RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AND SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

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INTRODUCTION

In an October 2014 episode of *This American Life*, the producers of the popular radio program asked a group of teachers how they learned to manage behavior in their classrooms. The radio producers observed that teachers:

> Often answer with a name, a kid's name . . . Johnny and Z and Jeff and Alex are our nation's education school. These are the kids who were so hard to discipline that teachers just had to figure out what to do. So each teacher finds an approach that works for them. Does it work for the kids? Who knows? There's no clear answer. There's no best practice that educators agree on.[1]

This issue is especially troubling to scholars of educational equity, who have observed a link between exclusionary discipline and unfavorable educational outcomes, a key component of a larger phenomenon known as the "school-to-prison pipeline."[2] Researchers have also documented the disparate impact of exclusionary discipline along lines of race, income, and ability.[3] In an effort to stop the pipeline, researchers and policymakers have explored a number of strategies to reduce reliance on exclusionary discipline.[4]

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[1] *This American Life: Is This Working?*, CHICAGO PUBLIC RADIO (October 17, 2014), http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/538/is-this-working.

[2] Russell J. Skiba, Mariella I. Arredando, & Natash T. Williams, *More Than a Metaphor: The Contribution of Exclusionary Discipline to a School-to-Prison Pipeline*, 47 EQUITY & EXCELLENCE IN EDUC. 546 (2014).

[3] *See* DANIEL LOSEN, CHERI HODSON, MICHAEL A. KEITH II, KATRINA MORRISON, & SHAKTI BELWAY, THE CENTER FOR CIVIL RIGHTS REMEDIES, ARE WE CLOSING THE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE GAP? (2015), http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/are-we-closing-the-school-discipline-gap/AreWeClosingTheSchoolDisciplineGap_FINAL221.pdf.

[4] Notable examples include student threat assessment, positive behavioral intervention and supports ("PBIS"), and social and emotional learning. Dewey Cornell & Peter Lovegrove, *Student Threat Assessment as a Method of Reducing Student Suspensions, in* CLOSING THE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE GAP: EQUITABLE REMEDIES FOR EXCESSIVE EXCLUSION 180 (Daniel J. Losen ed., 2015) (discussing student threat assessment); Claudia G. Vincent, Jeffrey R. Sprague, CHiXapkaid (Michael Pavel), Tary J. Tobin, & Jeff M. Gau, *Effectiveness of Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports in Reducing Racially Inequitable Disciplinary Exclusion, in* CLOSING THE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE GAP, *supra*, at 207 (discussing PBIS); U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, GUIDING PRINCIPLES: A

One such strategy, called restorative practices ("RP"), has drawn the attention of researchers and the public due to its potential for reducing reliance on punitive discipline.[5] In an effort to advance understanding of 'what works' in school discipline, this study uses qualitative methods to examine the underlying processes in the implementation of RP. To do so, we interviewed ten educators in a public school district that began implementing RP four years before our study, focusing on how the educators perceive, use, and evaluate RP. To provide context for our research, this paper will first survey literature examining the school-to-prison pipeline and restorative practices, then provide background on our site of study and research methods. Afterward, this paper will explain our findings and discuss implications for practice and for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

School-to-Prison Pipeline

The construct of the School-to-Prison Pipeline ("STPP") is used to describe an increasing trend of tracking students out of educational institutions through exclusionary discipline policies ('zero tolerance' policies), and, directly or indirectly, into the juvenile and adult criminal justice system.[6] Other definitions of the STPP include reference to the disproportionate impact that the discipline practices have on minority students, particularly African Americans, and students with disabilities.[7] The literature on the STPP supports a number of mechanisms that perpetuate the

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RESOURCE FOR IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE AND DISCIPLINE 6-7 (2014), http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf (recommending PBIS and social and emotional learning).

[5] *See, e.g.,* Thalia González, *Socializing Schools: Addressing Racial Disparities in Discipline Through Restorative Justice, in* CLOSING THE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE GAP, *supra* note 4, at 151 (finding reduced discipline disparities and improved academic achievement in a school district that implemented RP); *This American Life: Is This Working*, *supra* note 1 (examining a public school founded upon RP); U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, *supra* note 4, at 12 (recommending restorative justice practices); Eleanor Chute, *22 Pittsburgh Schools to Use Discipline Aimed More at Understanding Than Punishment*, PITT. POST-GAZETTE, Aug. 31, 2015, http://www.post-gazette.com/news/education/2015/08/31/22-Pittsburgh-schools-to-use-discipline-aimed-more-at-understanding-than-punishment/stories/201508280271 (reporting school districts' initial implantation of RP program funded by U.S. Department of Justice).

[6] Nancy A. Heitzg, *Education or Incarceration: Zero Tolerance Policies and the School to Prison Pipeline*,2, FORUM ON PUBLIC POLICY 1 (2009).

[7] Alicia Darensbourg, Erica Perez, & Jamila J. Blake, *Overrepresentation of African American Males in Exclusionary Discipline: The Role of School-Based Mental Health Professionals in Dismantling the School to Prison Pipeline*, 3, JOURNAL OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN EDUCATION 196-211 (2010); Johanna Wald & Daniel J. Losen, *Defining and Redirecting a School to Prison Pipeline*, 99, NEW DIRECTIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT 9-15 (2003).

tracking of students form educational institutions into the criminal justice system. Hirschfield[8] focuses on the increasing criminalization of the school environment, most evident in (1) school punishment as more formal and institutionalized, and less at the discretion of educators; (2) the increase of exclusionary punishments reflecting patterns in the criminal justice system of deterrence and incapacitation; and (3) the increased use of criminal justice technology and personnel for disciplinary and security purposes. Others have emphasized the macro-context of the prison-industrial complex in perpetuating school discipline policies that channel students into the criminal justice system.[9] These scholars consider the structure of the larger justice system relevant to policymakers who potentially have vested interests in building or expanding prisons and then are deciding on policies related to financing of schools, school security, and disciplinary procedures.[10]

Race has been a central focus in the research on the STPP due to the wide disparities in discipline rates between white students and students of color. The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights released a report in March 2014 that showed that racial disparities in discipline practices begin as early as pre-school.[11] Continuing throughout students' educational lives, the disparities exist for both genders, with black girls suspended at higher rates than girls of any other race, and black students overall suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than their white counterparts.[12] A meta-analysis of the literature on the STPP found that there have been racial and ethnic disparities documented in national, state and local level data using a variety of measures and at all school levels and typologies.[13] African American students have been disproportionately documented for office disciplinary referrals, suspension and expulsion, school arrests, and corporal punishment, while at the same time African American students are

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[8] Paul J. Hirschfield, Preparing for Prison? The Criminalization of School Discipline in the USA, 12, THEORETICAL CRIMINOLOGY (2008).

[9] See KEN MCGREW, EDUCATION'S PRISONERS: SCHOOLING, THE POLITICAL ECONOMY, AND THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX (2008).

[10] Bernadine Dohrn, *Look out Kid, it's Something you Did: The Criminalization of Children*, THE PUBLIC ASSULT ON AMERICA'S CHILDREN: POVERT, VIOLENCE AND JUVENILE INJUSTICE 157-187 (Valerie Polakow ed. 2000); Paul J. Hirschfield supra note 8.

[11] Civil Rights Data Collection, Data Snapshot: School Discipline, Issue Brief No.1 (March 2014) available at http://ocrdata.ed.gov/Downloads/CRDC-School-Discipline-Snapshot.pdf

[12] Id.

[13] Russell J. Skiba, Mariella Arredondo & Natasha T. Williams, *More Than a Metaphor: The Contribution of Exclusionary Discipline to a School-to- Prison Pipeline*, 47, EQUITY & EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION 546-564 (2014).

shown to receive fewer mild disciplinary actions for similar infractions as their White peers.[14] Ethnographic work has also provided insights into the ways in which discipline is patterned in racialized ways. In her three year ethnographic study of eleven and twelve year old males in a public school, Ann Ferguson[15] details how school discipline policies and practices, including being sent to the "Punishing Room", suspensions, and expulsions, are administered in racialized and gendered ways that systematically target black boys. These patterns occur not because of the frequency or nature of the behaviors or transgressions of black youth, Ferguson observes, but because of the ways in which administrators and teachers perceive the attitudes, cultural backgrounds and actions of black students as being particularly unruly, threatening, suspect and pathological.

Building from findings that explore the role of race in the administration of discipline in schools, a recent study conducted by Hannon et al.[16] on colorism-discrimination based on skin tone using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth found that the darkness of African American adolescents' skin significantly increased their odds of suspension. However, complicating previous findings that often focus on the disproportionate impact of discipline policies on males, Hannon et al. found that their results were driven by the experiences of African American girls. For African American adolescent girls with the darkest skin tone, their odds of getting suspended were about three times greater than the African American girls with the lightest skin tones. The researchers believe that their finding show that the disproportionate effects of school discipline practices then go beyond the categories of race and include additional distinctions related to skin tone. The body of research on colorism has shown that the higher degree of "whiteness" in skin tone within racial/ethnic groups, the greater association with a number of better life outcomes for minority populations such as educational attainment, income, and likelihood of getting married.[17]

Addressing the discipline disparities and the STPP, inherently racial issues given the disparities among students of color and white students, is challenging in the context of

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[14] Id.

[15] ANN A. FERGUSON, BAD BOYS: PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE MAKING OF BLACK MASCULINITY (2000).

[16] Lance Hannon, Robert DeFina & Sarah Bruch, *The Relationship between Skin Tone and School Suspension for African Americans*, 5, RACE AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS 281-295 (2013).

[17] Id.

"colorblind racism."[18] The tenants of colorblind racisms, or racism without racists, is the belief by white Americans that discrimination against minorities has largely disappeared in the U.S. and therefore there is no barrier to social mobility of people of color. If minority groups fail to achieve social parity with whites, it is understood through a frame Bonilla-Silva[19] considers 'cultural racism', expressed through sentiments such as "Blacks don't value education" to explain why black students do not achieve as highly in school. Colorblind racism is characterized by avoiding direct language about the subject of race itself, instead finding coded ways to avoid talking about difficult subjects.[20] Within this social and institutional context, discussing and remedying the racial disparities that exist in school discipline practices can be challenging due to the imperatives of colorblind racism.

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is a form of dealing with misconduct that is distinguishable from the two dominant modes of discipline: retribution and rehabilitation.[21] Unlike retribution and rehabilitation, restorative justice emphasizes healing rather than hurting, moral learning, community participation and community caring, respectful dialogue, forgiveness, responsibility, apology, and making amends as a way of countering social harm that has occurred.[22] This approach is values-based, and it keeps an eye towards reintegrating rather than excluding the offender from the communities that have been harmed; it also emphasizes the importance of restoring those parties who may be indirectly affected or implicated by the behavior, rather than simply focusing on the actors who are immediately involved.[23]

Restorative Justice in Schools

Policymakers, administrators, and staff members are already considering and implementing restorative justice in educational institutions across the globe.[24] Many of these

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[18] EDUARDO BONILLA-SILVA, RACISM WITHOUT RACISTS: COLOR-BLIND RACISM AND THE PERSISTENCE OF RACIAL INEQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES (2010).

[19] Id.

[20] Id.

[21] David Simson, Comment, *Exclusion, Punishment, Racism and Our Schools: A Critical Race Theory Perspective on School Discipline,* 61 UCLA L. Rev. 506, 553 (2014).

[22] John Braithwaite, *Restorative Justice: Assessing Optimistic and Pessimistic Accounts,* 25 Crime & Just. 1, 6 (1999).

[23] Judy Hostetler Mullet, *Restorative Discipline: From Getting Even to Getting Well,* 36 Child. & Sch. 157, 158-159 (2014).

[24] Thalia González, *Keeping Kids in Schools: Restorative Justice, Punitive Discipline, and the School to Prison Pipeline,* 41 J.L. & Educ. 281, 281 (2012); see also Matthew Wildcat, *Restorative Justice at the Miyo Wahkotowin Community Education Authority,* 48 Alberta L. Rev. 919, 927-937.

actors are considering restorative justice as a disciplinary alternative because, under the current paradigm, students who face exclusionary and punitive harms are denied an education, and are put at greater risk of dropping out or future incarceration. Additionally, research indicates that exclusionary and punitive consequences are disproportionately applied to students of color, and particularly to black students.[25] Scholars recognize that reforming school discipline is especially necessary in light of the surge of zero-tolerance policies that have grown since the 1980s and, as recently as the late 1990s, were in effect at four out of every five schools.[26]

By implementing restorative justice in schools, administrators, teachers, and students are able to more specifically identify what harm has occurred; they can then use this information to engage in dialogue to reach an agreeable solution or all affected parties.[27] The implementation of restorative justice can vary: It can range from engaging in "circle discussion" as a way of mediating any conflict, to whole-school implementation beyond disciplinary practices and into academic and extracurricular settings.[28] It has demonstrated reductions in the rate of suspensions as well as building a healthier climate for students and personnel. [29] Actors' stories can be heard, and if there is a relationship then participants will be able to share the root causes underlying the problem behavior.[30] It requires buy-in from staff and administration, as well as the resources and training necessary to prepare both the school and the broader community–stakeholders such as law enforcement, parents, neighbors, and other government agencies.[31]

However, in spite of this research, the potential benefits of implementing restorative justice in schools remains low and untapped, and many of the stakeholders necessary to create this change are not being involved in the broader process of conflict resolution.[32] This is true in spite of the potential organizational benefits that restorative justice has to bestow upon schools,

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[25]S. David Mitchell, Symposium, *Zero Tolerance Policies: Criminalizing Childhood and Disenfranchising the Next Generation of Citizens,* 92 Wash. U. L. Rev. 271, 273-274 (2014). See also Kerrin C. Wolf, *Booking Students: An Analysis of School Arrests and Court Outcomes,* 9 Nw. J. L. & Soc. Pol'y 58, 61-62 (2013); Kaeanna Wood, Note, *Restoring Our Children's Future: Ending Disparate School Discipline Through Restorative Justice Practices,* 2014 J. Disp. Resol. 395, 395 (2014); González, 41 J.L. & Educ. 281, at 287-298.

[26]Wood, 2014 J. Disp. Resol. 395, 404.

[27]See Simson, supra note 21, at 553. See also Mullet, supra note 23, at 160-161.

[28]Id.

[29]Id. at 554-556; Wolf, supra note 24, at 84-85.

[30]Id. at 559; Mullett, supra note 23, at 158.

[31] Id. at 561-562.

[32] Wolf, supra note 25, at 406-407.

including a school culture that is more conducive to safe and inclusive teaching and learning.[33]
There may also be hesitancy to integrate this approach due to speculation about whether
restorative justice approaches to school discipline are compatible with punitive or zero-tolerance
approaches; and scholars distinguish between modes of social control and social engagement.[34]

Restorative Justice and Race

One reason that restorative justice presents opportunities to positively and constructively
address racial issues is because open dialogue allows all parties to discuss perceptual segregation
and implicit bias.[35] Perceptual segregation is the empirically measured difference in perception
of various environments, such as workplaces, between different classes of people, and has been
identified across racial and gender lines.[36] Restorative justice can provide an alternative way to
consider race in conversations where its consciousness is relevant.[37]

SITE OF STUDY

Our site of a study is a school district encompassing a small Pennsylvania city. The city has seen
small but steady population growth over the past two decades, largely attributable to its growing
number of minority residents.[38] While the number of White residents in the district declined
from 1990 to 2013, the number of Black and Hispanic residents more than doubled.[39] As a
result, the percentage of nonwhite residents grew form 14.8 % in 1990 to an estimated 30.1% in
2013.[40] The community's growing racial diversity is even more pronounced among the district's
students, a 52.5% of whom were nonwhite in the 2012-2013 school year.[41] Despite modest

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[33] Douglas M. DeWitt & Lori J. DeWitt, *A Case of High School Hazing: Applying Restorative Justice to Promote Organizational Learning,* 96 NASSP Bull. 228, 239-240 (2012).

[34] See Katherine R. Evans, *Restorative Justice in Education: What We Know So Far,* 44 Middle Sch. J. 57, 57 (2013).

[35] See Simson, supra note 21, at 557-559.

[36] Russel K. Robinson, *Perceptual Segregation,* 108 Colum. L. Rev. 1093, 1106-1117 (2008).

[37] Theo Gavrielides, *Bring Race Relations Into the Restorative Justice Debate: An Alternative and Personalized Vision of "the Other",* 45 J. Black Stud. 216, 223-224 (2014).

[38] NAT'L CTR. FOR EDUC. STATISTICS, *Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates,* http://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/tableViewer.aspx (last visited Sept. 27, 2015) [hereinafter "*EDGE*".]

[39] *Id.*

[40] *Id.*

[41] PA. DEP'T OF EDUC., *Public School Enrollment Reports*, http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/enrollment/7407/public_school_enrollment_reports/62054 1 (last visited Sept. 27, 2015) [hereinafter "*Enrollment Reports*"].

growth in its resident population, the district's enrollment has declined in recent years.[42] Further

demographic information for the district's residents and students can be found in the appendix.

As is common throughout the United States, the district experiences racial disparities in its

discipline rates. In the 2010-2011 school year, the district issued 8.3 out-of-school suspensions

("OSS's") for every 100 students,[43] somewhat lower than the state average of 10.2.[44] Black and

Hispanic students, however, were far more likely to be suspended than White students at both the

state and district level. In the district, Black students were 5.0 times as likely to be suspended as

White students (16.2 OSS's per 100 students compared to 3.2), and Hispanic students were 4.3

times as likely to be suspended (13.8 compared to 3.2).[45] The district's Hispanic-White gap is

similar to the state average, while its Black-White gap is smaller. Throughout Pennsylvania in

the 2010-2011 school year, Black students were 7.2 times as likely to be suspended as White

students (34.1 OSS's per 100 students compared to 4.8), and Hispanic students were 4.0 times as

likely to be suspended (19.2 compared to 4.8).[46]

From 2008 to 2011, the district saw a steep increase in disciplinary incidents. In the six

year period from 2002 to 2008, the district reported between 7 and 13 disciplinary incidents per

1,000 students each school year.[47] By 2011, that figure had increased to 78.[48] The district

responded by enlisting an organization specializing in restorative practices to provide training

and support in applying restorative techniques, and began implementing the new strategy in the

2011-2012 school year.[49] While the number of disciplinary incidents declined to 60 that year,

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[42] *Id.*

[43] Calculated using data compiled in HAROLD JORDAN, AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION OF PA., BEYOND ZERO TOLERANCE: DISCIPLINE AND POLICING IN PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (2015), www.aclupa.org/bzt; and *Enrollment Reports*, *supra* note 41.

[44] JORDAN, *supra* note 43, at 21.

[45] *See supra* note 43.

[46] *Id.*

[47] Calculated from PA. DEP'T OF EDUC., *Safe Schools Online,* https://www.safeschools.state.pa.us/(S(rtxdjqvu4drlmpuoihvcsdcd))/Home.aspx?App=Empty&Menu=dbd39a1f-3319-4a75-8f69-d1166dba5d70 (last visited Sept. 27, 2015) [hereinafter "*Safe Schools*"].

[48] *Id.*

[49] *Id.*

the number has hovered around that level in the two subsequent years.[50] The district's OSS rate similarly declined by 19.7% over that same period, from 8.3 in 2010-2011 to 6.7 in 2013-2014.[51] While the district may have successfully reined in overall discipline rates as it implemented its restorative strategy, examining its discipline rates along racial lines reveals mixed results.

Although the OSS rates of almost all racial subgroups declined from 2010-2011 to 2013-2014, the decline did not benefit all subgroups equally.[52] Asian and Hispanic students saw the steepest declines (39.0% and 28.2%, respectively), while White and Black students saw relatively modest declines (13.3% and 9.0%, respectively).[53] The OSS rate for multiracial students remained constant.[54] As a result of this difference, the Hispanic-White gap narrowed while the Black-White gap did not. In 2013-2014, the latest year for which data is available, Black students were 5.2 times as likely to be suspended as White students (14.7 OSS's per 100 students compared to 2.8), and Hispanic students were 3.5 times as likely to be suspended (9.9 compared to 2.8).

METHODS

The data used in this paper come from interviews conducted with educators at different site visits to the Mountain Area School District ("MASD").[55] Since the restorative practices model adopted by MASD requires all teachers to incorporate restorative practices into their classroom routines, the in-depth interviews were conducted with high school teachers in various subjects including science, special education, social studies and health and physical education. In 2011 the district began its program in their two high schools and in the fall of 2015 the restorative justice program will be implemented throughout their middle schools. The data collection period for this was spring of 2015 and involved the two high schools in the MASD. In order to select participants to be interviewed for this study, we asked the administrator who is responsible for the coordination of the restorative practice program at the district level to identify a group of teachers that have played a leadership role in the implementation of the restorative practices

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[50] *Id.*

[51] Calculated from *Enrollment Reports, supra* note 41, and *Safe Schools*, *supra* note 47.

[52] *Id.*

[53] *Id.*

[54] *Id.*

[55] All interviews were conducted on-site at the high schools in MASD except for one interview which was conducted over Skype.

model in their schools. This purposeful sampling strategy[56] was used in order to connect with those individuals who would be able to best able to provide perspectives on the phenomenon of interest. Following initial contact with the interviewees recommended by the administrator, a snowball sampling technique was used to connect with other teachers based on knowledge who would have important insights into the processes of restorative practices in the school. This sampling method allowed for the identification of people or cases who are information-rich.[57] However, one limitation of this sampling method was that it was challenging to connect with those teachers representing divergent perspectives on the restorative practices model, as there was a strong bias towards teachers favoring restorative practices who were willing to be identified.

Interviews were conducted with a total of seven teachers and two administrators across the two high schools and the district's Education Center. These interviews were semi-structured, allowing for the interviewees to elaborate and follow directions that were important to them while still following an interview protocol. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Once the interviews were completed and transcribed, the researchers first read though the interviews several times in order to gain an understanding of the main ideas of the content in the text and to find patterns.[58] Then, keeping in mind that the interview was being used to determine participants' perceptions and evaluation of the restorative justice program, open coding was used.[59] Open-coding allowed for the development of coding categories based on inductive attempts to capture new insights gained from the data collected.[60] Interview transcripts were open-coded for perceptions of what restorative practices are, how race is or is not addressed in the context of restorative practices, and barriers and supports for implementation. We were particularly attentive to the language that teachers used to discuss changes in this districts demographic and economic conditions, and the ways that teachers were defining what restorative practices meant to them.

FINDINGS

Definition of Restorative Practices

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[56] JOHN W. CRESWELL, QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN; CHOOSING AMONG FIVE APPROACHES 154-156 (2013).
[57] JOHN W. CRESWELL supra note 56 at 158.
[58] ROBERT E. STAKE, THE ART OF CASE STUDY RESEARCH (1995).
[59] JULIET M. CORBIN & ANSELM L. STRAUSS, BASICS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES FOR DEVELOPING GROUNDED THEORY 195-204 (2007).
[60] JOHN W. CRESWELL supra note 56 at 107.

The descriptions given by the interviewees can be described in three different rhetorical frames: as a disciplinary reform, as a cultural reform, and as a pedagogical reform.

Disciplinary Reform

All interviewees mentioned the disciplinary rationale provided to them when restorative practices were integrated to the school policy. The emphasis was on teaching students the effects of their behavior so that they could see the widespread social repercussions of their actions. By emphasizing relationship-building, interviewees hoped to alter disciplinary trends in the school district.

Paradoxically, interviewees provided two different perspectives on the role of traditional disciplinary regimes, including punitive and zero-tolerance punishment. Many described the adoption of restorative practices as a way of moving away from discipline, and as a way of disciplining the students at lower rates. At the same time, many of these interviewees stated that the restorative practices technique was not being implemented in lieu of traditional discipline, but instead was an additional tool to make the discipline be more educationally transformative and lower recidivism rates.

Regardless of the interpretation of traditional discipline's role in restorative practices, all interviewees emphasized the future-looking tendencies of the new disciplinary framework. By emphasizing and establishing relationships, teachers and administrators alike hope to prevent misconduct rather than react to it, and to instill an ability to solve social problems in students.

Building Relationships

All interviewees also discussed the central importance of building relationships as a goal in itself, as well as a useful influence on disciplinary issues. Teachers and administrators emphasized the importance of building a community and the importance of feelings—including those of students, teachers, and administrators. This focus on feelings was discussed as an opportunity to display vulnerability, and this vulnerability deepened relationships between students and students as well as between students and teachers.

They also mentioned the importance of dialogue in bringing out effective solutions that acknowledge the harms caused to multiple actors. Rather than talking to students about their problems, teachers discussed the importance of having violators say what they'd done and recognize the effect of their actions.

Technologies and Tools

The final piece discussed by most of the interviewees was the formal curriculum created for the restorative practices, including materials created by the International Institute of Restorative Practices. Most referred was the concept of circles, a tool that could be implemented throughout the curriculum (e.g., discipline, teaching). The circles provided a medium through which teachers and administrators could facilitate dialogue among students.

In addition to the circles, several interviewees mentioned the social discipline window as a way of framing the relationship between teachers and students. Challenge and supports are considered on two axes, and the teacher's role is to work in the "with" quarter. Although not all teachers or interviewees mentioned the social discipline window by name, many repeated the 'high-expectation, high-support' mantra idealized by the window.

Stories of Practice

While the teachers were often aware that restorative practice takes time and patience, and that success is elusive or not easily won, they were eager in their interviews to share stories of moments in their practice where they felt as though they had achieved some small form of achievement. Teachers spoke with a small sense of wonder at times with moments that they had witnessed or been a part of, sensing that these moments captured perhaps the essence of what restorative practices was all about. These moments were of course weaved in between the realities of the school context that placed demands that contradicted at times restorative practices, and these moments were also weaved in between realities of the sense of not making progress or getting through to students. But yet these stories were powerful because they demonstrated that the teachers sensed that they were witnessing something meaningful happening in classrooms when they were practicing restorative methods; they witnessed authentic moments of connection in their classrooms.

A social-emotional support teacher shared a story of how she saw a moment between another teacher and student that was characterized by authentic expression by a teacher that usually did not share her emotions. That restorative practices was in place seems to provide a norm or framework for the exchange between the teacher and student that was characterized by self-expression as opposed to exclusion. The teacher who re-counted the story explained:

> She's very rigid, and set in her ways. She was sobbing, crying, telling the student how it
> made her feel when he was interrupting her in class. That it really belittled her, and it
> made her feel like she had no control over her class. And it made her feel embarrassed

and uncomfortable. It made her feel like she wasn't a good teacher. I mean she just did everything—it was great, it was great. I have the chills. Because it was…and this student, I don't think he's ever seen a teacher cry. You know, he was… He was shocked. And he really was like, "Wow, miss, I'm really sorry. I didn't… I didn't know that you felt that way." Now that is a big win. Just writing a referral and making him stay after school for detention is not teaching him what his actions did. How his actions made her feel. And that way he'll think twice about acting that way again. Maybe not. But to me it's much better to at least let him see how his actions affect others. And I think it was revealing for her, too. She didn't realize she was going to get that way. You know, she started off a little stern, and before you know it we had to get the tissues, and the make-up she had to redo. It was great! It really was.

As this teacher told this story and was reflecting on this incident, she felt that there was something special that had happened between this student and teacher, saying it gave her "the chills", made possible through restorative practices. She reflects on the change in practice from traditional discipline approaches where this encounter may not have been possible, and the student would have been excluded from the school community through the referral process, rather than being included in a restorative process of sharing how actions impact the community. This teacher clearly felt that she had witnessed something very special for that student and teacher.

Stories shared also conveyed that teachers found it to be very powerful when students connected with each other in ways that may not have been possible without the methods used in restorative practices. A social studies teacher who was interviewed talked about how he saw the circles he used in class as part of restorative practices bringing students that he perceived as being different together. Talking about the circles he said, "Kids tell me it makes a difference. I see it. When I see the geekiest kid in class that… a boy is breaking down and crying in class, and the prom queen type girl stereotype is reaching over and putting her hand on this kid and saying it's okay… that's huge for both of them." The practice of circles were seen as a way of creating the opportunities for students to connect with each other in ways that were often authentic. It was not always the case, but when it happened it made an impact according to the teachers. And the circles created a norm and framework in which students were encouraged to cultivate connection

to each other and share their feelings, norms absent from traditional approaches to handling school discipline.

A special education teacher recounted a story of one of her students who had done something inappropriate in a circle, and found a way to rejoin the group. She recalled, "At one point he was getting feedback and then I continued to say something and he just looked at me and was like 'Mrs. C, this is getting very embarrassing for me.' And I could see his face, and the fact that he could articulate that was huge. I mean just that, if I would have done the whole [gestures writing a note], he wouldn't have had the opportunity to do that and to show us that kind of emotional growth." The teacher perceived that having a circle and the larger norms and framework of restorative practices allowed for this student to experience a growing moment by being vulnerable with the group. Such an experience, she thought, would not have been possible in the districts previous framework that privileged exclusionary tactics.

Not every story had to be one that involved a moment of deep expression and personal growth; teachers also remarked on the ordinariness of restorative practices and how these created routines that the students grew comfortable with. In fact, the ordinariness of practice was crucial to perhaps establishing a basis for deeper connections. A social studies teacher shared stories about the rhythm of his circles and how he begins to try and cultivate a connection slowly:

> So we always start with a simple, oftentimes amusing question. To loosen it up a little bit. One we did yesterday was current event in your life. Deep, not deep, doesn't matter. Just what's going on. So now we kind of know. "Oh, I failed my test." And yesterday one of the kids said, "Oh, take your driver's test up at Strausburg because it's way easier there." Right, I'm like… you know, that's phenomenal that the kids then are helping each other. It's a great way to have them bond.

There was not an expectation by the teacher that in order to have a meaningful circle that it is necessary to always be emotionally revealing; sometimes cultivating connection is providing supports in other ways to each other. And the teacher was finding importance and meaning in his restorative practice when he saw that students were helping each other.

Another form of story that weaved through the interviews were stories of their beliefs in the power of relationships. Sometimes these stories of relationships were facilitated by or mediated through restorative practices, and other times they were practices already familiar to teachers. In either cases, relationships were perceived to be important aspects of positive

experiences with students and with restorative practices. For a science teacher, relationships were fundamental to his teaching, and he perceived that he was the type of teacher that was understood the importance of relationships before restorative practices was implemented in the district:

> So I always strive to have relationships with my students in the sense that um, we interact about things that are not content driven. I'll actively engage them in the hall…So that's been a cornerstone of my teaching the whole time. So I think it's [restorative practices] wonderful in that because I know for a fact, I can tell you-without having actual data-that I get kids to behave in my classroom purely because they have a relationship with me, and not because I threaten them with grades or I'm gonna call home…

This teacher believed that relationships were integral to his teaching practices and that he was a natural at connecting with students in this way. He didn't necessarily think that restorative practices had brought something new for him because he already fostered these dynamics with students.

<center>*Support During Implementation*</center>

Interviewees described several positive forces, personal and institutional, that contributed to success in the implementation of restorative practices. Five themes arose: support from administration; support from the International Institute of Restorative Practices; training of teachers; curricular accommodation; and outside actors.

Administration

All interviewees mentioned administrative support, beginning with the board of trustees and working through the superintendent and through the principal and assistant principals. The board was convinced early of the benefits of instituting restorative practices, especially in the face of serious student misconduct. The superintendent received formal education from the International Institute of Restorative Practices, and has been an adamant proponent of its use since he was instituted as the superintendent.

International Institute of Restorative Practices

Additionally, interviewees mentioned the benefits of being located so closely to the International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP). IIRP was directly involved in the training of new teachers, and they have representatives who occasionally visited the campus to meet with teachers and assist in the integration of restorative practices. In addition, some new teachers

pursue their master's education in restorative practices through IIRP, and are more likely to be supportive of the initiative as well as better able to integrate the language and methodology throughout the program.

Training

Interviewees expressed gratitude at the in-service training that was provided to all new teachers. They mentioned that this training got everyone up-to-speed on the main topics, but also that the emphasis was so cursory that the only memorable

Curriculum

A few of the teachers interviewed discussed that their curriculum was more amenable to the implementation of restorative practices. Health and physical education teachers, for example, were required by the administration to implement various tools from the IIRP—including the social discipline window and the wheel of shame—into their regular curriculum. This approach would ensure that all first year students, all of whom are required to take the course, are introduced to the tenets of restorative practices.

Outside Actors

In addition to internal actors, it is important to recognize those outside institutions that had a direct effect on the implementation of restorative practices at these high schools. First, the unions cooperated with the new superintendent and with the board of trustees, making sure that contracts were appropriately discussed and the deal was fair for all involved parties. Additionally, younger teachers are more likely to have received relevant or cooperative training during newer teacher education programs.

Challenges to Implementation

The informants identified a number of challenges to the implementation of restorative practices, including resource constraints and competition from other demands. Our study revealed that the specific challenge stressed most by our informants was the problem of "buy-in." Almost all informants noted that RP is less likely to succeed when informants don't buy into it. One teacher went so far as to say that RP cannot succeed unless the teacher confidently incorporates RP into his or her practices, stating "If they're not into it . . . if it's not how they work, then it's not going to work."

Informants described several factors inhibiting buy-in. One factor was the perception of RP as a passing fad. As a special education teacher observed: "Education is full of new

initiatives. Teachers are 'initiatived' out. You see that. For a lot of teachers, it was 'Oh, this [RP] is just another one of those initiatives.'" Many teachers expected RP, like other initiatives, to be effectually abandoned in a few years. As another teacher explained: "When you work in a school district, that's what happens. Everybody's all gung-ho for some new program, policy, procedure. Everybody does it, and then two, three years later, they don't mention it anymore. There's a new thing!" Given the expectation that RP would be pushed aside in favor of some newer initiative, some teachers, our informants reported, treated RP tepidly. One informant observed that while some teachers actively seek to improve their use of RP, others "are just waiting for the next thing to come down the pipe."

Another factor inhibiting buy-in was the perception that RP conflicts with traditional discipline. The primary feature of traditional discipline, as described by our informants, was managing behavior through punishment. As one special education teacher observed "We live in a punishment sort of society. You do the crime, you pay the time." A secondary feature of traditional discipline was the conception of teacher-as-authoritarian. Under the authoritarian approach, students are expected to follow, students are expected to follow teachers' rules and directions out of deference to teachers' authority, rather than out of concern for community and relationships. To illustrate: If a student comes to class wearing a hat in violation of school rules, a teacher using the authoritarian approach would order the student to "Take off the hat," where a teacher using RP may direct the student using an "I statement." Multiple informants noted that some teachers do not buy into RP because they perceive RP as conflicting with traditional discipline. One teacher noted "I think people are skeptical. I think that . . . exactly the kind of miscommunication we're kind of having that, is it 'discipline' or is it 'just talking?' And a lot of teachers feel that it's not discipline." Another teacher noted that teachers using a traditional approach are reluctant to adopt restorative practices because they "don't see the accountability piece."

It should be noted that while almost all of our informants reported that other teachers perceived a conflict between RP and punitive discipline, our informants themselves described the two approaches as compatible, and some informants even posited that RP can only succeed when implemented alongside punitive discipline. As a science teacher put it, RP is "a great idea but you still need to have a code of conduct and still have discipline," adding that RP "helps prevent bad behavior; once bad behavior it has to be disciplined." Another teacher posited that, rather

than using RP in lieu of punishment, RP should be used during the discipline process to communicate to the student that "we care enough to know why and help you figure out how to not go further with it." On a related note, a special education teacher posited that immediately replacing punitive discipline with RP is an unrealistic realistic expectation because of the historical prominence of punitive discipline in society generally, and schools in particular. In the teacher's words: "Because we've been so traditional for so long—this is where I'm thinking—there's not a school that's going to be traditional, punitive, zero tolerance, whatever, and switch to restorative practices. It's like the person who goes cold turkey from nicotine addiction. It doesn't happen without the withdrawal symptoms."

Race/SES

The issue of race in restorative justice practice and school discipline is clearly revealed in the numbers, where disparities show that black students and Hispanic students are excluded from school at higher rates than their white counterparts. However, bringing race explicitly into conversations about school discipline and restorative practice is difficult in an increasingly colorblind school context and colorblind American society.[61] This bared out in the ways in which teachers tackled or were silent on the issue of race in their school in the context of a district-wide effort to reform school discipline practices.

It seemed that the teachers wanted to portray the "diversity" in their schools, but that they did not necessarily feel comfortable characterizing the diversity in racial terms. There was the avoidance of direct language[62] about race and an avoidance of using the word "race" to describe the diversity in the school or community, instead using socioeconomic status or poverty status as a sort of proxy for race. One social studies teacher when describing the school he is teaching in said, "there was a higher socioeconomic base at that school than here…there's more diversity at this school, Valley High School." In a subtle way the teacher is explaining the context of his school, which is racially more diverse. He is contrasting a higher income school context with a context of greater "diversity" without speaking directly to the racial dimension of this diversity, instead focusing on economic status. A physical education and health teacher also describes the context of the same school through a lens of socioeconomic diversity without mentioning race. Reflecting on the adoption of restorative practices in this school context she said, "We have such

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[61] EDUARDO BONILLA-SILVA supra note 18.
[62] EDUARDO BONILLA-SILVA supra note 18.

a diverse group here that I think that he [the superintendent] thought that it would be really good for us as a whole to start adopting it because the different dynamics of between, like, the socioeconomic stuff that we have. Such difference. We have like the poorest of poor to highly— you know—very rich people." The teacher is viewing the problematic dynamics to be occurring between the students of different socioeconomic statuses, and perceives that to have been an impetus for the adoption of restorative practices in the district. But there is silence on the racial dynamics of school being any part of the decision to adopt the restorative practice model.

Another way in which race came up with teachers was when discussing the role of family or cultural expectations for different groups of students. Assumptions or stereotypes about racial groups played out at these sites, as if 'cultural differences' are an acceptable way to discuss or frame what is otherwise a highly sensitive topic of race. One special education teacher was explaining how the school, family and community were connected, yet in her statement racial perceptions were revealed:

> Cause, unfortunately, in a school like this, we have a lot of students, and a lot of times we end up parenting. And the things that we do here aren't really being followed through in the community, so kids learn all these different rules…Um, I think it's very different outside of here. In most families, at least with the students that I work with, it's very, very different. And they even tell me. They tell me, I talk to the students that I work with about my own family. And about my, you know, my son did this or my son did that. And they tell me, "Well you're too nice. White people are way too nice to their kids." Seriously, like what? "Yeah, you have to be a little harder on them. You don't see Black kids talk back to their moms, it doesn't happen." It makes me laugh but this is what they're telling—this is what they perceive of my world, and it's very different from theirs.

This statement shows a number of assumptions about race. Left unsaid is "what a school like this" exactly means to this teacher, but without that specification, what is still stated in quite an explicit way is that there are some deficiencies at home that lead to the school and teachers taking on the role of parenting. Further, her statement reveals that she believes the rules of the school are different from the codes of families and the larger community, connected to the previous statement about the role the school takes on in terms of parenting, it would seem that there is an implied value statement that the rules of the school are superior in some way. Finally,

there is a reflection on how students view her whiteness and parenting, but little critical reflection on what the implications of these perceived differences are.

Another teacher discussed how restorative practices may be impacting students differentially. She perceived that there are cultural disparities among different racial groups in her school. Reflecting on her experiences she said, "I think that I have noticed that—I don't know if this is just the particular kids or not—culturally, the Hispanic/Latino population—their families are these big families and they're pretty close knit—they seem to respond well to it [restorative practices], especially when the families are called in. That may be because of the home culture—that you are part of that family and you're responsible—whereas the kids that don't have a lot of family don't connect as well to the foundation of it." She went on to describe that others (identifying no racial/ethnic group) were "anti-family", such as gang members, who "don't want to be connected with anybody else. The respect piece, though, they do well with, the real solid gong members. That makes sense to them." This teacher was making sense of how Hispanics were faring in restorative practices through a reference to their racial identity, providing a cultural explanation for their connecting to the program. Gang members, racial identities left unsaid, were also reduced in their identities.

Yet the administrators interviewed did address race in fairly explicit language, and one teacher spoke to the racial disparities that exist in school discipline. The teacher who directly discussed race was positioned uniquely to do so, herself studying restorative practices at the school for a graduate degree. She discussed the discipline gap in the context of her own work that lead her to investigate the changes in discipline rates following the adoption of restorative practices. Reflecting on what it means to her that following the adoption of restorative practices there remains a discipline gap, she said:

> You looked at the numbers, again as a whole, we dropped. If you looked at Whites compared to Latinos and Hispanics, and looked at where we were and where we ended, it still was almost an equal drop. But they were still disproportionately more so, just as they were when we were at the upper numbers. So we couldn't close that gap…[this] seems to be the pattern. Again, that's a whole other area to really be looking at. I think that there's so many variables involved there as far as underlying prejudices and things like that. Is that really the reason, or is it their own cultural issues they're dealing with?

Who's to say? I think just the fact that we saw a drop overall is still significant and it's still a positive change.

It seems that for this teacher, her own research gave her an insight into the issue of race and school discipline, perhaps allowing for her to discuss it more openly. She viewed the school discipline gap as a problem, and questioned its basis (i.e. as an expression of societal issues), but also emphasized the progress the school made reducing the overall rates of discipline. That she felt a need to place the emphasis on the positive of overall reductions for all races rather than tease out further her perceptions on why restorative practices often fail to reduce discipline disparities (i.e. "it's still a positive change") reveals something about her orientation.

The administrators interviewed also reflected in more explicit terms about race and discussed how they were discussing race at their level. What may be important to note is that discussions seemed to be occurring at the administrative level, and not with teachers included as well. Speaking broadly, one administrator said, "The superintendent, the cabinet, we just went to something yesterday that specifically looked at, not only discipline but what things in our system may be impacting, gender, color, all that like what can we look at in policy and procedure in just every day that might be impacting that. If we're not making the dent that we want to make just from one thing, what else is there?" She expressed an interest in reflecting on the ways in which practices at a systemic level are impacting students and was comfortable talking about race and implicating the school as a structure in perpetuating disparities. She adds that in the kind of work they are doing, there's usually "some implicit bias we all need to work on, that probably impacts the work, and that's the toughest thing to do." The teachers interviewed did not discuss implicit biases and how those might be impacting their discipline practices or restorative practices, but it was at the fore of those administrators' minds we discussed discipline practices with. The other administrator echoed her point about implicit biases, stating:

And I think we have to realize that there are prejudice in our own selves that we have to address and look at. It's not, I don't want to use the word compensate, but you really do need to make adjustments to how you react to situations and really critically, as I say, be reflective in your understanding of who you are and that's when I think it's hard sometimes. Especially, with older veteran…

The thought was finished by explaining that older veteran teachers could be especially challenging to work with in terms of recognizing prejudices in themselves. The administrators

really emphasized a need to be critical of oneself, one's biases and prejudices, and how that impacts the administration of discipline. Ultimately they view that having a large influence on the school structure as a whole.

IMPLICATIONS

Despite the challenges the teachers and administrators focused on, those that were interviewed were overwhelmingly positive about the reform of restorative justice in their district. Teachers interviewed felt that restorative practice was something they connected with in their classroom. It is a practice that they often made personal, creating relationships with students that they thought could prevent the need for discipline incidents, and when traditional discipline methods were needed, restorative practices were used in tandem to help students make sense of why the incident occurred and try to increase accountability on the part of the student. Although there was not necessarily a common definition of restorative practices and considerable differences among how it was being practices, this may be a strength of the reform in that it can be interpreted and adapted in ways that teachers connect with and individualize for their classrooms. It was clear from the narratives that teachers shared that experiences they had with restorative practices were at times very powerful, and that they believed in the reform.

A common concern of teachers and administrators interviewed was that there was a substantial portion of the teachers in the district who do not support the reform, even mocking it. The climate this can create is something that must be considered as with patchy implementation of restorative practices within schools the students will not have consistent expectations. Further, the reform strategy can lose legitimacy as a whole when there are such serious problems with buy-in. School leaders and teachers might seek out input from those teachers who are not connecting with the reform to better understand why this is and then find a strategy that may address this discrepancy. The nature of restorative practices is somewhat unique for a reform in terms of what is being asked of teachers, and it is not something that can be done half-heartedly as many interviewees pointed out. The expectation for students "high expectations, high support" may also be reflected for teachers, though many teachers felt that aspects of support from the administration wasn't there. Some are seeking out further training opportunities in restorative practices that move them to the next level of their practice, others would like to see administrators in the classroom more. This is to say that while it is clear that the leaders at the

district are committed to the restorative practice reform, there needs to be consistent opportunities for teacher growth in the practice for those that are committed practitioners.

An important issue for any district implementing a restorative practice model, and that this district also struggles with, is how to reduce the discipline disparities between racial groups. There seems to be an inherent tension in restorative practices as a reform strategy if it cannot authentically address the issue of race and discipline, because at the core of restorative justice is inclusion and critically addressing justice. It was very difficult for teachers to discuss race, and anytime the conversation neared race, much of the language was coded and at times loaded with cultural assumptions. This suggests that there could be opportunities for trainings that address implicit biases with a focus on discipline, perhaps putting these issues in a highly localized context of the rapidly demographically changing district. It may also be useful to discuss racial discipline disparities directly with teachers as the administrators do with each other so that the teachers have access to that information and can critically consume it.

CONCLUSION

The current study demonstrates the challenges inherent when implementing policy changes that affect day-to-day functioning of teachers and administrators. It shows that policy changes can be implemented from the top and have the full support of an administration without effecting change when the policy does not lead to good-faith changes in teacher behavior. The study also shows the narrative forms that teachers use to describe their experiences with new policies, and these stories that they share among each other are likely to influence the collective mood toward the policy change. Ultimately, though, restorative practices have not demonstrated an ability to diminish racial gaps in punishment rates, although they have demonstrated lower rates of suspension rates across the board.