

The influence of Restorative Practice Curriculum on Student Behavior: A Call for Educational Reform

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Abstract

This mixed-methods, sequential explanatory case study was designed to assess the effects of a Restorative practices intervention curriculum on student behavior at a disciplinary alternative secondary campus, and to assess the effects of this curriculum on teacher and administrator decisions regarding student discipline, through the lenses of Social Justice Theory. There is currently no data available on the effects of Restorative practices among students who are already receiving the impact of exclusionary discipline in schools in the United States. Quantitative data was extrapolated using campus disciplinary data over the course of two academic school years. Qualitative data was extrapolated through a 42-question survey protocol and an eight-question interview protocol. The results assert Restorative practices curricula appear to have a positive impact on student's behavior, teacher's classroom management decisions, and administrator's disciplinary decisions at the disciplinary alternative school.

Keywords: Restorative Discipline, Restorative Practice, Intervention, Behavior, Exclusionary, Discipline

Introduction

Typically, schools in the United States rely on punishment in the form of exclusion or ostracism to control behavior (Cummings, 2018). In actuality, the use of these punitive, exclusionary discipline practices has been found to exacerbate negative behaviors (Mirsky, 2011). When students experience exclusionary discipline, they are subject to both interrupted instruction and loss of instructional days, which contribute to academic failure and a widening of the achievement gap (Cummings, 2018; Fisher, Frey, & Smith, 2016). Academic achievement is not the only loss associated with exclusionary discipline; this discipline also compromises social and emotional learning, a necessary component for students to function productively and meet behavioral expectations (Cummings, 2018; Fisher et al., 2016). Suspensions have been specifically identified as the principal contributing factor to the widening student dropout rate (Fisher et al., 2016; Koppelman, 2017).

These exclusionary disciplinary tactics are applied to minority students and students with disabilities at disproportionately high rates (Fisher et al., 2016.) Studies show that minority students are more likely to be suspended for behaviors requiring subjective judgment, whereas their white peers are often suspended for offenses pertaining to the code of conduct (Koppelman, 2017; Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Shabazian,

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2014; Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014; Terrell & Lindsay, 2009). This disparity has led to significant concerns about the school-to-prison pipeline, where exclusionary discipline practices directly contribute to the overrepresentation of people of color in the American prison system (Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Robbins, 2005). These data suggest that educational institutions need to reconsider their approaches to dealing with student discipline in order to reduce the risk of school failure (Cummings, 2018; Fisher et al., 2016), and students' risk of entering into the criminal justice system. One possible alternative to exclusionary discipline is the implementation of restorative practice intervention curricula. The proposed study explores one possible alternative to exclusionary discipline: the implementation of restorative practices put the focus on building relationships and community with students (Cummings, 2018; Fisher et al., 2016; Mirsky, 2011). Relationships are a critical component of reducing inequities, building community, and shaping school culture among students and staff (Cummings, 2018; Fisher et al., 2016; Mirsky, 2011). Strategies that develop strong, positive teacher-student relationships should be central to pedagogy (Whalen, 2019). Restorative practices include a variety of relational and behavioral interventions, all designed to ensure equity, ensure members of the school community feel valued, and ensure all members have a voice in the community (Cummings, 2018; Fisher et al., 2016; Mirsky, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Research on restorative practices, the impact of building community in the classroom and the impact on student behavior, is in its infancy (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016). There is a current gap in the literature on the effects of restorative practice interventions in the United States on student behavior while receiving exclusionary discipline by being removed from their traditional campus to a disciplinary alternative secondary campus (Crawley & Hirschfield, 2018; Shabazian, 2014; Vah Seliskar, 2018).

Previous research has established that using exclusionary discipline practices also adds to the widening of the achievement gap and increases student drop-out rates (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009; West-Olatunji, 2006). Retention is a more accurate predictor of dropping out than poor academic performance (Marchbanks et al., 2014). Students who drop out are five times more likely to have been retained (David, 2008). African American students are two times more likely to experience grade retention than their White peers (Davis, 2008; Marchbanks et al., 2014). There are hidden costs concomitant with exclusionary discipline and its link to drop-outs; dropping out is connected to crime-associated costs of approximately \$26,000 per student across the nation (Marchbanks et al., 2014). Out of 64, 995 Texas students in grades 7-12 assigned to a disciplinary alternative educational placement (DAEP) during the 2014-2015 school year, 2, 912 dropped out; the annual grade 7-12 drop-out rate of students assigned to a DAEP was 4.5%, three times as much as students statewide at 1.5% (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

Much of the comprehensive research on the impact of restorative practice curricula on student behavior and the effects on the reliance on exclusionary discipline practices has been informed by a Eurocentric perspective (Gay, 2013; Skiba, 2002). It is imperative to discuss policy through the lens of social justice theory, as zero-tolerance policies continually demonstrate that African American males are the population at the highest risk for harsh, punitive discipline and increased exclusion from their educational institutions, and these zero-tolerance policies do not distinguish between offenses nor take behavioral disorders into consideration (Allman & Slate, 2013; McDermott, 2016; Ryan & Goodram, 2013; Zulfa 2015).

The overrepresentation of students of color in special education remains one of the most persistent and unresolved issues in education. This overrepresentation has long been a concern of educational equity due to the potentially adverse effects of stigmatizing labels and restricted access to general education settings for minority students, combined with the overall lack of conclusive evidence that special education programs are effective (De Valenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006). This disproportionate representation may also drastically decrease the opportunities that minority students must interact with their teachers and peers in an inclusive setting (De Valenzuela et al., 2006).

Although special education services are designed to promote positive student outcomes, they may also result in stigmatization, placement outside of the general education setting, and a decrease in learning opportunities (McKenna, 2013). African American students, specifically, have often been found to be overrepresented in the identification of emotional disturbances, intellectual disabilities, and learning disabilities (De Valenzuela et al., 2006). African American students with emotional and behavioral disorders “experience a variety of negative educational and life outcomes... of this population, 50% drops out of school before earning a diploma and 73% of these students are arrested within 3 to 5 years” (McKenna, 2013, p. 206).

Many African American students may be misidentified as Emotionally Disturbed and Intellectually Disabled due to an overreliance on the medical model of IQ testing. Child Advocate Evelyn Deno discussed the need for a change of identification procedures based on external variables and not an idea of an internal deficit in the child (Artiles & Trent, 1994). Without clear guidelines, personal and professional biases may result in false identifications of African American students with emotional disturbances (McKenna, 2013). A rather robust correlation between ethnicity, academic failure, exclusionary discipline, and special education identification has been documented (Artiles & Trent, 1994).

The relationship between the amount of funding spent on corrections and the rate of African Americans placed in the penal system is significant (Robbins, 2005). Nationwide, sizable increases in the incarceration of African Americans occurred with the increase in spending on corrections and corrections facilities (Robbins, 2005). The use of zero-tolerance policies as exclusionary discipline measures directly contributes to these negative trends in criminal justice; consequently, educators should consider other strategies (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Crawley & Hirschfield, 2018; Robbins, 2005; Zulfa, 2015). Society ends up paying these direct and indirect costs of school administrators’ use of exclusionary discipline practices, which subsidize the school-to-prison pipeline (Gross, 2016). Ultimately, by using discipline based solely on punishment, the penalizations generate their own issues, resulting in higher rates of suspensions and expulsions (Thompson, 2016).

The consequences for excluded students vary considerably between those students who are marginalized by race and socioeconomic status and those who are not. While the initial punishment may be the same, the long-term consequences of that punishment vary depending on the opportunities available within the students’ communities. The disparate distribution of the consequences of zero-tolerance punishment along racial and class lines undermines the legitimacy of this approach (Robbins, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed-methods, sequential explanatory case study is to assess the effects of a restorative practice intervention curriculum on student behavior at a disciplinary alternative secondary campus, and to assess the effects of this curriculum on teacher and administrator decisions regarding student discipline, through the lenses of critical race theory and social justice theory. Disparities in exclusionary discipline practices cross racial and ethnic lines, with African American students being excluded at much higher rates than their Caucasian peers (Crawley & Hirschfield, 2018; Sullivan et al., 2014). This study attempted to determine the impact of Restorative Practice curriculum on students who have already been excluded from their traditional school campus; specifically, it analyzed the effect of this curriculum on student behaviors, suspensions, and expulsions at a public disciplinary alternative campus for grades 6-12 located in central Texas. This study also attempted to determine the impact of Restorative Practice curricula with educator and administrator decisions for student misbehavior at a disciplinary alternative campus.

Quantitative data indicating student office referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and recidivism over a period of one school year, were extrapolated and analyzed. Campus teachers’ perspectives on the impact of Restorative practices were explored through individual interviews. Campus administrators also discussed quantitative results and their perspectives relating to the impact of Restorative practices on student office

referrals, suspensions, and expulsions more in-depth through individual interviews. Concurrent qualitative interview data was gathered on the educators' opinions of how the relational action plan, specifically, affected students' behaviors and their own classroom management decisions. Administrators' opinions on the relational action plan's influence on their disciplinary decisions were also extrapolated.

The researcher anticipates that student behaviors in the classroom may be positively impacted by the Restorative Practice curriculum, and there may be a decrease in staff reliance on punitive, exclusionary discipline practices of suspensions and expulsions in favor of discipline with consequences that lead to meaningful student accountability. Studies have shown that Restorative practices work with the general population of students at a traditional campus (Armour, 2016; Lang et al., 2016; NEDRP, 2019; Reistenberg, 2012). Further research is needed to determine whether these same practices also work at an alternative campus with an at-risk student body. The findings from this research may have practical implications for pedagogy and policy changes at both traditional and alternative campuses.

Significance of the Study

Success in academic, social, and emotional skills for all students continues to be at the forefront of educational initiatives (Ryan & Goodram, 2013). This research is significant for its practical application in classroom management and student discipline, particularly with students assigned to a disciplinary alternative secondary campus. Restorative practices emphasize the rehabilitation of an offender and develop discipline to focus less on broken rules and codes of conduct (Buckmaster, 2016) and more on building relationships and community in schools. Current data indicated that Restorative Practice interventions have had positive effects on student behavior in traditional schools by decreasing the need for exclusionary discipline practices and promoting the growth of a positive school climate (Cummings, 2018; Fisher et al., 2016; Mirsky, 2011). However, there is currently no data available on the effects of Restorative practices among students who are already receiving the impact of exclusionary discipline in schools in the United States.

The results of this study could raise awareness of the impact of restorative practices as a counter to punitive disciplinary practices. Restorative practices would possibly benefit students by teaching them necessary social skills and relationship building skills; educators would also possibly benefit by learning proactive strategies to build and sustain classroom community, as well as strategies for repairing harm and rebuilding classroom community when necessary. By utilizing these restorative practice strategies, educators could experience a decrease in their reliance on punitive discipline in the form of office referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and decrease recidivism, thereby potentially reducing the achievement and discipline gap.

Research Questions

Primary

In what ways does the existing Restorative Practice curriculum at a Disciplinary Alternative School affect the behavior of students of grades 6-12 in a central Texas, urban school district?

Secondary

1. Do Restorative practices and the relational action plan influence students' behavior in the classroom as observed by school staff?
2. Do Restorative practices and the relational action plan influence teachers' classroom management decisions?
3. Do Restorative practices and the relational action plan influence administrative disciplinary decisions?

Limitations

This study is confined to school staff members' perceptions in a select urban disciplinary alternative education placement, secondary school in a large central Texas school district. Parents' or students' perceptions on restorative practices were not included. This study is also confined to school staff members who received training from the National Educator's for Restorative practices and were employed at MDL academy in the 2017-2018 school year, the year before the pilot program, and during the 2018-2019 school year during year one of the pilot program. This study was limited to the voluntary participation of applicable staff members who completed a one-on-one interview with the researcher.

Delimitations

Delimitations of the study include data was only collected from the central Texas disciplinary alternative education placement secondary campus, MDL Academy, for the year prior to and the year of, and the year after the Restorative Practice pilot program was implemented. Delimitations were not imposed on other factors that involve the students such as: special education population, year of current staff members' employment, staff diversity, or the years that the school has been in operation as a disciplinary alternative campus. To maximize the validity of the measurement, instruments, and data, an existing survey and interview protocol were used, the questions of the interview protocol followed the research questions, and all data was properly stored and protected after collection.

Review of Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the literature that is relevant to the implementation of a Restorative practices curriculum on a disciplinary alternative education placement (DAEP) campus, its effects on student behavior, and its effects on resultant staff responses in regard to student discipline. Unlike alternative schools that "focus on academics or therapy, DAEP schools focus on the needs of seriously disruptive students" (Avery, 2016, p. 1). This chapter begins with a history of student discipline from the 1950s to the present, examining the contributing factors of disparities and inequities in school discipline and exclusionary practices that led to the development of disciplinary alternative placements, most notably the implementation of the Gun-Free Schools Act (1994), No Child Left Behind (2002) and the overzealous application of "Zero-Tolerance" policies. Next, this chapter reviews literature on the results of exclusionary discipline, such as the overrepresentation of minorities in suspensions and expulsions and the development of the "School-to-Prison Pipeline"; how schools combat exclusionary discipline practices with multicultural education and cultural proficiency; and, most importantly, the shift to restorative measures.

Restorative practices evolved from restorative discipline and are based on a belief that students should be taught the necessary skills to engage in discussion and to resolve conflict (Boucaud, 2017). Boucaud (2017) indicated a strong positive correlation between discussion and conflict resolution. In restorative practice curricula, educators teach strategies to repair violations of relationships and cultures. Proponents of restorative practices assert that these strategies are more effective than punishments for rule violations because these practices hold students accountable for making the offense right (Brown-Kersey, 2011). Schools have also implemented conflict-resolution curricula to combat disciplinary policies that show racial bias and contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline (Vah Seliskar, 2018; Zulfa, 2015). Other examples of conflict-resolution curricula include mental health care, trauma-informed care, and training in emotional coping (Crawley & Hirschfield, 2018). Conflict resolution programs help students unpack their emotions in a safe setting while being coached, guided, and positively reinforced (Golson, 2018).

Positive interventions are necessary not only to address misconduct, but also to change the criminally-oriented mindsets of the educational institutions (Armour, 2016). The standard approach to school discipline narrows a student's opportunity for learning and youth development in prosocial skills by removing them from the traditional learning environment and focusing on punishment for their offense. A restorative response, by contrast, works to engage the student and afford them the chance for positive youth development by giving them the opportunity to learn how to reflect on their actions, consider who

was harmed, and discuss how to make it right. Punitive practices fail on multiple levels: they are an ineffectual response to student misconduct, they do not address the needs of victims, and they do not speak to the systemic issues that lead to misconduct (Robbins, 2005; Zulfa, 2015). Negative consequences for misbehavior often result in increased frequency and severity of student misconduct (Armour, 2016; Sullivan, Van Norman, & Klingbeil, 2014).

In schools, both victims and offenders need the opportunity to have their voices heard (Reistenberg, 2012). Being a victim may be disempowering and set the victim apart from the community, but restorative practices bring the victim back into the community (Reistenberg, 2012). Offering the victim an opportunity to express what they need to feel safe and valued can increase their sense of power (Reistenberg, 2012). When students learn restorative strategies, they become better equipped to resolve communication and conflict issues (High, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

Social Justice Theory

Social justice theory (SJT) is just as important to this study as critical race theory for ensuring that student discipline is analyzed with a focus on equitable practice and ethical treatment of all students. SJT emphasizes addressing the inequities in educational institutions and providing an ethical foundation for discussion of current educational issues (DeMatthews, 2016; St. John, 2007). SJT is built on a foundation of equity. It asks that society enlarge their perception of the educational institution to decide if its configuration aligns with our shared beliefs about how schools should contribute to the development of children (Bull, 2009). It views the issue of school funding as one of equity among all schools and not merely an issue of meeting the costs of education in a select community (Bull, 2009).

A general consciousness of social injustice is insufficient, and it is challenging to find social justice in educational policy (St. John, 2007). Essential to social justice in education is an understanding that student backgrounds play a significant role in their academic success (Vah Seliskar, 2018). School reform is “moving rapidly towards test-driven policies that have detrimental effects on equal opportunity” (St. John, 2007, p. 77). School leaders must take care to be knowledgeable about the intersecting roles of marginalization in their schools and communities, acknowledge racism as a central cause of educational inequity, and be prepared to act in the presence of that inequity (DeMatthews, 2016; Terrell & Lindsay, 2009).

Rawls’s *Theory of Justice*, the predecessor of social justice theory, identified three guiding principles: all individuals have fundamental rights, all individuals have equal opportunity, and all individuals have cross-generation equity (St. John, 2007). Social justice theory builds upon these principles by defining four values that Americans believe the educational institution represents: personal liberty, where schools develop students as responsible individuals and members of society; democracy, where schools promote students’ ability to contribute to the public decision-making process; equality of opportunity, giving students equal opportunities for success; and economic growth, teaching children the value of economic capabilities (Bull, 2009).

Effects of Exclusionary Discipline

School-to-Prison Pipeline

Inequality and inequity take shape in schools partly through a lack of funding, resources, and personnel in under-developed communities (Grice, 2016). School discipline practices have come under increased scrutiny in relation to inequity; in particular, researchers have devoted increased attention to the effects of exclusionary disciplinary practices on minority students with and without disabilities (Allman & Slate, 2013; Townsend, 2000). Racial minorities are disproportionately represented in our nation’s criminal justice system, an issue that is reflected in the populations most frequently punished in schools. This concept is often referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline”: policies and practices that push children

out of schools and into the criminal justice system (Grice, 2016). Suspensions are a definite contributor to this pipeline (Riestenberg, 2012). Students who end up in this pipeline face stigmatization, academic regression, and possible jail time.

The public school system in the United States is plagued with inequality when it comes to exclusionary practices and minority students. On virtually every measure, minority students and students with low socioeconomic status are not achieving at the level of their White peers (Koppelman, 2017). These disparities have created concerns about the “school-to-prison pipeline,” in which detentions, suspensions, and expulsions ultimately lead to the overrepresentation of minorities in the prisons (Grice, 2016; Lindsay & Hart, 2017).

In most situations, “the connection between student misbehavior and the criminal justice system is created at the discretion of the school or district” (Zulfa, 2015, p. 24). African American and Latino students account for over half of all the reported suspensions and expulsions (Grice, 2016; Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Thompson, 2016) and comprise 70% of police referrals (Golson, 2018), exacerbating the chances of their involvement with the criminal justice system. While exclusionary discipline practices are used with students across ethnic groups, they are particularly problematic for African American students who are subjected to corporal punishment, suspensions, and expulsions more frequently due to the intersection of their ethnicity, residence in urban areas, academic achievement, and low family income (Townsend, 2000). The use of these exclusionary discipline practices has wide-ranging consequences for students including, but not limited to, the widening of the achievement gap, lack of prosocial behavior instruction, and entry into the school-to-prison pipeline (McDermott, 2017; Thompson, 2016; Townsend, 2000).

Disciplinary measures that exclude students may further widen the achievement gap. Students who experience exclusionary practices may be denied access to learning opportunities afforded to their peers and fall behind their peers academically and socially-emotionally; in addition, frequently suspended students may be placed into lower-ability groups, directly contributing to tracking practices (Rector-Aranda, 2016; Thompson, 2016; Townsend, 2000).

When excluded from school, students have more free time to be unsupervised at home and more time to engage in illegal behaviors (Townsend, 2000). Suspended and expelled students are at higher risk for encountering the criminal legal system (Crawley & Hirschfield, 2018). Simply stated, students who are excluded from school have more time to get into trouble with the law; thus, exclusion contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Suspensions are used to primarily punish students for minor infractions against the student code of conduct (Simson, 2014). Suspensions also contribute to the achievement gap by adding to the loss of instructional time and increasing the likelihood of low scores on standardized tests (Simson, 2014). There is a correlation between suspensions, high school drop-outs, and encounters with the criminal justice system (Fisher et al., 2016; Koppelman, 2017; Simson, 2014).

Overrepresentation of African Americans in Exclusionary Discipline

Data show that African American students are subject to punitive and exclusionary discipline practices more frequently than their White peers (Selmi, 2016). Such racial disparities have been documented since as early as 1968 when Lloyd Dunn called attention to the disproportionate amount of minority students in segregated classrooms for students with special needs (Artiles & Trent, 1994). Today, many schools have remained segregated by race, and achievement gaps persist (Selmi, 2016).

Studies of school suspensions have consistently documented the overrepresentation of low-socioeconomic status (SES), minority students facing disciplinary consequences (Skiba, 2002). Social scientists have identified connections between students’ school experiences and adverse outcomes including delinquency and antisocial behaviors (Monroe, 2005). The National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 analyzed the disciplinary practices in middle schools and connected those disciplinary practices to African American student achievement (Milner, 2013). Educators’ implicit and explicit

beliefs directly affect their differential treatment of their students (Kennedy et al., 2017). Observed comparisons of cultural interaction styles imply that teachers regularly interpret African American student behaviors as inappropriate, and these students are referred to the office for subjective infractions against the student code of conduct more frequently than their White peers (Lindsay & Hart, 2017; Monroe, 2005; Skiba, 2002). The disproportionate number of office referrals for students of color for defiance or disrespect is well-documented (Kennedy et al., 2017).

Cultural collision occurs within the institution of education itself as African American students adapt to educators' perceptions of them (McCray, 2015). In other words, African Americans are aware that educators and school leaders view them through the lens of deficit thinking. Deficit thinking is when students are believed to be academically unsuccessful due to "limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn and immoral behavior" (Valencia, R.R., 1997, p. 2). Another definition of deficit thinking is "operationalized within the school when educators view students of color and students from the inner city as inherently flawed, suspect, and corrupt, thus having nothing of value to offer or contribute to the learning process" (McCray, 2015, p. 348).

The racial bias in school discipline that results from this deficit thinking is part of a larger conversation on institutional racism and inequities in education (Skiba, 2002). Many African American families and communities believe that schools are aggressive and hostile environments for their children (Townsend, 2000). Recent studies of the disproportionality have not resulted in policy changes (Zulfa, 2015). It is essential to examine the messages sent to African American children when they are suspended at rates two to three times higher than their White peers, as this disproportionality can lead to low self-esteem (McDermott, 2017; Townsend, 2000). Feelings of low self-worth may contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy, a phenomenon that reinforces perceptions as African Americans as criminals and exacerbates racial disparities along all levels of the criminal justice system (Payne & Welch, 2010).

Tracking

The disparity also exists in the grouping and assignment of minority students to ability-related classes, a practice known as tracking. Students of color tend to be overrepresented in classes for slow learners, underrepresented in accelerated classes, and placed in vocational or remedial classes in disproportionate numbers (Koppelman, 2017; Rector-Aranda, 2016; Thompson, 2016; Townsend, 2000). Consequences due to tracking practices can influence students' economic and occupational outcomes as adults. Research has found tracking is harmful to students placed at the lower levels and provides marginal value for students in higher levels (Koppelman, 2017; Rector-Aranda, 2016; Thompson, 2016; Townsend, 2000). Research has also found that tracking has minimal effects on learning outcomes and profound negative effects on equity outcomes as students receive lower-quality resources and instructional supports (Koppelman, 2017; Townsend, 2000). Because students tracked are typically low-income and racial minorities, tracking also contributes to segregation within a school.

Achievement Gap

The achievement gap is a measure of gaps in education, such as disparities in grade-retentions, drop-out rates, and enrollment in higher-level courses (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). Systemic disparities also exist in students' access to high-quality educational programs, experienced teachers, and equitable school funding; failure to address these disparities results in a cycle where some students are served and others may not be (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009; West-Olatunji, 2006).

These systems of oppression impose barriers that obstruct educators' ability to meet the needs of all students (Terrell, 2009). Educators must acknowledge that racism and oppression still exist in our schools and our society to consciously make choices that benefit all students. Studies have found that one effective way to combat systemic oppression is to employ African American teachers (Gay, 2013; Lindsay, 2017; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). The teacher's race could be influential for improving student achievement and in combating inequality in several ways: being preventative by reducing the risk of

racial bias, reducing the likelihood of African American students experiencing exclusionary discipline, and increasing students' reading achievement scores (Lindsay, 2017). Evidence suggests that hiring and retaining a more significant number of African American teachers could positively impact the development of African American children (Lindsay, 2017; Payne & Welch, 2010). It is imperative that the teaching workforce become more diversified to reflect the increasingly diverse student demographics seen in schools (Gay, 2013; Lindsay, 2017).

Holistic Teaching

Restorative Practices

Restorative justice was born from indigenous traditions of peacemaking circles that reinforced the interconnection of every member of the community (Vaandering, 2014). Native American and First Nation communities used circles to “promote healing by sharing and by showing respect and honor to others” (Whalen, 2019, p. 16) and to strengthen the bonds of their communities through dialogue. Restorative justice is a “value-based approach to responding to wrongdoing and conflict with a balanced focus on the offender, victim, and community” (Crowe, 2017, p. 33). Like many other forms of justice, restorative justice is the philosophy that crime and wrongdoing create harm, and the offender is accountable for repairing that harm (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013).

In the 1970s, restorative justice entered the judicial system as a means of shifting the focus from guilt and punishment to one of repairing harm, addressing the needs of the victim (Vaandering, 2014), and meeting the needs of diverse populations (Lang et al., 2016). Restorative justice seeks to rebuild community relationships and repair harm done by the accused to the victim (Lang et al., 2016) by coming together to identify how people were affected. Together, the victim and the offender decide the best way to repair the harm (Gregory et al., 2016).

Restorative justice in schools was renamed restorative discipline in an effort to separate it from the criminal system; restorative justice and restorative discipline are two different strategies seeking comparable positive results (Lang et al., 2016). In the mid-1990s, restorative discipline for education was implemented, focusing on strengthening relationships in schools, teaching students to take responsibility for their actions, and ultimately repairing any harm caused (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). Student misbehavior was viewed as an offense against a relationship that needed to be restored (Payne & Welch, 2013). This paradigm directly contradicted exclusionary discipline practices by shifting the emphasis from punitive consequences and exclusion toward reconciliation and community (Payne & Welch, 2013). The proactive, relational goal of restorative discipline was comprehensive, containing a continuum of activities; the overall aim of this approach is to re-orient schools from rules and social control to relationships and social engagement (Vaandering, 2014).

Restorative practices are related to restorative justice, but they go beyond it in that they are both proactive and reactive (Mirsky, 2011). Restorative practices include strategies to prevent infractions before they occur and to intervene afterward (Gregory et al., 2016). These practices support the entire school community; they teach students they are part of a bigger community in both the classroom and the school, and that their actions affect everybody in the community, not just themselves (Mirsky, 2011). When school environments emphasize a philosophy of care and social-emotional learning, they are more prevention-oriented (Gregory et al., 2016). Educators have highlighted the importance of school climate and community-building to the social-emotional wellbeing, behavior, and proficiency of their students (High, 2017). By instructing students in proactive self-advocacy and communication skills, educators prepare those students to resolve future conflict concerns (High, 2017).

Restorative practices use a variety of strategies designed to bring classrooms together for positive community building; these strategies are outlined in the relational action plan (NEDRP, 2019). The relational action plan contains six specific strategies to build and sustain relationships: the 60-second

relate break, the 90-second spark, the two-minute connection, the treatment agreement, the pulse meter, and classroom circles.

Classroom circles are used to proactively build and promote relationships, and they present opportunities to participate in positive learning practices (Whalen, 2019). Restorative circles have specific characteristics: a circle facilitator, a talking piece, circle guidelines, a discussion round, and the ability to pass without judgment (NEDRP, 2019; Reistenberg, 2012; Whalen, 2019).

The circle facilitator organizes and guides the circle process (Reistenberg, 2012; Whalen, 2019). A talking piece is an object that identifies the speaker (Whalen, 2019) and directs the discussion (Reistenberg, 2012). Circle guidelines are an agreement on how the circle participants will treat themselves and each other while in the circle (Reistenberg, 2012; Whalen, 2019). The discussion round is the central portion of the Restorative circle; this is where the facilitator and the participants can ask and answer questions, discuss current events, converse over classroom conflict, or create a sense of community (Reistenberg, 2012; Whalen 2019). The ability to pass during the discussion round is important as it provides the circle participants with a sense of safety; they are not required to answer questions if they are not ready to do so. Some types of Restorative Circles may also include a “values” round, where participants discuss what they need from other participants to feel secure while sharing information.

NEDRP (2019) suggests that teachers utilize two specific types of circles in their classrooms: Green and Yellow. Green circles, also known as get to know you (GTKY) circles, are meant to be quick and fun (NEDRP, 2019). Questions asked in GTKY circles are easy, shallow questions whose purpose is to help build student-to-student and student-to-teacher connections (NEDRP, 2019). Shallow questions also assist in preparing students to be able to answer questions that may be more challenging and serious (Whalen, 2019). Yellow circles are similar to green circles, but they contain one key difference; the questions asked are medium, meaning they have the potential to elicit more serious discussion (NEDRP, 2019; Whalen, 2019). Circles can also be themed; themes may vary depending on what the intent of the circle is, whether that be academic or social-emotional.

Figure 4

NEDRP Proactive “Green” Circles

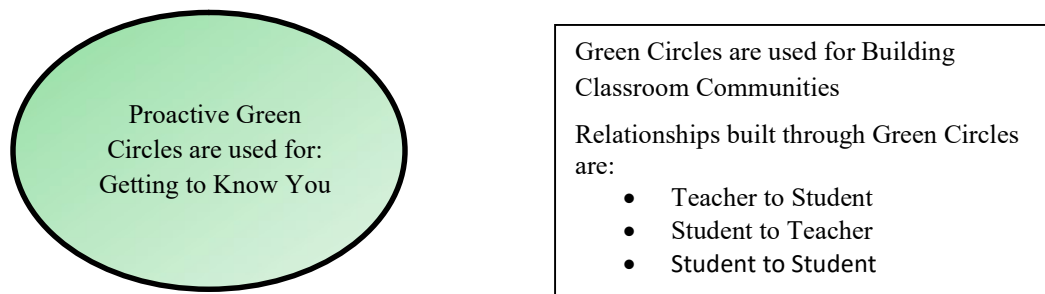
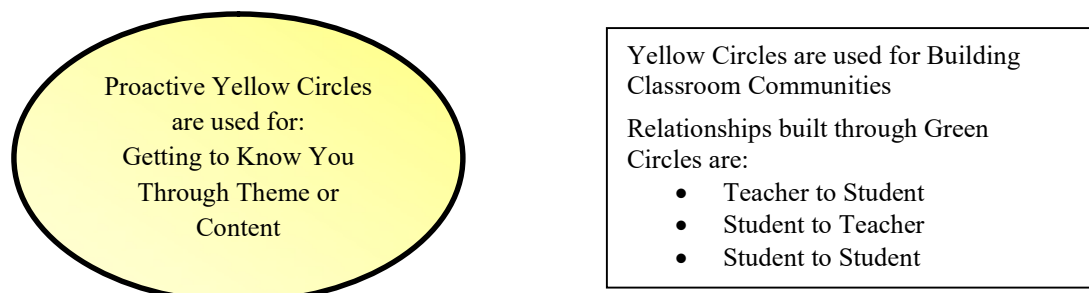


Figure 5

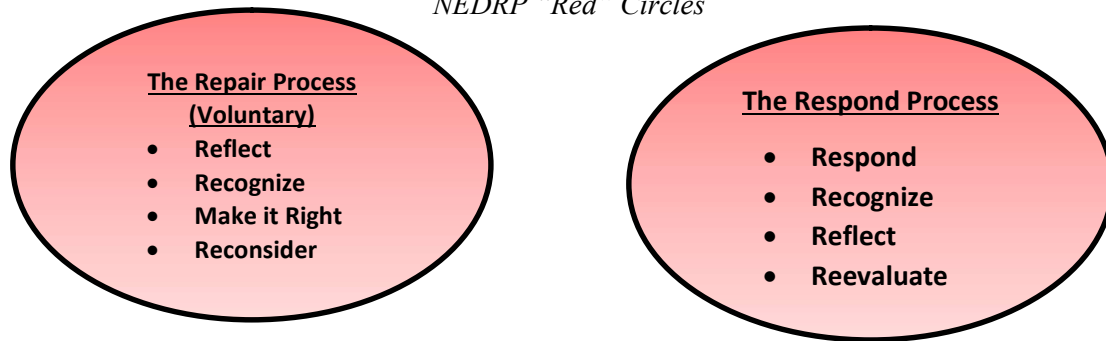
NEDRP Proactive “Yellow” Circles



Red circles are reactive (Whalen, 2019) and are used to repair harm and restore relationships (NEDRP, 2019). Red circles are primarily facilitated by administrators, counselors, and behavior specialists. Consequences are meant to shed light on the intended function of the behavior (Smith, Fisher, & Frey, 2013) and discipline should be differentiated by considering consequences that leads to meaningful student accountability (NEDRP, 2019). By using Red circles to assist in the discipline process, administrators have an option outside of traditional, exclusionary punitive measures (NEDRP, 2019).

Figure 6

NEDRP “Red” Circles



Red Circles are used by administrators and counselors to respond to behaviors and repair relationships and harm in classroom and school communities.

Methodology

Introduction and Research Design

This is a mixed-methods, sequential explanatory case study to assess the effects of restorative practice curricula on student behavior at the disciplinary alternative secondary campus, as well as the effects of restorative practices on resultant staff responses and perceptions regarding student discipline. This explanatory case study was conducted using the interpretive frameworks of Social Justice Theory in order to address injustices experienced by a student population impacted by exclusionary discipline practices and attempt to bring about societal and institutional change (Mills & Gay, 2016). The researcher attempted to answer the following questions: first, in what ways do existing restorative practice curricula at a Disciplinary Alternative School affect the behavior of students in grades 6-12 in a Central Texas urban school district? Second, how do Restorative practices and the relational action plan influence students' behavior in the classroom (as observed by school staff), teachers' classroom management decisions, and administrative disciplinary decisions.

This study is designed using Creswell's (2015) social justice design: Theory, research questions, quantitative data collection, quantitative results, qualitative data collection and analysis, qualitative results, and interpreting how the qualitative data explains the quantitative results and calls for action. Explanatory research occurs in two distinctive phases (Creswell, 2015). This multi-stage evaluation "is a systemic process of collecting and analyzing data about the quality, effectiveness, merit, or value of programs, products, or practices (Mills & Gay, 2016, p. 431). Due to the aim of the research study, the stages were conducted sequentially instead of concurrently. The explanatory design "is well suited when the researcher needs qualitative data to explain quantitative significant (or nonsignificant) results, positive-performing exemplars, outlier results, or surprising results" (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). The researcher explains how the qualitative results inform the quantitative results (Creswell, 2015).

Setting and Participants

The site chosen for this potential study is a disciplinary alternative education program that serves all secondary students, grades 6-12, in a large, urban school district. For confidentiality, the research participants, as well as the site name, remained anonymous. The site was identified as “MDL Academy.” MDL Academy has been operating as the school district’s secondary DAEP campus since 2008. Students may be placed at MDL Academy from any of the district’s 14 high schools, 11 middle schools, or 22 academies that serve grade six. Students’ ages range from 11 to 19 years. The school district services approximately 50,600 students. Of this population, 90% are Hispanic, 7% are African American, and 3% are Caucasian; 91% are economically disadvantaged, and 74% are at-risk (Texas Tribunal, 2017). MDL Academy demographics are 89% Hispanic, 10% African American, and 1% White; 92% are economically disadvantaged, and 100% are at-risk.

Students are placed at MDL Academy after it is determined that they have committed an infraction against the district’s Student Code of Conduct. A Critical Incident Report is filed, and the student is referred to a hearing with one of the district’s two hearing officers. There are two types of placements at MDL Academy: mandatory and discretionary. Mandatory placements are given when students have committed an offense against the student code of conduct, as outlined in the Texas Education Code Chapter 37. Discretionary placements are given when students have committed an offense against the student code of conduct that the district has determined constitutes grounds for removal to the disciplinary alternative education program. Placement terms vary from 20 days to 50 days and can be “stacked” for multiple infractions. Placement lengths increase the more often the student is sent to the DAEP. Currently at MDL Academy, 86% of placements are mandatory, and 14% are discretionary.

Students are withdrawn from their campus of record and enrolled at MDL academy after the hearing. Each student placed at MDL Academy is assigned to one of four teams, based on their registered grade level, to ensure students are combined with age-appropriate peers and registered with teachers certified to teach their grade-level content. These teams compete daily, utilizing a system that awards points for completing academic assignments, demonstrating appropriate behavior and social skills, service learning, and physical education. Middle school and high school teams are assigned randomly, except in instances where students have committed grievous acts together or toward each other and are required to be separated.

MDL Academy students are provided instruction in the four core subjects: English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Instruction is computer-enhanced, using curriculum software aligned to state standards. In addition, students are provided field and laboratory activities in Science and Social Studies through service-learning projects. Citizenship, self-discipline, responsibility, and a positive work ethic are taught through meaningful projects and activities intended to enhance the school environment and directly benefit others. MDL Academy does not provide credit-based instruction in physical education because there is not a certified PE teacher employed there. MDL Academy does not offer any elective courses nor employ elective-certified personnel, as the Texas Education Code does not require DAEPs to do so.

MDL Academy provides each student with a minimum of 45 minutes of structured counseling each day in a variety of settings. These settings include individual, team, and occasional sessions provided by outside social service organizations. Counselors implement and participate in daily team counseling sessions. Counselors conduct at least one individual guidance session with every student. The counseling component enables students to deal with the trials of high expectations, stress, constant supervision, and additional issues of adolescence. The counselors serve as a resource for students as they deal with the struggles of daily life with the added burden of attending an alternative campus. Counselors are also available to support students’ families.

Participants for this study were recruited from the population of employees assigned to MDL Academy. Mills and Gay (2016) recommend an entire population if there are fewer than 100 participants. Currently, MDL Academy employs fifteen core-content teachers, one Special Education teacher, one behavior interventionist, two counselors, three assistant principals, and one principal. Of the core-content teachers, eight are certified to teach middle school level content, and seven are certified to teach high school level content. There is currently one vacancy for a certified high school teacher and a vacancy for a certified Special Education teacher. Currently employed teachers' years of experience vary from one to fourteen years in the classroom. 67% of the staff population is male, and 33% is female. 22% of the currently employed staff are White, 44% are Hispanic, 5% are Asian, and 22% are African American. Seven teachers have their Bachelor degrees, nine have their Master degrees, and two have their Terminal degrees.

All employed staff during the 2018-2019 school year received training in restorative practices curricula through the district. Restorative practices training, funded through a grant via the Department of Student Discipline, entailed the opportunity for all staff to attend a workshop conducted by the National Educators for Restorative Practices (NEDRP). During this two-day training, teachers were instructed in implementing the relational action plan and its various components. Teachers also had the opportunity to create their own relational action plan and practice implementing the sections. Administrators, counselors, and behavior interventionists attended a separate one-day training with the National Educators for Restorative Practices that focused on conflict resolution and reintegrating students back into a classroom or campus after removal for a violation.

Sampling Procedures

The sampling strategy should allow the researcher to transfer the conclusions of this study to other comparable groups (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). This study is site-specific. MDL Academy was chosen for this study due to the following characteristics: MDL Academy is a disciplinary alternative educational placement campus; MDL Academy services secondary school students; all employees of MDL Academy during the 2018-2019 school year are trained in restorative practices; and restorative practices is already established as a pilot program at MDL Academy. Due to the small population of educators employed at MDL Academy, the whole qualifying population was utilized. Mills and Gay (2016) propose that when any population is smaller than 100, the researcher should use the entire sample. Twenty-three participants were contacted and asked to participate. Out of that number, the response rate was nine qualified potential participants. To maintain confidentiality of the participants and adhere to the Institutional Review Board application, six participants out of the nine that initially volunteered were chosen to be part of this study. Six individuals agreed to participate and took the initial survey. One individual dropped from the study for undisclosed reasons, and the remaining five went on to participate in the interview.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the degree to which a test measures what it is meant to measure (Mills & Gay, 2016). Reliability displays the consistency of the scores produced (Mills & Gay, 2016). There are five general types of reliability: stability, equivalence; equivalence and stability; internal consistency; and scorer-rater (Mills & Gay, 2016). Reliability in this mixed-methods, sequential explanatory case study was established through scorer-rater reliability, in which independent scorers agree on the score of an open-ended response type test (Mills & Gay, 2016). Scorer-rater reliability, also known as intercoder agreement (Creswell, 2013) and inter-rater reliability, was established through the process of multiple raters checking on the consistency to reduce bias (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Inter-judge reliability was established using two or more independent scorers (Mills & Gay, 2016).

Validity

It is essential to employ accepted validation strategies to document the accuracy of this study. For this mixed-methods, sequential explanatory case study, validity will ensue through triangulating data sources

as well as data collection methods. Triangulation is the process in which multiple data are used to clarify meaning and achieve understanding (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Triangulation makes use of “multiple sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251).

To enhance the validity of this study, the researcher will employ the following strategies: clarifying researcher bias; rich, thick description; and peer review. To clarify the researchers’ bias, the researchers will explain their position and any biases that may potentially impact the inquiry. Using this validation strategy, the researcher comments on past experiences, and prejudices that have likely molded the interpretation and approach to the study (Creswell, 2013). Clarifying researcher bias up-front creates a sense of honesty and integrity with the reader (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The researcher can continually self-reflect on their own bias by maintaining reflective field notes or keeping a journal throughout the process of the study.

Rich, thick descriptions ensure the researcher describes each process, idea, or theme in such detail that readers can make decisions regarding transferability. Using rich, detailed descriptions allows readers to transfer the information to other settings and determine whether the findings are transferrable based on shared characteristics (Creswell, 2013). “Thick description means that the researcher provides details when writing about a case or when writing about a theme” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). Thick description assists in communicating a whole, realistic picture of the experience (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Another validation strategy is peer review, where an outside individual commits to an external check of the process to keep the researcher honest. Peer review assists in enhancing the accuracy of the account (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). By asking a peer to review the researcher’s notes and then ask questions, assumptions can be examined, and alternative viewpoints can be considered (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The peer-debriefer asks difficult questions about the “methods, meanings, and interpretations, and provides the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher’s feelings” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251).

Construct validity is the “most important form of validity because it asks what the fundamental question: What is this test really measuring?” (Mills, & Gay, 2016, p. 171). Construct validity will ensue using previously published interview protocols for teacher and administrator perceptions of student behavior and restorative practices. The validity of any measure can be diminished due to subjective scoring (Mills & Gay, 2016); procedural safeguards will be in place to combat researcher bias and subjective scoring.

The Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher was to ensure confidentiality at every point of this study. The researcher was aware of the importance of confidentiality due to the small staff population at MDL Academy and the need for participant protection. Copies of informed consent were collected in a sealed envelope and then stored in a secure location. Both the survey and the semi-structured interview data were collected via secure, private computer programs and participant-only accessible online meetings. Both sets of this data were also stored in a secure location only accessible to the researcher. The researcher consistently addressed informed consent and confidentiality practices with the participants, ensuring them that the specific answers containing any identifiable information would not be utilized or accessible to anybody outside of the researcher.

Data Collection

The use of multiple methods and triangulation is critical for understanding the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Phase I data collection for this mixed-methods, sequential explanatory case study will be descriptive statistics pulled from the Texas Education Agency database to determine the number of teacher-managed classroom behavioral issues, office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions for the DAEP for one school year. Descriptive statistics are “methods used to portray the cases in a collection of data, to depict patterns in the data, to explore distributions or shapes of the data, and/or to summarize the basic features of the data being described” (Vogt, Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele, 2014, p. 207).

Phase II data collection for this mixed-methods, sequential explanatory case study will comprise of a survey followed by one-on-one interviews with participants. Both the interviewer and the interviewee will be audio recorded using a microphone and visually recorded using a digital recorder. An existing survey protocol will be used with appropriate permission (see Appendix B). An existing interview protocol will be utilized, with appropriate permission, and driven by the analysis of the quantitative data (see Appendix C).

Each interviewee will sign an informed consent document before the interview begins. All interviews will take place in a comfortable, neutral area, using the computer program “Zoom”. The interviewer will revisit the purpose of the study, the amount of time necessary to complete the interview, the plans for using the data from the interview (Creswell, 2013). All interview information will be recorded manually on the predeveloped interview protocol to circumvent issues in the event the audio-visual recording fails to work.

Through interviews, “the researcher can examine attitudes, interests, feelings, concerns, and values” (Mills & Gay, 2016, p. 550). The interviews will be formal, with preplanned times to meet, and semi-structured, with a set of interview questions that will prompt equivalent information from all respondents (Mills & Gay, 2016). The semi-structured interview will consist of both open-ended and closed questions. Open-ended questions give respondents the opportunity to respond in detail and elaborate. Closed questions enable respondents to reply briefly. The secondary researcher will follow the “Guidelines for Interviewing” set forth by Mills & Gay (2016): they will listen more than they speak, refrain from interrupting the respondent, allow time for silence, stick to the interview protocol, be nonjudgmental, keep respondents focused on the interview, and refrain from debate.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Data

Interviews play a central role in data collection (Creswell, 2013). “Following data collection, it is useful to transcribe the recordings” (Mills & Gay, 2016, p. 551). Interview data from participants will then be analyzed, classified, and interpreted into codes. The process of coding “involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code... and then assigning a label to the code” (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). Creswell (2013) highly suggests using the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method for analyzing data in a case study. In the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, the researcher finds statements in the interviews and works to develop a non-overlapping list. Once this list has been developed, the researcher will take the significant statements and groups them into themes. Next, the researcher will write a structural description of the phenomenon (the effect of restorative practices on student behavior). Finally, the researcher will create the essence of this method—a composite description of the phenomenon—by combining the textual and structural descriptions.

The computer software program, QSR NVivo, will also be used to analyze the coding data. This software will “enable the researcher to store, categorize, retrieve, and compare data” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 75). NVivo also affords security by storing the database and the records together in a singular file (Creswell, 2013). Advantages to using a computer program include: having an organized storage filing system with the ability to quickly locate materials, having to look closely at the data to determine meaning, the ability to use the concept-mapping tool to design visual models, and easy access for retrieval (Creswell, 2013).

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this sequential explanatory case study is to assess the effects of a restorative practice curricula on student behavior at the disciplinary alternative secondary campus, as well as the effects of restorative practices on resultant staff responses and perceptions regarding student discipline. To that end, the researcher analyzed data collected through three different methods: Two forms of quantitative data regarding the number of students enrolled, discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions over a

three-year period for MDL Academy in addition to an approved Survey Protocol, and Qualitative data extrapolated through an approved semi-structured Interview Protocol. Exploring the educators' experiences and perceptions relating to disciplinary practices, and exclusionary practices, will allow for analyzation to determine if these practices are occurring among staff and students at the DAEP.

The overarching research question that guided this study was: "In what ways does the existing Restorative Practice curriculum at a Disciplinary Alternative School affect the behavior of students of grades 6-12 in a central Texas, urban school district?" Three secondary questions existed to guide data collection and elicit responses relevant to this study:

1. Do restorative practices and the relational action plan influence students' behavior in the classroom as observed by school staff?
2. Do restorative practices and the relational action plan influence teachers' classroom management decisions?
3. Do restorative practices and the relational action plan influence administrative disciplinary decisions?

To address the research questions, all three sets of data were utilized. The researcher analyzed data collected from the semi-structured interviews of certified educators working at MDL Academy during the academic years of both 2017-2018, and 2018-2019.

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Based on findings of the study, the Social Justice framework was used because of its emphasis on addressing the inequities in educational institutions and providing an ethical foundation for discussion of current educational issues (DeMatthews, 2016; St. John, 2007).

Essential to social justice in education is an understanding that the background of the student will play a significant role in their academic success (Vah Seliskar, 2018). School leaders must take care to be knowledgeable about the intersecting roles of marginalization in their schools and communities, acknowledge racism as a central cause of educational inequity, and be prepared to act in the presence of that inequity (DeMatthews, 2016, Terrell & Lindsay, 2009). Using Social Justice Theory as a lens through which to view the data, their guidance on the history of institutional inequities and its impact on minority children appear to be maintaining, though current educators seem to have negative opinions of systems and policies that permit a racial and socio-economic imbalance. In Chapter 4, the researcher describes the methods used to analyze the data, discuss analysis, and present my findings.

Quantitative Analysis

Disciplinary Data Analysis

The disciplinary data was pulled from two specific academic years: 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. Data includes the number of enrolled students at MDL Academy, the number of office referrals, the number of student suspensions, and the number of student expulsions.

Table 1
Disciplinary Data: 2017-2020

| Year | 2017-2018 | 2018-2019 | 2019-2020* |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Enrollment (students) | 290 | 236 | 145 |
| Discipline Referrals | 458 | 301 | 155 |
| Suspension | 156 | 83 | 10 |
| Expulsion | 31 | 0 | 0 |

* *The 2019-2020 year was the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and data during that year will be skewed due to schools closing down in March and not returning to in-person learning until the following academic school year.*

The 2017-2018 academic year was to be used for base-data; this year was the academic year prior to the implementation of the Restorative Practices program. During the 2018-2019 academic year all MDL Academy staff, in addition to approximately three other campuses within the district, received training in Restorative Practices, and began year-one of the pilot program for the district. Though only a small number of campuses participated in the initial Restorative Practices training from NEDRP, all middle schools, high schools, and specialty campuses (both the primary and secondary DAEP and the Academy for Special Education students with severe, chronic behavioral needs) were invited. All educators that attended received initial training in September of 2018 and MDL Academy, specifically, received follow-up guidance in April of 2019. The 2019-2020 school year was year-two of the Restorative Practices pilot program. However, it is important to note that the 2019-2020 school year was interrupted by the COVID-19 Pandemic, which required schools to close their doors to in-person learning in March of 2020 and not reopen until October of the 2020-2021 academic year. For this reason, the researcher has shown the data but not included it in the study.

As validated by the quantitative data, over the two years of the Restorative Practices pilot program it appears the number of disciplinary consequences decreased, as did overall student enrollment at the DAEP. Specifically, there was an 18.6% decrease in enrollment between 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. The average of student enrollment over the two-year period was 263 students. Between 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, there was a 34.3% decrease in discipline referrals. Between 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, there was a 47% decrease in suspensions. Between 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, expulsions went from 31% to being eliminated.

Survey Analysis

The results of the survey include data from all six participants. The existing survey protocol used a five-point Likert-Scale, a rating scale used to assess opinions, attitudes, or behaviors, where choices included: “(5) Strongly Agree”, “(4) Agree”, “(3) Neither Agree nor Disagree”, “(2) Disagree”, and “(1) Strongly Disagree”. One exclusive survey question asked that participants rate the extent individual programs were used on campus to combat negative classroom and/or campus behaviors and promote school safety, with the five-point Likert-Scale answers ranging from “(1) Never Used” to “(5) Frequently Used”.

Table 2
Participant Demographics

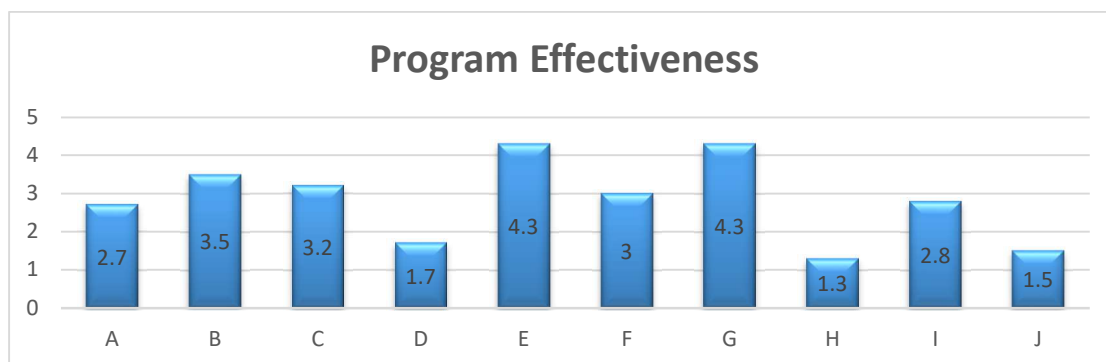
| Participant | Age (Years) | Years in Education | Ethnicity |
|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| A | 35-40 | 12 | Black |
| B | 25-30 | 5 | Latin/Latinx |
| C | 35-40 | 5 | Hispanic |
| D | 45+ | 26 | White |
| E | 25-30 | 6 | Hispanic |
| F | 30-35 | 11 | Hispanic |

*Participant D chose not to participate in the interview process

When asked if suspension makes students less likely to misbehave in the future, four individuals disagreed and two individuals strongly disagreed. Similarly, when asked if suspensions and expulsions hurt students by removing them from academic learning time, four participants agreed and two participants strongly agreed. Additionally, three participants indicated they strongly agreed that suspensions and expulsions only afforded students more time on the streets to get themselves in trouble, while the remaining three participants agreed. Three participants strongly agreed that students with disabilities account for a disproportionate amount of time spent on discipline, three agreed, and three neither agreed nor disagreed. As it relates to Zero-Tolerance policies, one person agreed that those policies made a difference in maintaining order at the campus, while three disagreed and two strongly disagreed.

When participants were asked to respond to questions concerning race and socio-economic status, the answers varied. One participant strongly agreed that students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds have different behavioral needs, while two agreed, two neither agreed nor disagreed, and one disagreed. Similarly, two individuals strongly agreed that suspension and expulsion were unfair to students from certain racial/ethnic backgrounds, three agreed, and one neither agreed nor disagreed. All participants disagreed certain students from racial/ethnic backgrounds were most likely to be disrespectful to teachers, with four disagreeing and two strongly disagreeing. Similarly, all participants disagreed that students from a certain racial/ethnic background chose to be less engaged in class, with two disagreeing and four strongly disagreeing. When asked if economically disadvantaged students required a different approach to discipline than other students, one participant strongly agreed, two agreed, and three disagreed. Comparably, two participants agreed that most, if not all, discipline problems could arise from inadequacies in the students' home situations, one neither agreed nor disagreed, and three disagreed. Participants were also asked to rate the extent of multiple proactive programs and/or strategies and their effectiveness in maintaining discipline and safety at MDL Academy. The results of this particular question can be seen in Table 3:

Table 3
Intervention Program Effectiveness



- A. *Social skills and conflict resolution training for all students (including Restorative Practices)*
- B. *Individual behavior plans or programs for disruptive students*
- C. *Counseling or therapy*
- D. *Peer mediation*
- E. *In-class telephone for reporting behavior problems*
- F. *In-service training and workshops for teachers on classroom management*
- G. *Metal detectors and/or video technology*
- H. *Bullying prevention programs*
- I. *Security guard, resource officer, or police presence*
- J. *Anger management training*

Table 4

Intervention Program Effectiveness Mean and Standard Deviation

| | |
|--------------------|----------|
| Mean | 2.83 |
| Standard Deviation | 1.071914 |

Qualitative Analysis

Interview Analysis

The researcher used qualitative data analysis to examine the interview transcripts. The semi-structured interviews, using an existing interview protocol, were untimed and lasted between 30-minutes and 90-minutes in length. All five participant-interviews: Participant A, B, C, E, and F, were conducted and recorded using the computer program Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic and social restrictions in place. Transcription of the interviews was completed utilizing the *QSR NVivo Transcription* program. Transcripts were first read through for informational purposes. The transcripts were then read while listening to the audio recordings to ensure accuracy. The transcripts were read through multiple times, a process that also allowed the researcher time to familiarize herself with the data and make sense of what the participants said. After the transcription process was complete, the process of coding the interviews began.

Interview Results and Emergent Themes

Creswell, 2013, recommends 20-30 codes regardless of the size of the study. Interviews play a central role in data collection (Creswell, 2013). “Following data collection, it is useful to transcribe the recordings” (Mills & Gay, 2016, p. 551). Interview data from participants was then analyzed, classified, and interpreted into codes. The process of coding involved “aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code... and then assigning a label to the code” (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). Creswell (2013) highly suggests using the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method for analyzing data in a case study. Using the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, the researcher found statements in the interviews and worked to develop a non-overlapping list. Once this list was developed, the researcher took the significant statements and grouped them into themes. Next, the researcher wrote a structural description of the phenomenon (the effect of restorative practices on student behavior). Finally, the researcher created the essence of this method—a composite description of the phenomenon—by combining the textual and structural descriptions.

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The interviews identified teachers’ beliefs regarding disciplinary practices and their personal opinions about their own abilities to provide appropriate disciplinary consequences and proactive interventions to students. In addition, the interviews allowed the researcher to examine the teachers’ perceptions of the

use of the restorative practices curriculum and its effect on student behavior and discipline. The interviews uncovered concerns regarding consistency and fidelity to the restorative practices curriculum and the need for continued training on its usage.

Theme 1: Systemic Inequities

Systemic inequities appeared to play a central role in the lives and perceptions of all five interview participants. The following narrations from the five interviews support this. Participant A holds the belief that children “misbehave because they don't understand the culture of the environment and it's not explained; the norms are not set. A lot of times we, as educators, have a set norm for kids and we don't explain them.” When asked to expand on this statement, Participant A discussed a reliance on school norms developed through a Eurocentric lens, one that did not take the culture or values of the Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) and Hispanic communities they serve into consideration. Participant B discussed the disparity and inequity in educational quality and experiences between the charter school they attended and the public school their sibling attended: I graduated my high school having seventy-five percent of my bachelor's degree done for free. My brother is only one year behind me in terms of grade-level, so he went to the local high school that we lived in the district of and the difference in the education we got is staggering. . . That was my first glimpse into the disparities that are in education.

Participant C discussed their own educational experience, touching on the issue of racism they, themselves, experienced: “I grew up in a predominantly Caucasian city, and I experienced a level of casual racism - from jokes and a lack of respect for the culture that I come from and from the cultures of African American friends that I had. I definitely think that needed to be something that needed to be addressed and was not addressed enough.” Participant E discussed students from primarily Black and Hispanic low-socioeconomic areas of town being disciplined in a more severe manner than the other areas of the district:

I got to work on the East-side, and you kind of see this different culture coming from families, leadership, teachers. Some of these sides of the school district, whether it's mostly like East-side or the South-side, some parts of the West, I would say, has a very punitive approach as far as disciplining children. They went on to say MDL Academy's student numbers mostly came from low-socioeconomic areas of town that included high minority populations. “[Student placements] were high coming from South-side and East-side, and [if] you ask the students, they can't explain to you why they're there because they, themselves, are confused because there's no consistency [in disciplinary practices] in those schools.” When asked to expand on student behavior and why students may misbehave, Participant F believes there are disparities in education because:

The educational system was not created with [the students] in mind, it is not education that they are defying; it is educational system that they are rebelling against because it is not inclusive, it is completely binary, and there's no space for them; it's subtractive thinking, is what it is. It's all the things that we take away from them, so we see them as a problem; we see them as an issue. Their behavior is all these deficits and all this negative connotation that we focus on instead of thinking about all of their experiences and their wealth of knowledge and the fact that they have a different upbringing than us. But they have so much social capital that we just don't understand; because we don't understand it, we think that they're the problem when really our educational systems are the issues.

Participant A and F also indicate a lack of connection with the families in their community. There are no community-building events for the MDL Academy, nor are home-visits conducted for positive reasons. All participants agree it is difficult to engage parents. Participant F reasons:

If you haven't had a good experience [at school], it's the last place you want to go. Lots of times these kids are hearing horrible things. These parents are hearing horrible things about their kids and it's coming from teachers, it's coming from [us] and [we] have to change this.

Figure 7
Extrapolating Themes from Interview Coding: Theme 1



Theme 2: Combating Systemic Inequities

Another common theme among all five participants was being able to combat the systemic inequities in education. They all discuss the use of preventative strategies, ranging from procedures and policies that can be implemented in the classroom and at the campus level, to nation-wide educational policy reform. Participant A believes the use of proactive, preventative strategies such as the campus' use of Boy's

Town social skills and NEDRP's restorative practices curriculum can make a difference in their student's behavior. They expand on this thought by discussing a few more well-known, research-based management systems- "PBIS" and "CHAMPS" and how well those systems fit within the "Gradual Release of Responsibility" instructional practice the campus utilizes:

I like to model the behaviors that I want to see each kid have as we go through the various activities inside and outside the classroom. I also like to praise a lot and reward positive behavior in the hallways and the cafeteria. I still like to go over norms and expectations on a weekly basis just to remind them every week, because you pretty much have to reinforce behavior weekly. When asked about a student whom they believe restorative practices assisted with, specifically, Participant A recalled a student: who was pretty much really extreme, and she never wanted anybody touching her...nobody could reach her, even people who thought they could reach her. I pretty much sat her down and, like, asked her what was going on. Pretty much I just let her have a day where she didn't have to [conform to the dress code]. I mean, [coworkers] got upset with me, you know, but the next day she came in uniform [following the dress code]. All she needed was somebody to vent to her and listen to her and not tell her what to do. Participant B discussed the use of NEDRP's restorative practices curriculum and the impact its use had at the classroom level:

When you use it, it's not 100% effective because I don't think anything is, but it definitely has a positive impact if you are performing it with fidelity, continuously giving feedback, with your check-ins, check-ups, check-outs, that is. If you use the tools as they are intended to be used, it does positively impact behavior. It doesn't mean all the problems are gone, but I think it makes a positive impact as to what [the behavior] would be if you didn't. When asked to discuss using restorative practices with students, they chose to discuss the proactive part of building relationships in the classroom: I'm going to say that my approach was relationship-building; I think that's my strong suit as an educator because [students] are only there with us for four weeks, minimum. Because you're not there with them that long, it is so crucial to build relationships and it's hard because you have to be authentic, and you have to build them fast. I will say, when a student likes you, they will behave for you a lot more, but I've definitely seen students that might give other teachers difficulty but not me. They would be much more willing to work for me or willing to behave in my class. Participant B also discussed the effect on student behavior when the relationship and trust was broken: I chose battles to fight that I shouldn't have and, today, wouldn't have. I remember there was a student who was playing with the blinds in my classroom and I turned it into a power struggle when I shouldn't have, and was [verbally] fighting with them about those blinds. After that, the rapport was not as strong, and I would say that affected their behavior in my classroom negatively from that point onward.

Participant C took time to discuss the impact the change of leadership had in regards to suspensions and expulsions. They discussed that the new administration firmly believed in disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline, stopped relying on exclusionary discipline practices as consequences for all infractions, and implemented the use of Restorative Practices, specifically saying they are "using very current techniques to try to fix a very current issue". They believe that by not relying solely on suspensions and expulsions, restorative practices put a "clog in the school-to-prison pipeline." They believe that different children require different approaches based on their situation. Participant C also indicates that student needs must be considered; are their basic needs being met according to Maslow's hierarchy and how that could impact a child's behavior. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs Tier 2 includes stability, safety, security, and freedom from fear. Participant C speaks about discipline in relation to Tier 2: The only feelings that come into play when I discipline students is how am I going to deescalate this situation? How are my actions inside of this event? When I deescalate a situation, I have to be very, very careful because the consequences or after-effects of the conversation will determine how the student looks at me, looks at the school, everything. At the very end they can still feel comfortable coming to talk to me...it's a promise I always make the students. You can do whatever you want to me. You can yell and you can scream at me; I will always be here. Not only because it's my job but because I want to be here. When

asked about combating systemic issues through policy, Participant E believes that there should be: a social worker on every campus, don't divide them by a [school's] feeder pattern. I would also add mental health counselors to alternative schools because a lot of the trauma starts at home. I would add more budget for public schools; a lot of these schools are understaffed. The policies on student discipline, I feel like, are not kid friendly; I feel like they kind of target the child. Similar to Participant C, Participant E also confers that if the basic needs of the child are not being met, the child can't focus on learning. In regard to policy change, Participant F strongly believes that trade programs need to be brought back, and to assume everybody is going to college does a disservice to our students. They believe that college is a viable option, but for those that can't or won't attend, they need something to fall back on, and bringing back that vocational instruction can assist in helping all students be successful.

Figure 8

Extrapolating Themes from Interview Coding: Theme 2



Theme 3: Practices for Positive Change

The final theme that emerged from the interviews discussed the changes that could be made in order to positively impact the institution of education, in addition to the students and families it is supposed to serve. Participants B, E, and F agree that there need to be an abundance of counselors available to children as they feel the mental-health crisis is impacting their children. They believe that mental-health reform needs to be at the top of the list in relation to supporting the communities their schools are situated in. Participant B specifically states:

Mental health needs to be considered much more frequently in education, and it's really frustrating because I think everyone wants that. I think everyone is like, yes, mental health is important, let's do something about it. But the parameters that have been put upon public education and the restrictions of everything is so results driven with tests, and it's very difficult to implement those changes that would be beneficial.

Participant B also believes it is incredibly important that “separate discipline from criminal records as much as possible. [A student's] criminal record should not be influenced by schools”. Participant C's views align with Participant B, emphasizing that schools “don't pay attention to data that supports that systemic racism exists inside of the system and are perpetuating the school to prison pipeline”. Participant F contributes to this discussion by stating:

[Policy-makers] are doing it wrong. This is unjust. School is made for those who would have succeeded anyway; people who are used to fitting in the system; people who conform. There isn't anything for those that aren't or don't.

Additionally, Participant F feels strongly that every student can learn:

It's not education they don't like, it's the business of schools. Schools perpetuate these binary systems. [Educators] need to understand our role as oppressors; we are part of the problem – if you can remember that and not have a savior complex, understand that you work for an oppressive system and are helping move that forward, it will humble you.

Participant F also posits that “Social Justice is the compass [they] use to frame every decision [they] make.

Finally, Participant B and Participant F discuss the importance of teacher and administrator retention as a practice for positive change. Participant B states that “teacher burnout is so real – new teachers need more supports in place; more opportunities and programs for support and mentorship should exist”. Participants C, E, and F acknowledge the frequency of teachers coming in untrained in the middle of the academic year and not having the correct tools to be consistent, negatively impact the procedures and systems at the campus-level. All participants believe that in order to be successful in any endeavor there has to be consistency amongst the staff.

Figure 9
Extrapolating Themes from Interview Coding: Theme 3



Synthesis of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Findings

As previous research has indicated, restorative practices curriculum used to increase relationships between students, teachers, and administrators, increase campus/classroom culture and climate. They build community and increase trust between the student and the staff. When used the number of campus disciplinary issues, including office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions decrease. The teachers at MDL Academy perceived more negative behavioral issues prior to the implementation of the restorative practices curriculum, and indicate that consistent, purposeful use of the curriculum has helped. In sum, quantitative and qualitative data all support the implementation and use of restorative practices as a viable

alternative to traditional exclusionary discipline practices, even when the students are already suffering the consequences of exclusionary discipline.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research

Introduction

The present study investigated the impact of a restorative practices curriculum on student behaviors at the DAEP. NEDRP created their restorative practices curriculum to assist educators, both administrators and teachers, in decreasing negative student behavior and increasing relationships, thus promoting a positive culture and climate. This study also investigated the impact of the restorative practices curriculum on teachers' classroom management decisions and administrators' disciplinary decisions.

It was hypothesized that:

- The restorative practices curriculum would decrease negative student behaviors at school and consequently decrease the use of exclusionary discipline practices.
- The Restorative practices curriculum would impact teachers' classroom management decisions by giving them a toolkit that allowed the creation of classroom culture and climate, building relationships between students and with students, thereby decreasing the need for administrative intervention.
- The Restorative practices curriculum would positively influence administrators' disciplinary decisions by allowing them training in conducting circles focused on student-to-student and student-to-teacher mediation, allowing the "perpetrator" of an offense to right the wrong and make amends while also affording administrators' the ability to continue to use punitive consequences when necessary.

The Restorative practices curriculum used in this study introduced the concepts of individualized student consequences, while teaching proactive tools to build a foundational relationship of mutual trust and respect. Each tool in NEDRP's Restorative practices curriculum are built to increase positive interactions between the students, the teachers, and the administration. Both Green and Yellow circles are also designed to promote connection and community in the classroom, while Red circles are utilized to restore communication and repair the harm. Additionally, a student re-entry plan ensures that each student has an individualized reintegration plan into the classroom or the campus. This re-entry plan is designed to afford the student multiple levels of support, academically, behaviorally, and social-emotionally. By wrapping the student in supports on every level, the impact on the use of exclusionary discipline practices was hypothesized to decrease. This section reports on the results of the quantitative and qualitative data to prove or disprove the hypotheses of the present study.

Discussion

Student Behavior in the Classroom

Do restorative practices and the relational action plan influence students' behavior in the classroom as observed by school staff?

This research question was answered by educators through use of participant interviews. One question asked of the participants was to remember a student with whom their intervention was successful with. All five participants were able to recall situations where they used Restorative Practices, sometimes in addition to Boy's Town social skills, to intervene and deescalate student behaviors. Participant F recounts an experience with a student where they were dealing with a particularly difficult, returning student:

He was testing me, telling me that he's in charge of this particular situation and doesn't care what I have to say or who I am or anything [but] I wouldn't let it go. I basically gave him the choice – if you keep that shirt [that doesn't belong to you] then this will be your consequence. If you take it off, you can sit back down but I will not give you points for this first fifteen minutes. I told him it was his choice. He took it off...folded it...and put it back where he found it.

Participant E recalls building a relationship with a student to combat misbehavior:

My first concern was to make sure that he can trust me – build a relationship with him first, get to know him, his favorite artist or candy or whatever his interests were. Get to know him first and then reward the

little things. Find the little things to just celebrate his success for trying. He became a student leader for me, and he would help me with other students.

Participant E posits that “restorative practice is all about trust”. Building trust between the students and between the students and the teacher show children are more likely to behave positively because they feel safe and included. All five participants also indicated that by using Restorative Practices, they had less disruption and needed administration to intervene less frequently.

Teachers’ Classroom Management Decisions

Do restorative practices and the relational action plan influence teachers’ classroom management decisions?

Restorative practices appeared to influence teachers’ classroom management decisions. Specifically, restorative practices influenced teachers’ classroom management decisions in the following ways:

- Teachers were able to build relationships with their students
- Teachers did not have to document as many behaviors in their online system
- Teachers were able to build community in their classrooms and between students by using restorative practices circle

Survey data was collected prior to the interviews, and all six participants agreed or strongly agreed that suspensions and expulsions were ineffective in combating inappropriate student behaviors and that they needed additional resources and programs dealing with social skills and conflict-resolution training. In their interviews, the five remaining participants all stated they believed that restorative practices were an effective part of decreasing negative student behaviors in their classrooms, decreasing the number of times they had to call for an administrator for student behaviors, and ultimately increasing community in the teams. When asked specifically about classroom management, Participant A believes that most behaviors should be handled by the teacher. They affirmed “Our goal is pretty much [do] all that we need to do to manage our classes. That means verbal warnings, sitting with the kid, doing restorative practices, restorative circles, conversing with the student and parent phone calls”. Participant B took time to discuss their use of circles as part of their proactive strategies; “Circles! Love circles; love circles; big fan of restorative practices with circles”. Participant C answered, when asked about MDL Academy’s approach to preventing challenging behavior, that they “implement restorative [practices]; we have policies that reflect restorative justice, to reflect restorative practices that actually are district-mandated policies”.

Administrative Disciplinary Decisions

Do restorative practices and the relational action plan influence administrative disciplinary decisions?

This question was answered through the use of all three data sets – Disciplinary Data over a period of two years, the survey, and participant interviews. The Disciplinary Data from MDL Academy clearly shows a decrease in student referrals, suspensions, and expulsions once the Restorative practices pilot program was implemented. Using data from the survey, all six participants reported that suspension is last in their line of consequences as it only serves to give students time on the streets and time away from the instructional environment, where they need to be to ensure their learning is happening. The interview data from the remaining five participants supports this assertion, as the participants all discussed the decreased usage of punitive, exclusionary disciplinary actions once their campus had been trained in restorative practices.

Unanticipated Findings

There were a few unanticipated findings from the participant interviews: inconsistency in the implementation and fidelity of the restorative practices curriculum, in addition to other systems, and the overreliance on one system. All five participants discussed that inconsistency in training, implementation, and follow-through have played a part in their reflections and opinions on the impact of any system utilized at MDL Academy, including the restorative practices curriculum. They discuss a perceived imbalance, what they refer to as an overreliance on restorative practices and a subsequent lack

of punitive consequences. It should be noted, however, that teachers do not get to determine if punitive consequences are issued, or which punitive consequence is issued (mainly in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension). The participants believe that whatever program or system they adopt needs to be used consistently. They believe they need a mission, a common vision, leadership, community, and culture. They would like to know the reason behind the way incidents on the campus are handled. They crave feedback on their use of these strategies, indicating that they receive the specific training in restorative practices but that there was never any follow-up to ensure they were using it correctly and efficiently. One participant stated they do not have the ability to write office referrals, though they do document the student's behavior in an online database. Office referrals are typically written by administration when they have been called to assist a teacher for inappropriate or negative student behaviors in the classroom. The practice of administrators writing the office referrals appears to have been a consistent one and used throughout the two years of quantitative data collection. The participants indicate that suspensions are rare, and expulsions only occur when a staff or student is hurt by another. The reason behind this decision is that students have already been removed from their primary educational setting, and that it is better they remain in school to complete their assigned days and continue with the curriculum so educational gaps do not increase. While they agree that the emphasis should be on the proactive strategies, Participant A believes that "using an exclusively restorative approach is not the best [way to handle student discipline]". They believe that a combination of restorative practices and traditional disciplinary consequences, when warranted, would be a better method for handling discipline, particularly when a student chooses not to take the restorative route. NEDRP, 2018, also posits that restorative practices are made to be used in conjunction with traditional disciplinary consequences, not replace them completely.

It should also be noted that participating educators have not spent extensive time in students' homes due to the rotating student population at MDL Academy. Because students are assigned to the DAEP anywhere between twenty and forty-five days for an offense, teachers at a DAEP may not have the opportunity or a reason to visit each individual student's home. Ideally, educators do not do home visits alone; finding a partner with such a small staff to attend a home visit during the school day is sometimes difficult due to the varied conference times of teachers and counselors.

Recommendations for Further Study

Several limitations existed within the present study and can provide direction for future research. The first limitation was that this study was confined to school staff members perceptions in a select urban disciplinary alternative education placement, secondary school in a large central Texas school district. Parents' or students' perceptions on restorative practices were not included. The second limitation was that this study was also confined to school staff members who received training from the National Educator's for Restorative Practices and were employed at MDL academy in the 2017-2018 school year, the year before the pilot program, and during the 2018-2019 school year during year one of the pilot program. The current problem of teacher and administrator retention negatively impacted the number of qualified participants. Additionally, qualified participants only received initial training and one follow-up training, increasing the potential for inconsistencies in implementation. The third limitation of this study was that this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, potentially skewing student discipline data as the children were not allowed to be on any campus for in-building learning. Due to this shift out of the classroom, the behaviors that students would engage in and the types of disciplinary consequences available to teachers and administrators changed drastically. The final limitation was that this study was limited to the voluntary participation of applicable staff members who completed a one-on-one interview with the researcher. To protect individual's identities, the researcher could only utilize a portion of qualified participants, picking six out of the nine individuals who agreed to be a part of this research process. Recommendations for further study include the impact of restorative practices on student recidivism. Student recidivism numbers could not be extrapolated as the Central Texas school district that MDL Academy belongs to does not have a method of recording and/or retrieving that specific data. The

researcher was informed that, previously, MDL Academy was tasked with the collection of yearly recidivism data, though the specific practice appears to have been stopped at some point.

Additionally, the impact of restorative practices used at the DAEP after a student transitions back to their home campus has not been determined. Does the campus follow the re-entry plan designed for the student and does the student receive the wrap-around support services? If so, how is the behavior of the student effected and does the student engage in behaviors that require further placement at the DAEP?

Implications for Professional Practice

This research study highlights the importance of using a restorative practices program as an alternative to the overreliance on traditional, punitive, exclusionary practices. Synthesis can be drawn from the evidence of this educational research regarding strategies that support schools appear to have a decrease in negative student behaviors when utilizing a restorative practices curriculum in the classrooms and across the campus. The researcher's main purpose is to bring forth the positive impact utilization of restorative practices curriculum, which promote building student, teacher, and administrative relationships while building community in the classrooms and across the campus.

An additional implication for professional practice is the continuation of professional development surrounding restorative practices. One common theme throughout the five interviews was the desire to have continuing professional development, coaching, and supports. Coaching and continuing support plays a crucial role in modeling job-embedded collaboration and effective practices. There are seven key, widely shared elements of effective professional development: content focused, incorporates active learning, supports collaboration, uses models of effective practices, provides coaching and expert support, offers feedback and reflection, is of sustained duration- one-and-done workshops are not enough (iacet.org, 2021). NEDRP offers continuing supports through their program with ongoing professional development and in-person support, should a school district choose it.

A concluding implication for educators is that restorative practices support the social and emotional development of students, contributing to teaching holistically as opposed to focusing only on academics. Social and emotional learning are an important part of a child's development and learning these skills can assist in supporting conflict-resolution, empathy, interpersonal skills, and trust. As Maslow's postulated in his hierarchy of needs instead of reducing a behavior to an environmental response, teachers should take a holistic approach, looking at the complete physical, emotional, social, and intellectual qualities to impact student learning. Maslow also believed that students had to be shown that they were valued and respected in the classroom, and that the teacher needed to create an environment to support them.

Reflection

There were several discoveries that were unexpected. Working closely with the quantitative data over the span of two academic years indicated to the researcher that the restorative practices curriculum appeared to be working as a positive combatant to exclusionary discipline practices. However, after interviewing the participants, it appears that there is a combination of systems, sometimes utilized inconsistently, that contribute to the decrease in negative student behaviors. It is difficult to determine if the decrease is primarily from the use of the proactive behavioral curriculums or from the participant-perceived reluctance to assign any disciplinary consequences. Looking at the data collected there is a decrease in the use of exclusionary punitive disciplinary consequences and a decrease in the amount of office referrals written for inappropriate or negative student behaviors by administration.

This experience also solidified the belief that, in order to truly be effective, all campuses in the district need to use restorative practices. One key component that is missing from the district's current use of NEDRP's Restorative Practices curriculum is a lack of a student re-entry support plan for children returning to their home-campus after the utilization of exclusionary discipline by being placed at the DAEP. Participant E sums it up best by saying "When the student goes back to their campus, there's no there's no there's no plan set for them to be successful. So, what happens is that they end up coming back

because we didn't learn the lesson". Because no recidivism data is collected, the researcher is unable to determine how many students would have benefitted from the re-entry support plan.

Conclusion

While restorative practice curricula are fairly new in education, the apparent positive impact of their use to decrease negative student behaviors can be clearly seen. The dominant focus of schools has been focused primarily on academics and standardized testing. To this end, students being removed from the classroom, and therefore losing learning opportunities, needs to be minimized. Participant E sums it up: "If we're really going to have restorative practices, you need to get all the schools involved. Like every teacher, every teacher in the district, from elementary to high school needs to be trained well".

The results support findings that exclusionary discipline practices do not appear to decrease negative student behaviors. The results also support previous research that students who experience exclusionary practices may be denied access to learning opportunities afforded to their peers (Rector-Aranda, 2016; Thompson, 2016; Townsend, 2000) and, when excluded from school, students have more free time to be unsupervised at home and more time to engage in illegal behaviors (Townsend, 2000). Additionally, the results support the idea that Zero-Tolerance policies make little contribution to maintaining order at the school, and that in order to effectively combat negative behaviors and increase safety, additional resources, training, and time are needed for school staff to be proactive and reduce the need for suspensions and expulsions.

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