involved. Similarly, one participant said that although the conference and questioning allow for closure, no expectation exists that those involved in the conflict will become friends. As Zehr (1990) stated, depending on the harm done, a return to the past may not always be a healthy result.

Restorative justice practices became a part of the United States criminal justice system in the 1970s as a result of critics claiming that traditional criminal justice practices neglected the "justice needs" of the victim (Zehr, 1990). In this sense, participants in this study appear to have the "justice needs" of the victims at the forefront of their practices. This also connects to a second aspect of restorative justice practices, which emphasizes obligations, accountability, and responsibility for the harm-doers to make things right. Multiple participants discussed these accountability measures, such as "restoring relationships" and "expressing remorse." At least one participant added that sending a kid out of school does nothing to teach them about who they affected and how, and another stated that he can't tell a student is remorseful just because he sent them home. Instead, helping the students understand the human-side of the victim allows them to truly express remorse.

Zehr (1990) also explained that restorative practices should not always take the place of punitive measures, because sometimes punitive measures are warranted. However, restorative practices provide another option for dealing with harm and for preventing harm from occurring in the first place. In this sense, multiple participants stated they do, in fact, assign punitive consequences for specific behaviors; however, the interaction with the student starts with a conversation trying to get to the root of the problem or behavior, and the consequence only occurs at the end of the conversation. This also aligns with restorative practices, which aim to understand the root causes of crime to prevent future incidences.

Although every participant explained their use of reactive measures to discipline problems, restorative justice practices exist as proactive measures as well. Four participants discussed proactive measures used in their schools, including community/ relationship circles, guiding principles, peer mediation, and homeroom/ advisory as a vehicle for teaching. Although one participant did not discuss proactive measures, one cannot assume they do not exist within his school. The aforementioned reactive and proactive measures align with those discussed by the International Institute of Restorative Justice Practices (IIRP), which identified processes that are most helpful during implementation. These practices include restorative conferences, circles, family-group conferences, and informal restorative practices (Wachtel, 2016), three which were discussed by participants to some degree.

According to the IIRP, restorative conferences involve the offender(s), the victim(s), and both parties' family and friends, and allow for all parties to discuss the harm done and any necessary consequences (Wachtel, 2016). These conferences are victim-focused, voluntary, and scripted, similar to the conferences discussed by at least one study participant (O'Connell et al., 1999). Circles, then, are proactive ways to build community, and are similar to those used by at

least three study participants. Family group conferences, which are rarely used, bring together extended family and possibly social workers, and are based around legal and safety issues. No participants in this study discussed this type of conference. Finally, informal restorative practices are those done in every classroom every day, including asking affective questions, telling students how their behaviors affect others personally, and intervening at the classroom level to keep students in the classroom (Wachtel, 2016). Multiple participants discussed this as the "lowest level of discipline possible."

Beyond the subthemes identified under "proactive approaches," one participant also discussed the capital that they are able to build with students through the use of restorative justice practices, which helps when a disciplinary action is required. Similarly, Wachtel (2016) explained how restorative justice practices build social capital through democratic and participatory practices, and, therefore, have the power to reduce violence and crime.

From the research and the study, one may deduce that there is no one way to "do restorative justice" in school. Rather, assessing the needs of the school, its students and staff, is a good first step. One way to perform this assessment is via data dives, which will be discussed in the next section.

Impetus for Change. Every participant in this study explained that when they started their principalship in their current locations, their building had high levels of punitive discipline, one even calling himself "the hammer." Two immediately sought to change the culture, including how discipline looked, and the other two quickly noticed the skewed discipline data. They all eventually sought change.

In an attempt to "close the educational opportunity gap," in 2015, the Washington state legislature changed the laws regarding exclusionary discipline (Washington State House

Appropriations, 2016). However, prior to this change in legality, multiple participants had already noticed the disproportionality in discipline data and had begun their own work to transition away from exclusionary discipline practices. Evidence of this disproportionality can be found on the website of the Washington state Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. For example, in the 2018-2019 school year, in Washington state, 8.3% of Black students were suspended from school compared to 3.4% of White students, which means that Black students were suspended at a rate of 2.45 times that of White students (Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2021). Because of this, three out of five of the participants had already begun to shift their practices prior to 2015, while two of the participants became principals after 2015.

One impetus to change included data analysis, which four participants discussed in their responses. Two mentioned data tracking tools, such as the School-Wide Information System, Skyward, and the Universal Screener, and one expounded on the usefulness of these tools, which breaks down the data according to demographics of the student, type of behavior, location of the behavior, and time of the behavior, so he can be "cognizant of trends." This data analysis, then, often led to a critical self-reflection of beliefs and practices within the school. Not only did the principals question their staff, but they questioned themselves and what they could do to change the data.

This critical self-reflection relates to the theoretical framework of this study: transformative learning theory, which is the process by which a person shifts or "transforms" their frames of reference, assumptions, and expectations. These frames of reference include a person's mindsets, perspectives, and habits of mind, and by shifting these mindsets, a person is more capable of considering the experiences and perspectives of others (Mezirow, 2018). As

discussed in Chapter 1, this process of perspective transformation often involves three vital elements: an individual experience (often called a disorienting dilemma), critical reflection, and voluntary discourse (Mezirow, 1978a). In this instance, the data analysis serves as the "disorienting dilemma," also called the "powerful human catalyst," or "forceful argument" that shakes a person and causes them to reconsider the world and their role in it (Christie et al., 2015, p. 11).

Once the person feels this initial discomfort, they begin the process of critical self-reflection, where they consider their beliefs and assumptions, as well as the source of those beliefs and assumptions (Mezirow, 2018). In this instance, multiple principals questioned themselves and their staff, wondering, in response to the data, "Why are our minority students having a higher proportion of discipline than others? Is it because they're not feeling connected to school?" Another asked, "How can we address this issue that's going on with the number of boys of color getting suspended? Can we do some different things here?" Lastly, after analyzing the wording on student referrals, another participant questioned, "Is this really teaching and learning with our students? Or are we just trying to be punitive?" Following this critical self-reflection, one engages in honest discourse with others, because, at its core, transformative learning is a metacognitive process by which people reconsider the reasons for their sometimes-problematic perspectives (Mezirow, 1978a). This discourse was frequently mentioned as one of the first steps in the next section: the process of implementation.

The Process of Implementation. This question directly relates to the main question of this research study: How do administrators implement restorative justice practices? Nested within the responses, then, are the answers to the second research question: How do administrators create buy-in by staff for adopting restorative justice practices?

As discussed in Chapter 2, implementation occurs on three levels, also called "dimensions." These levels are 1) normative, 2) technical, and 3) political (Wiley et al., 2018). Chapter 2 reviewed the literature according to the first two dimensions: normative and technical. Because the political dimension often involves confidential human resources decisions, the scholarly literature did not discuss that dimension. However, because multiple participants shared staffing and hiring processes with the researcher, this study does include the political dimension. The following section focuses on the normative dimension, but discussion of the technical and political dimensions will follow.

How do Administrators Create Buy-In by Staff for Adopting Restorative Justice Practices? The first strand of implementation, the normative dimension, is the main focus of this section. It involves elements that are rarely visible and can be difficult to identify, such as beliefs, and in the context of implementation, the shared beliefs by all people involved in that implementation. This section is really the heart of this research study because shifting practices is one thing, but shifting beliefs is much more challenging and often, much more important.

Take a Whole-School Approach. According to the scholarly research, taking a whole school approach is one element of the normative dimension, because it "works to create a restorative culture grounded in shared values by engaging all community members and developing the necessary skills to build and foster relationships" (Gonzalez et al., 2018). Within Chapter 2, Alliance Charter High School, Central Falls School District, and Cole Middle School all took a whole-school approach to implementation. Within this study, three participants also mentioned the importance of a whole-school approach for implementation to be successful. In fact, one participant claimed that it was the most important step she took, while another stated that "restorative justice can't be a flavor of the month;" rather, it must be a *way of being*. The

third concurred that restorative practices require everyone to get on board and agree, and that eventually, it just becomes a practice at the school. Because teachers and administers are so busy every day with their day-to-day responsibilities, restorative justice practices cannot be an add-on, or "just another thing they have to do." This supports findings from Vaandering's (2014) study, where, in an interview, a teacher responded, "in the busyness of everyday teaching, feeling the weight of curriculum expectations and testing" she often "defaults to an approach that is attentive to instructional detail, transmission of knowledge and student academic success, but seemingly indifferent to the emotional and relational concerns of her students" (p. 73). Therefore, building the practices into how the school functions increases its effectiveness.

Create Shared Beliefs. Within this whole-school approach, creating shared beliefs and understanding the "why" becomes the next step. As discussed in the "Summary" section of Chapter 2, Liberman & Katz (2017) cited a participant who stated, "it is important to shift philosophy first and then proceed with shifting action" (p. 14). Sumner et al. (2010) stressed the importance of gaining support for restorative justice practices before implementing change. Within the studies included in Chapter 2, Alliance Charter High School had created a shared belief, though that belief was not articulated in the study (Gonzalez et al., 2018), while Central Fall School District also established a philosophy of the school, which was also not articulated in the study (Liberman & Katz, 2017). At Denver Public Schools, staff had the opportunity to attend professional development trainings that had the *potential* to build shared beliefs, though those were not discussed either (Wiley et al., 2018). Only in the study regarding Cole Middle School were the shared values articulated; these include "respect, empathy, and compromise" (Sumner et al., 2010).

Analyze Data. Most participants in this study stated that creating a shared belief starts with analyzing data, and letting staff see the disproportionality in discipline, the connection between discipline and academic data, and the wording staff members use to discuss students on disciplinary referrals. After analyzing this data, staff can engage in honest discourse, or as one participant called it, "really honest, down and dirty" conversations. For example, in three participants' schools, staff analyzed the disproportionality in discipline data and discussed what they, as a staff, could do to change that data. The principals asked reflective questions, encouraging the staff to consider their beliefs about their students and how those beliefs might be harmful to those students. Christie et al. (2015) explained that this discourse must remain rational, objective, and open to opposing viewpoints, but it must also consist of critical reflection. Through these discussions, beliefs are capable of change, and participants can transform *what* they believe about students by recognizing *why* they believe certain things about students. However, Brookfield (1991) asserted that for an experience to be truly transformative and an act of critical reflection, the person "must engage in some sort of power analysis of the situation or context in which the learning is happening" (p. 121). In this sense, the abovementioned staff discussed the role they played, in their positions of power, in negatively affecting their students by removing them from the learning environment.

What Transformative Experiences do Staff Undergo in the Shift from Exclusionary to Restorative Practices? This is the essence of transformation, and one of the most difficult tasks to accomplish—not only helping others see where their beliefs are restrictive and harmful, but also recognizing when one's own beliefs are restrictive and harmful to others. As one participant said, "kids are more than just this little person sitting there, this empty vessel, but they are this conglomeration of all these different experiences and thoughts." The same is true

about adults in schools; they have many years of experiences and thoughts that have developed into their frames of reference—their ideas about what is right, true, and good—but these frames of reference are not necessarily the same as those of their students.' The problem arises when what the person in the position of power believes is right, true, and good is not the same as what the person who holds little to no power in the situation believes is right, true, and good. How does the person who believes a silent classroom is good respond to the student who comes from a loud household, and therefore, believes that a loud classroom is good?

This is best illustrated by a story shared by one of the participants, who recognized that his school was suspending minority boys so often because of their culture. As he said,

We would have two boys walk in, we would have a White kid walk in, he would not do anything, not have a book, not have a pencil, not have a piece of paper. He'd go into the back of the room, just kind of sit there and not get into trouble, not do any work, zero. But the same brother walks into the room, the Black boy walks into the room, he yells across the room, "Hey! What's up man?" So, you know that he doesn't have a pencil or backpack. He doesn't have anything and he gets called up right away. He gets sent to the office. "He was disruptive, came in, doesn't have any supplies," and so that gets added to the discipline: doesn't have any supplies. But Jonathan, in the back of the room, shows up every day with no supplies, doesn't do anything but Jonathan doesn't say anything. Jonathan's laid back, comes from a real quiet home life, is pretty laid back and they don't yell around. But Kareem comes from a homelife that's pretty out-going, they're active and so he walks into the room and the first thing he does is yell to Jamal in the back of the room, "What's up dog?" and the teacher, you know, they send him down to my office

for disrupting the class and the class hasn't even started yet and he's already being

disruptive. . . so he doesn't come back next week.

The participant shared this story as an illustration of how he realized he had been punishing

students based on behaviors that were indicative of their culture, which caused him to transform

his ideas about and responses to student behaviors. He said he chose to become involved in

education to help boys like these, but instead, he found he was harming them more by

disciplining them for displaying elements of their cultures. This led him to work with his staff to

shift away from viewing behaviors such as these as "misbehaviors" requiring punitive

consequences. He explained that he realized he had to figure out something different, how to get

to the root of the problem rather than continuing to assign traditional consequences, which

required a great deal of learning and growth on his part. He added that punitive consequences are

tradition, and "it's not just my tradition. It's everyone's tradition, right? Everyone wants to

punish kids. Everybody. This is tradition. . .. it is hard to move away from being punitive."

    Shift One's Mindset. Not only does "moving away from being punitive," then, require a

shift in mindset, but recognizing certain behaviors as being aspects of culture also requires a shift

in mindset, such as realizing that a loud student might just come from a "loud house" and should

not be punished for their culture or homelife. Then, acknowledging the inherent value of

different cultures than one's own also requires that shift. As discussed in Chapter 1, an analysis

of these hegemonic assumptions encourages those who engage in critical self-reflection to

recognize how their power and dominance stem from policies and institutions that continue to

maintain the status quo.

Become Culturally Responsive. Though not mentioned in the research about restorative justice, it is important to consider that restorative justice is essentially a culturally responsive practice. As explained by Gay (2010)

> Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches *to* and *through* the strengths of these students. Culturally responsive teaching is the behavioral expression of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognize the importance of racial and cultural diversity in learning (pp. 36-37).

Although not necessarily related to instruction, getting to know students on an individual level, understanding their backgrounds, their beliefs, their interests, their conflicts, their fears, their emotions, their motivations, their families, their cultures—this all allows educators to see students as individuals who have very individual needs. It allows them to realize that oftentimes, behaviors are an extension of a student's culture and homelife, and as one participant said, "some kid's homelives are just louder, so those kids tend to be louder." Culturally responsive educators value students' homelives rather than penalize them for it being louder, which requires teachers to truly understand their students.

Engage in Self-Reflection. After engaging in this critical self-reflection about beliefs and assumptions, a staff can move toward shared beliefs, ones that are more open and accepting of the vastly different backgrounds, beliefs, thoughts, experiences, and perspectives of their students. The importance of this becomes apparent when reviewing the differing demographic data of teachers and students discussed in Chapter 1. Then, once the staff has shared beliefs, they can move to the technical dimension of implementation, which is much easier to quantify. All

scholarly articles reviewed in Chapter 2, as well as all participants in the study, emphasized the technical dimension of their implementation.

The Technical Dimension of Implementation. Once the staff shares similar beliefs and is ready to move from exclusionary to restorative practices, they can begin making the necessary technical changes. These include changing school practices, allotting time in the school day for restorative practices, facilitating professional development, and providing resources and funding.

Change School Practices. Three study participants all explained that one of the changes to school practices focused on building relationships with students. This included teachers and staff talking to students one-to-one, understanding the root causes of "misbehaviors," and creating learning opportunities out of these "misbehaviors." One participant transitioned his school to a "student support model" while another emphasized the need for transparency so all stakeholders understand the new practices as well as the rationale behind these practices, so he includes this information on his School Improvement Plan, which is posted on the school website.

Allot Time. The participants also emphasized that building relationships takes more time than simply issuing punitive consequences, so allotting time in the school day arose as another prominent subtheme. Four participants explained that time is also necessary to conduct community circles; therefore, schools need to build this time into the master schedule, and they need to plan for these restorative experiences in advisory or homeroom classes.

Facilitate Professional Development. To prepare for holding restorative circles and transitioning to restorative practices in general, staff need to participate in initial and on-going professional development, which arose as a third subtheme. One participant explained that her school received a grant and partnered with the National Center for Restorative Justice, which

provided intense training for her staff, but she emphasized the need for all staff, including administrators, to participate in this training to support the necessary "whole school approach" to implementation. Another participant also spoke of district-led professional development which created a good deal of buy-in by staff. Lastly, a third participant explained that her district tied restorative justice into the Social Emotional Learning focus of the district, which has been an emphasis for years. This has created a sort of building block from one to the next, both of which are linked to the focus on "equity" within the district.

However, as explained by multiple participants, professional development must remain on-going to support the school's efforts toward effective implementation. For example, one participant spends part of his weekly staff meetings addressing various aspects of restorative justice with his staff, while another shared that her staff engages in relationship circles during every single staff meeting. A third participant explained that professional development at her school always centers around one of her school's two goals, or "big buckets," which are 1) student learning and 2) fostering a safe and supportive learning environment. Therefore, restorative practices are often the focus of discussion when discussing how the staff fosters a safe and supportive learning environment. Lastly, although each participant stated that even though they no longer facilitate the initial trainings about restorative justice practices, refreshers and reminders are always necessary to continue the work that the staff has already started.

Provide Resources and Funding. Providing professional development requires time, but it also connects to the last subtheme: providing resources and funding. Resources include hiring trainers for professional development, buying out teachers' plan periods so they can participate in restorative circles, and hiring personnel to support restorative efforts. For example, two participants both use categorical funds to pay personnel. One hired an afterschool tutor while the

other added two positions to his student support model. Additionally, a third participant applies

for and has been awarded a grant to support her school's restorative justice efforts. However,

schools that are not awarded categorical funds or grants will need to find ways to provide the

necessary resources and funding within their budgets.

Also within a school's budgetary planning is a focus on staffing, which relates to the next

section, the political dimension of implementation.

The Political Dimension to Implementation. The political dimension to implementation

centers around personnel, and more specifically, who is hired or released from positions within

the school. Two participants shared that the transition from exclusionary to restorative practices

caused some staff to choose to leave their positions. Because they did not believe in the change,

they left to find a better fit. On the more proactive side, two other participants shared that

restorative-type questions are asked of all interviewees. In this sense, candidates who do not

support these practices are not hired in the schools where the practices are a priority.

However, even with these many practices in place, challenges to implementation clearly

exist for all participants. These challenges are discussed in the next section.

What Are Barriers to Implementation of Restorative Justice Practices?

A secondary question within this study sought to understand challenges that

administrators experienced during the implementation process. Every participant in this study

expressed that implementation is an arduous process, but, as one participant said, "it's the right

work." That said, the most prevalent challenges to implementation include making time,

accessing the necessary resources, and creating buy-in.

Making Time. Most participants identified time as a challenge to implementation, not

just with students, but with staff as well. One participant shared that despite what she would like

to accomplish with her staff, she only has one hour a month with them, and oftentimes that hour is filled with other essential tasks. For example, in many school districts, the union and administrative team negotiate the number of minutes allowed per month for staff meetings, and in the instance of this participant, only one hour-long staff meeting per month was negotiated. Because meetings often consist of nuts-and-bolts information sharing, this participant stated that she does not have the time necessary with her staff to implement restorative justice practices well. Secondly, the time spent with students to engage in restorative-type activities varies greatly between elementary and middle school. Only in the elementary school do proactive community circles occur daily, while in the middle schools, homerooms meet for a limited time only once a week. Further, although three middle school principals stated that restorative justice and SEL lessons are taught to students in homeroom, only one middle school principal shared that relationship circles occur in homeroom as well. The last element related to time is the time it takes to do restorative justice well. As most participants shared, assigning a punitive consequence is quicker and easier than taking the time to understand the root causes of behaviors, repair harm caused by those behaviors, and engage all stakeholders in a discussion about how to remedy and prevent the behaviors. Although some schools in both this study and the studies presented in Chapter 2 partnered with outside organizations to help with these restorative practices, most schools do not have that partnership. Lastly, as stated in the conclusion of Chapter 2, Sumner et al. (2010) stated that school administrators must be willing to invest a great deal of time and energy, especially during the early stages of implementation.

Accessing Necessary Resources. Participants also identify money, resources, and staffing as major challenges to implementation. In fact, one participant said that without the grant awarded to her school, she doubts her school would have transitioned to restorative justice

practices, though she likes to believe her district would have supported the efforts, nonetheless. Another participant stated that he worries what will happen if his funding is cut because he uses his categorical funds to pay for the personnel necessary for his student support model. Interestingly, when analyzing the different stages of implementation demonstrated by the participant schools, those awarded grants have partnered with outside organizations. Therefore, they have established systems to support restorative practices and are much further along in the process than the schools where principals are mostly working on their own to implement these changes.

Creating Buy-In. The biggest challenge to implementation regards teacher buy-in, which every participant in this study identified. The scholarly articles from Chapter 2 also identified buy-in as a challenge needing further research. As one participant said, it doesn't matter if a school offers professional development every three months about the importance of restorative justice practices, some staff simply will not buy in because punitive discipline is just a part of our culture. Another participant said that some teachers are just "unretractable" in their beliefs, while another said that some staff believe that without punitive discipline, no learning can take place. These ideas support the scholarly research from Chapter 2. For example, Harber & Sakade (2009) explain that our structures of control are "deeply embedded in schooling and highly resistant to change" (p. 173), while McCluskey (2008) says that despite the best of intentions, schools often fall back on "taken for granted" systems of discipline and control.

Analyzing the challenge of creating teacher buy-in through the lens of transformative learning theory offers suggestions for practice. These suggestions, as they relate to this theory, are discussed in the next section.

Implications for Practice

Despite the challenges discussed in the previous section, this study offers many suggestions for practice based on the experiences of the administrators involved. When looking at implementation through the lens of transformative learning theory, one can identify how the steps of implementation have the potential of mirroring those of transformative learning. Although Mezirow's (1978a) "Ten Phases of Transformative Learning" resulted from his study about adult women's reentry into school or the workforce, many of the phases relate to the steps necessary during the implementation of restorative justice practices as well. These phases were included in Figure 1.2, but can also be found in Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5

Mezirow's Ten Phases of Transformative Learning

Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b) Ten Phases of Transformative Learning

Phase 1	A disorienting dilemma
Phase 2	A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
Phase 3	A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
Phase 4	Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
Phase 5	Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
Phase 6	Planning of a course of action
Phase 7	Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
Phase 8	Provisional trying of new roles
Phase 9	Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
Phase 10	A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective

Note: The ten phases of transformative learning. Reprinted from "The Evolution of John Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory," by Kitchenham, 2008, *Journal of Transformative Education 6*(104).

According to Mezirow's (1978a) Ten Phases, Phase 1, "a disorienting dilemma," is the first step to transformation, because it shakes a person's beliefs or causes them to realize a truth that they had not considered or known prior to the experience. In the context of this study and the implementation of restorative justice practices, this includes any catalyst that inspires change, including participating in a data analysis and either recognizing the disproportionality of discipline data or viewing how colleagues refer to students on disciplinary referrals. The catalyst in Washington state, for many schools, was the state legislature changing the laws regarding exclusionary discipline. However, to enact change meaningfully, the law change by itself is not enough. Schools must strive to understand the student data that inspired that change.

Once a staff has engaged in thoughtful data analysis, critical self-reflection is the next step. Phase 2, "a self-examination," allows administrators and teachers to think critically about what role they have played in the misjustice that students, particularly students of color, have experienced in school. This critical self-reflection may occur after being asked reflective questions, such as "why are our minority boys having higher proportions of discipline than others? Is it because they're not feeling connected?" In response to this question, staff may engage in a self-examination whereby they identify ways they do or do not make connections to certain groups of students.

 Phase 3, then, consists of "a critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions." These assumptions relate to knowledge, to social and cultural factors, and to the soul and mind, which form ideas about what is right and good. Critically assessing one's own frames of reference, mindsets, and beliefs, as well as the roots of these elements, helps one realize that others with whom they interact have very different frames of references, mindsets, and beliefs, based on their differing backgrounds, experiences, and cultures. During this stage,

school staff might discuss the demographic differences between staff and students, the role

culture and experiences play in shaping behavior norms, and the influence of one's norms on

students whose norms differ. For example, one participant discussed with his staff that

"loudness" is an aspect of some cultures, and therefore, should not be considered a

"misbehavior" necessary of discipline.

Phase 4, then, is the "recognition of one's discontent and the process of transformation

are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change." This involves honest discourse with

others, recognizing, in the context of implementation, that change requires a team effort. For

example, in this study, multiple participants discussed the necessity of a "whole-school

approach" to implementation, whereby all staff members work together to transform the school's

culture and to build community within the school, so all students feel connected and empowered.

It also includes creating shared beliefs around *why* change is necessary, which is to better meet

the needs of students individually and culturally.

Once staff establishes shared beliefs and a shared purpose, they can move into Phase 5,

which is "the exploration for new roles, relationships, and actions." Here, the staff can work as a

team to identify the needs of the students and staff in the school. As three participants mentioned

in this study, implementation must consider the needs of the school, because the entry points

vary. One participant emphasized that, "like any program brought into a school, it has to be the

right program for that particular school," while another said that any program should build upon

what already exists in the school, not assuming that all schools are at the same point. In this

regard, Feuerborn et al. (2014) suggests that implementation begins with staff completing a

needs assessment to identify what needs and beliefs they have.

From here, the "Ten Phases of Transformative Learning" move into the technical dimension of change. Phase 6, "planning a course of action," and Phase 7, "the acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan," seem to go hand in hand. These steps potentially include speaking with principals who have experienced implementation, observing restorative justice practices in other schools, building partnerships, applying for grants, and being very intentional about an implementation plan, knowing the work requires a great deal of time, training, and resources. Phase 7 could also include creating very purposeful professional development for one's staff to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to successfully practice restorative justice within their classrooms. Phase 8, "provisional trying of new roles," may include practice activities done during professional development to increase teacher and administrators' capacity to participate in restorative practices, such as engaging in community circles.

The final phases, Phase 9, "building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships," and Phase 10, the "reintegration in one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective," sound similar to "capacity building," which one participant stressed in his interview.

Although the second research question asked about "buy in," one participant caused this researcher to pause in her analysis. As he said, "you can't just get them to buy into what you believe. You have to build capacity." In a follow-up interview, the researcher asked for clarification, and the participant explained that "buy-in" implies that the staff simply accepts the ideas and practices encouraged by administration, but "capacity building" is more meaningful and effective. This phrase was unfamiliar, but after reviewing the transcript and listening to the interview recording multiple times, the concept of "building capacity" seems much more

powerful and permanent than simply working for "buy in." While researching the meaning of "building capacity" or "capacity building," the researcher learned that these phrases are most often used in non-profit or non-governmental organizations in an attempt to strengthen their organizations. One organization describes it as "the process of equipping individuals with the understanding, skills, and access to information, knowledge, and training that enables them to perform effectively" (*Defining Capacity Building*).

The United Nations Development Programme states that "in the global context, capacity refers to the ability of individuals and institutions to make and implement decisions and perform functions in an effective, efficient, and sustainable manner." They go on to define the term at the individual level, saying that here, "capacity building refers to the process of changing attitudes and behaviours—imparting knowledge and developing skills while maximizing the benefits of participation, knowledge exchange and ownership" (*Capacity Building*). In the context of this study, building capacity means going beyond working to create agreement among staff about a need for changed practices based on what the administrators want. Rather, it involves a transformative experience so staff members themselves believe a change is necessary, independent of any push for "buy-in" by administrators. Additionally, it involves not only educating the educators about the need for changed practices, but also equipping them with the tools necessary to effectively implement restorative justice practices. With this education and tools, students and staff will benefit from a more inclusive and positive school culture.

With these definitions and explanations in mind, it seems that Mezirow's (1978a) Ten Phases of Transformative Learning have the power to build capacity. Like capacity building, these phases involve people working to change attitudes by sharing discipline and referral data; imparting knowledge and developing skills through data analysis and professional development

related to restorative justice practices; and maximizing the benefits of participation by working together to create shared beliefs, planning a course of action, and engaging in restorative practices with one another to build competence and self-confidence.

From here, the "implications for practice" depend on the needs of any given school. These practices can include those that are proactive and reactive, and, according to the scholarly literature and the participants in this study, the implementation of restorative justice practices should be done school wide.

Research Limitations

This phenomenological study investigated the experiences of principals who implemented restorative justice practices in their schools. Although the researcher had hoped to find principals representing all grade levels—elementary, middle school, and high school—the timing in the school year when the interviews took place affected the availability of many principals who had originally expressed interest in participation. Additionally, although she hoped to represent a more diverse population of principals, only one participant was a person of color. Further, because the researcher sought volunteers for this study, those who volunteered might not represent all principals; rather, they likely are principals who feel very strongly about restorative justice, and therefore, do not represent principals as a whole. Lastly, as this is a qualitative study, the perspectives and experiences of the participants are unique to the participants and cannot be generalized to other principals, schools, or locations. However, the responses shared by the participants may offer guidance to other principals as they work to effectively implement restorative justice practices in their schools.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study explored the experiences of administrators during implementation of restorative justice practices. It did not seek to analyze the effectiveness of restorative justice practices when it comes to building community or decreasing behavior incidents. For example, a criticism of restorative justice practices is that they eliminate discipline altogether, and therefore, behavior incidents in schools are actually on the rise, even if discipline referrals are down. Therefore, studies that analyze its effectiveness would be warranted.

In the future, it would be interesting to investigate the perspectives of teachers within the same schools as the administrators to see where their perspectives align and differ. It would also be interesting to learn how students in the same schools experience the restorative practices to determine if they sense a feeling of connection and support from the adults in the building.

Additionally, a mixed methods or quantitative study analyzing the discipline and academic data, looking to identify correlations in data, would be helpful. Lastly, a longitudinal study would be useful to analyze the longevity of implementation, the long-term effects of implementation, and any possible trends in data over time.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of principals as they worked to implement restorative justice practices in their schools. The researcher chose this focus after completing a review of the scholarly literature and noticing the gaps in research, as well as the recommendations by previous researchers. For example, multiple studies indicated that change begins with a shared belief and buy-in for a new practice, but that no explanation existed about how that was accomplished (Gonzalez et al., 2018; Liberman & Katz, 2017). Therefore, this study sought to understand how administrators create shared beliefs and buy-in for the implementation of

restorative justice practices. Additionally, some teachers indicated that their principals did not demonstrate buy-in because they failed to participate in restorative training (Liberman & Katz, 2017); therefore, this study sought to examine how principals not only implement restorative practices, but create buy-in through their actions as well. The researcher explored this by asking each participant "What is the history of buy-in for restorative justice practices, and what role did you play in that?" Lastly, Lustick (2020) asserted that "further research should more deeply investigate principal decision-making, especially if it allows us to understand what allows principals to implement restorative justice practices with orientation toward relational responsibility rather than accountability" (p. 18). In this sense, the researcher analyzed the proactive measures implemented within the participants' schools, which take on a relational orientation.

As the researcher, I chose to focus on how principals shift mindsets and create shared beliefs not only because of the gaps in research, but because having worked in schools for 19 years, I have experienced multiple attempts by administrators to enact change, and so many of these attempts failed in year one. I often wondered how the results would differ if the principal had taken a different approach to implementation, if they had started at the "normative level" first—involved staff in data analysis, helped them understand the "why," helped them see the rationale and need for the change, created a shared belief, and involved them throughout the process—how might implementation occur effectively? In a way that benefits students and staff? In a way that enables us to *really* make positive change, in the lives of our students, in our schools, and in our communities? As evidenced by the data, many of the participants in this study did start the implementation process at the normative level, which made them ideal candidates for this study.

Restorative justice practices are not the panacea to all the struggles that schools face. Nor should schools be expected to remedy the injustice and racial strife perpetuated in our society. However, steps do exist that can result in change in schools, which can better meet individual student needs. As evidenced by this study, there are many layers of implementation, and school administration and teachers must consider what elements of restorative justice would work best within their schools. That is not to say that all schools will benefit in the same way, but if disproportionality in discipline does exist, then systems must change. It is the responsibility of adults in the building to shift practices and beliefs if those practices and beliefs harm students.

That said, I fully acknowledge how difficult some of these practices and expectations are in reality. Having taught in a traditional public high school for 15 years, I had around 150 students every year, and some teachers have even more. The idea of knowing students individually seems like a simple task, but with 150 students who have 150 different needs academically and behaviorally, that task is daunting. Teachers work tirelessly every single day to instruct their students, to respond to behaviors in their classroom, and to build connections to students in a meaningful way. As mentioned by every participant in this study, time is a challenge that has no simple solution. Most teachers complain that not enough time exists to even teach their content, let alone know their students on a very personal, individual basis and respond to their students' behaviors in a way that is restorative. Though not always the case, I believe most teachers do the best they can every day to teach and connect to their students. Therefore, this cannot be something placed on teachers alone.

As emphasized by multiple participants, change must occur on a systemic level. Just like students, teachers also need supports as they teach and help grow their students. When looking at the history of public education in this country, one might notice that practices have not changed

very much. Our system was not established to teach every single child, nor does its structure today meet the needs of every single child. The closure of schools due to Covid-19 provided schools the unique opportunity to reconsider their structures and potentially make change where those structures were viewed as inefficient. I fear that schools and school systems did not take that opportunity that that time allowed. However, I am hopeful that that time provided a space for critical self-reflection into what changes can potentially be made.

The importance of changing the way we "do school" cannot be denied when analyzing data according to student demographics. As one participant said, "if we don't change what we do, we will not see a change in our outcomes." Again, this is not to say that implementing restorative justice practices will guarantee a change in outcomes; however, with thoughtful implementation, critical self-reflection, and meaningful discourse, it may be possible. The result, if done well, may be building relationships with students, holding them accountable for their behaviors, and teaching them how to grow into empathetic, responsible, problem-solving adults. I believe that most school teachers and administrators would view these outcomes as worthy of our time and best efforts.

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Appendix A

Sacha Helling-Christy
The Implementation of Restorative Justice Practices in Schools
Study Number 212201002
Seattle Pacific University

Study Questions:

1. What do restorative justice practices look like in your school (or district)?

2. What is the history of restorative justice practices in your school (or district), including the impetus for change and how it was initiated?

3. What was the implementation process?

4. What is the history of buy-in for restorative justice practices, and what role did you play in that?

5. What on-going training and supports does your school (or district) have to support restorative justice practices?

5. What have been challenges to implementation?

7. What have you learned about the process of implementation of restorative justice practices, based on your experience?

Appendix B

1. What do restorative justice practices look like in your school (or district)?
    - Restorative justice as a school-wide practice
        o Connect to schoolwide practices
        o Involve all stakeholders
    - Proactive practices
        o Community circles (also called relationship circles)
        o Guiding Principles
        o Peer mediators
        o Homeroom/ advisory
    - Reactive practices
        o Engaging with a support team
        o Answering restorative questions
        o Conferencing/ participating in a restorative circle
        o Holding students accountable (restoring relationships, repairing harm, and expressing remorse)
2. What is the history of restorative justice practices in your school (or district), including the impetus for change and how it was initiated?
    - Administration recognized the need for change
        o Had high levels of punitive discipline
        o Recognized disproportionality in discipline data
        o Engaged in critical self-reflection
    - The state changed laws regarding exclusionary discipline
3. What was the implementation process?
    - Normative dimensions of implementation
        o Explain the "why"
        o Create a shared belief that change is necessary
        o Model different ways of thinking
        o Create buy-in
        o Build capacity
    - Technical dimensions of implementation
        o Change practices
        o Allot time
        o Facilitate professional development
        o Provide resources and funding
4. What is the history of buy-in for restorative justice practices, and what role did you play in that? *The researcher chose to nest the responses to this question within the responses to Question 3, because participants identified "buy-in" as a necessary element within the "normative dimension" of implementation.*
5. What on-going training and supports does your school (or district) have to support restorative justice practices?
    - Professional development done in building
    - Professional development done with outside supports
    - Restorative justice becoming a fiber of the school

6. What have been challenges to implementation?
    1. Resources
        o Time
        o Staffing
    2. Buy-In
        o Teachers and Staff
        o Parents and Families
7. What have you learned about the process of implementation of restorative justice practices, based on your experience? *Because the participants responded to this question on a very personal level, the researcher chose to not code for themes; rather, she wrote their responses as shared by the participants.*

Appendix C

Initial email communication to potential participants:

Dear (Potential Participant),

My name is Sacha Helling-Christy and I am a doctoral student at Seattle Pacific University. The topic of my dissertation is restorative justice practices in schools, and my study is focusing on the experiences of administrators who oversaw the implementation of these practices (Study Number 212201002).

If your school transitioned to restorative practices and you were a part of that process, I would very much like to speak to you about it.

I know you are busy so I appreciate your response.

Thank you in advance,
Sacha Helling-Christy
Doctoral Candidate
Seattle Pacific University

Appendix D

Follow-up email to potential participants:

Dear (Potential Participant),

I am excited to say that I am at the stage of my dissertation where I can start my study about the implementation of restorative justice practices in schools, and I am grateful that you have agreed to be a part of that study (study number 212201002).

At this point, I would like to arrange a time for our interview, where you will share responses about your experience with implementation. The interview can take place either in person or via Zoom, whichever works best for you. I imagine the interview will last 30-60 minutes, and I will send you the questions beforehand so you can consider your responses. The interview will be recorded so I can transcribe your responses, but please know, neither your school nor your name will be identified in the write-up of my study. I will also send you the informed consent document with the questions.

Please let me know a few days and times when you are available, and I will set up our meeting.

Also, if you have any artifacts that you can share with me pertaining to restorative practices in your school, I would like to collect those as well. These can include: the student handbook, any professional development agendas or training documents, posters in the building, implementation timelines, etc.

Thank you!
Sacha Helling-Christy
Doctoral Candidate
Seattle Pacific University

Appendix E

Informed Consent

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Seattle Pacific
UNIVERSITY

212201002
FEB 2022
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Expires N/A

INFORMED CONSENT
Administrators' Experiences Implementing Restorative Justice Practices

Investigators:
Principal Investigator: Sacha Helling-Christy
Doctoral Candidate
253.576.2462
hellingchris@spu.edu
Faculty Sponsor: Julie Antilla, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Educational Leadership
206.281.2216

PURPOSE
You are invited to take part in a research study. The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of administrators as they implement restorative justice practices in their schools. You have been invited to take part in this study because you have engaged in this implementation as an administrator. The number of people that will be part of this research is six.

PROCEDURES
The main study will take the form of an interview.
If applicable, the investigator will also ask you to share documents you have within your school that pertain to restorative justice practices, including but not limited to: the student handbook, professional development agendas and training documents, posters, manuals, and scripts.
Prior to the interview, the investigator will send you the interview questions so you have time to consider your responses.
At an agreed upon time, you will meet via Zoom and will be asked to respond to the seven prepared questions, with follow-up questions as necessary for clarity.
The interview will last roughly 30-60 minutes.
The interview will be recorded via the Zoom recording option, as well as on a Voice Recording application.

RISKS and DISCOMFORTS
No risks or discomforts are anticipated in this study. In the study, your name will be replaced by a pseudonym. Though the level of your school will be included (elementary, middle, or high school), your school name will also be titled by pseudonym, and will only be identified as being located in the Puget Sound area of Washington state.

BENEFITS
We do not anticipate direct benefits; however, as more schools transition away from exclusionary discipline practices, this body of knowledge may help administrators implement restorative justice practices more effectively, which may result in the indirect benefit of knowing you helped with the implementation.

PARTICIPATION AND ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION
Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may skip questions or withdraw from the study at anytime without

penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed. Likewise, the Researcher may terminate your participation in the study at any time.

An alternative to a live interview for this study includes submitting written responses to the questions sent to you via email prior to the scheduled interview.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL / PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENT
Seattle Pacific University does not offer to reimburse participants for medical claims or other compensation. If physical injury is suffered in the course of research, or for more information, please notify the investigator in charge, Sacha Helling-Christy (253.576.2462).

CONFIDENTIALITY
The information in the study records will be kept confidential. In the study, your name will be replaced by a pseudonym. Though the level of your school will be included (elementary, middle, or high school), your school name will also be titled by pseudonym, and will only be identified as being located in the Puget Sound area of Washington state. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

Your de-identified data may be used in future research, presentations or for teaching purposes by the Principal Investigator listed above.

SUBJECT RIGHTS
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the Principal Investigator, Sacha Helling-Christy, at 253.576.2462. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the SPU Institutional Review Board Chair at 206-281-2201 or IRB@SPU.edu .

CONSENT
Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in this research project and agree to participate in this study. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

Participant's name (print)	Researcher's name (print) *Sacha Helling-Chrsty*
Participant's signature	Researcher's signature *Sacha Helg-Chrsty*
Date	Date *March 1, 2022*

Copies to: Participant   Principal Investigator