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Zero Tolerance, Zero Justice: Teacher Perceptions of Using Restorative Justice

Ajayi Monell

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ZERO TOLERANCE, ZERO JUSTICE:
TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF USING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

by

Ajayi H. Monell

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the
Degree of
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In
Teacher Leadership

In the
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DEDICATION

This body of work is dedicated to my family and friends!

This journey started on the day of my birth. Being the first born and oldest of three, I always wanted to be the “perfect” son and older brother. As I grew up, I realized that I was not perfect but also that perfection was boring. Rather than being perfect, I just wanted to be the best son and brother possible. Each and every day during this educational journey, I felt the support and love of my family which motivated me even more to reach this goal and make this dream a reality. As a child, my mother would look at me and call me her “Little Doctor.” Look mommy, it happened. We did it! Your little boy did it. This dream began because you saw something in me all those years ago. Lynette R. Cole-Monell, you are my angel and I will always love you.

To my brother and sister, Ajaime and Ajoya, you two are more than just my younger siblings, you are my heart. Literally, every moment that I doubted myself and could not see the light at the end of the tunnel, I pictured your faces and regained my focus and drive. You two mean more to me than you will ever know. No matter what I accomplish in life and in my career, the two biggest blessings of my life will ALWAYS be you two! So I dedicate this dissertation to you in hopes that I have made you proud of me.

To my fellow bobcat, turned mentee, turned tennis partner, turned best friend…dang that’s a lot of turns (lol)…Michael A. Wiggs, Jr., there is absolutely no way I would have been able to complete this journey without you. There were so many moments that I doubted myself and you were right there to remind me that not only could I do it, but “You have come too far to turn back now, so get to work.” You have always been real with me and the words I am placing on this page do not begin to explain how truly thankful I am for you and how blessed I am to have you in my life. Thank you for being your truly amazing self. You are my gift from Virgo and a treasure to this world. Believe in your greatness because I believe in you. #DynamicDuo
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Sometimes you have to speak victory during the test.”

Donald Lawrence and the Tri-City Singers

During this test, there were many times when I could only call on my Heavenly Father. ALL thanks and praise to the Holy Trinity for standing with me and always having my back. When this all seemed to be too giant of a task, I remembered that in calling on His name, giants do fall. Because of my faith, I knew that my steps where being guided by my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The fact that I am writing this page means that I have completed a major task. One that would not have been possible without my amazing committee chair and committee members. To my chair, Dr. Corrie Davis, thank you for everything! First, for being on my committee and then for stepping in to be my chair when I needed one. Your positive words and support, mixed with a constant push to do more, to be better, reach higher, helped me reach levels I did not know I had in me. I am so happy to be able to call you a mentor and friend. To my other committee members, Dr. Daphne Hubbard-Berry and Dr. Neporcha Cone, thank you both for your supportive spirits. Dr. Hubbard-Berry, when we met, I did not know then that we would be on this journey together, but I would not have had it any other way. Dr. Cone, you joining my committee brought in a third voice that only wanted to pull out the best of me and that meant strong, inspiring work. You three will forever have a place in my heart. From the bottom of my heart - Gracias! Merci Beaucoup! Grazie! ありがとう! THANK YOU!

I would also like to thank my mentor and friend Dr. Barbara Pullium-Davis who was an unofficial member of my committee and an official member of my support team. Not only have you taught me so much just from being in your presence, you have shared so many nuggets of
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To the participants of this study, thank you all so very much. It was truly a pleasure working with you. Your willingness to be a part of this study and step out of your comfort zones to attempt this alternative approach to discipline speaks to your dedication to the profession and desire to be the best you can for your students.

I would also like to acknowledge all the school leaders who have mentored and supported me during this journey and throughout my career.

Now, for the unexpected step during my journey. Moving to Cleveland, OH, was one of faith. Leaving my family, friends, and home in Georgia was not easy, but God knew what He was doing. He blessed me by growing my circle of friends. One of those new friends is Rachel Grech. Each time you would tell me, “You got this buddy,” or say your famous “Giant eye roll,” every time I doubted myself or felt my work was not good, truly helped get me here to this moment. I genuinely appreciate all the times you read over my work and listen to my different presentations as I prepared for my proposal and dissertation defenses, giving up your own time to help me. I hope you know how much your kindness inspired and encouraged me.

While there are so many family members and friends who were a part of this accomplishment, if I was to list them all, we would be here for days. It took a village to get me
here and I am forever thankful to each member of my village. There were many nights that I was up all night and into the morning reading, researching, writing, and working. Although I was by myself, I never was alone because I felt each and every one of you cheering me on. My support systems stretch all the way back to my beautiful family and friends on St. Croix, my friends in Georgia, and the friends I have made since moving to Cleveland. I am blessed beyond measure to have each and every one of you be an encouragement to me in your own special way.

To everyone reading this, remember that you are more than a conqueror. I hope my completion of this journey emboldens many more to do work that leads to making this world better than it was the day before.

To my fellow Black males around the world, despite what anyone says, WE are worth more than this world may ever know. It comes down to us realizing that when we believe in ourselves, we can finish first in a race that wasn’t even built for us. With each step forward, remember to bring another along with you. Divided we are a microcosm of our greatness, but together, we can and have built great nations. I hope that this body of work can do just what I work so hard to do each and every day of my life and in my career, inspire others to be the change...because “Every child deserves a champion.” –Rita Pierson

“If you teach, they may learn; if you care, they will change.” – Dr. Ajayi H. Monell
ABSTRACT

While many schools are spending millions on instructional programming, new technology, and colorful chart paper for data walls, an area that often takes a back seat to improving achievement is the social and emotional learning of students (SEL). Until the education community starts focusing on the well-being of our students, closing the achievement gap will continue to be a nice catch phrase and not a reality. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of K-8 teachers to determine how they felt about the use of Restorative Justice, with a focus on Peace Circles. This study explored this alternative approach to discipline and how social and emotional learning can be used to improve school culture and school safety while addressing the clear racial disparities in punitive consequences given to Black males. The participants in this study included nine classroom teachers, one ENCORE teacher, and a support staff member. This study aimed to answer two questions:

1. To what extent do professional development workshops influence teachers’ knowledge and perceptions of restorative justice for discipline?

2. What are teachers’ early experiences using Peace Circles in their classrooms?

This researcher hopes that schools and districts will strongly consider restorative practices as a legitimate replacement for zero tolerance policies based on the data analyzed and reported. This study will help inform teachers, building and district administrators, and other advocates about the specifics of restorative practices and how the use of said practices can lead to increased student growth and community building. Ultimately, the need to care for the whole child needs to be at the forefront of decision making when disciplinary choices are made in schools. By putting the human back in humanity when
dealing with students, especially our Black males, the education community can truly help all students succeed.

*Keywords:* restorative justice, restorative practices, teacher perceptions, professional development, changed mindset, discipline, Black males
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”
-  Frederick Douglass

Statement of the Problem

We are surviving – not living – in times where physical chains may not be on the ankles of Black males any longer, but we are still seen as disposable. On July 6, 2016, Philando Castile, a Black male, was shot and killed by Jeronimo Yanez, a Minnesota police officer. Despite Mr. Castile doing everything right, making the officer aware that there was a weapon in the car, repeatedly saying he was not reaching for the weapon, and his girlfriend and four-year-old daughter being in the back seat, Mr. Castile was shot not once, but seven times. On June 16, 2017, Office Yanez was acquitted of all charges. This continuation of officers not being indicted for the murder of Black people suggests the lives of Black people have no value. Between 1999 and 2015, 78 unarmed Black males and females were killed by law enforcement (Chancey & Robertson, 2015). These deaths include 12-year-old Tamir Rice, a native of Cleveland, Ohio.

Historically, a large segment of the White population has demonstrated an extraordinary amount of racial animus toward African-Americans (Alexander, 2010; Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2009; Fields, 1990; Marger, 2012; Tonry, 2011). This racial tension continues to dominate the streets of the country and the hallways of schools. In United States schools, Black males remain one of the most socially and academically marginalized student groups (Brown, Dancy, & Davis, 2013; Dancy & Brown, 2012; Ferguson, 2003; Howard, 2013; Lewis & Erskine, 2008; Noguera, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999). For example, Black children represent 16% of K-12 enrollment nationwide but made up 43% of students who receive multiple out-of-school suspensions during the 2011-2012 school year (Hart & Lindsay, 2017). Recent research shows that each suspension decreases a student’s chance of graduating from high school on time.
by an additional 20% (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2015). Also, compared to their peers, suspended youth have an increased chance of interactions with the criminal justice system (Shollenberger, 2015). The disproportionate rate of discipline when it comes to Black males in U.S. public schools has been an area of concern for hundreds of years. Coates (2015) stated:

I came to see the streets and the schools as arms of the same beast. One enjoyed the official power of the state while the other enjoyed its implicit sanction. But fear and violence were the weaponry of both. Fail in the streets and the crews would catch you slipping and take your body. Fail in the schools and you would be suspended and sent back to those same streets, where they would take your body. And I began to see these two arms in relations – those who failed in the schools justified their destruction in the streets. The society would say, ‘He should have stayed in school,’ and wash its hands of him (p.33).

**Background and Need for the Study**

The struggles that Black males face in school and society did not start with the use of zero tolerance policies and lack of cultural awareness in teachers. The struggle goes back to when educating Black people was illegal. Prior to the Era of Reconstruction, there were very few educational opportunities for Blacks. Instituted slave codes prohibited any efforts that led to the educating of enslaved men, women, and children. Every state, except Tennessee, enacted laws preventing the enslaved from being educated (Brown & Dancy, 2008). At the end of the Civil War, the need to provide educational opportunities to freed men and women become more heavily recognized. Notwithstanding, exclusionary policies have been a part of educational practice throughout history of U.S. schooling, with the use of suspensions as a deterrent for misbehavior increasing widely beginning in the 1970s (Losen & Skiba, 2010). According to
Noltemeye, Ward, and Mcloughlin (2015), the term expulsion refers to the more permanent removal of a student from the school by the superintendent, while the term suspension generally refers to the denial of school attendance for a specific amount of time that may be 10 days or less.

Over time, there has been an increase in school trends toward the use of in-school suspensions (ISS), over out-of-school suspensions (OSS). ISS is where a student is removed from the classroom to a separate room for at least a full day, where he or she must complete work and cannot participate in mainstream activities alongside peers (Hyman, 1997). The thought behind the use of ISS and OSS is to decrease the likelihood of those negative behaviors in students; however, due to the conditions and climates of schools, students may actually find being in school more of a punishment than removal from school (Hyman, 1997). Some research stated that school characteristics and climate can predict higher rates of suspensions. Urban schools and schools with a high percentage of low-income students and students of color often have higher suspension rates (Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004; Fowler & Walberg, 1991).

The perception of Black males in schools has been a major focus of studies in literature. Black males are a paradox in the American public that also plays a role in schools, where they are both admired and despised (Dancy & Brown, 2012; Davis, 1994, 2001). The public and schools enjoy Black male talent in athletics, music, and entertainment while coexisting with negative stereotypes of violence, fear, and hyper-sexuality (Dancy, 2014). Ladson-Billings (2011) noted:

We see Black males as problems that our society must find ways to eradicate. We regularly determine them to be the root causes of most problems in school and society. We seem to hate their dress, their language, and their effect. We hate that they challenge
authority and command so much social power. While the society apparently loves them in narrow niches and specific slots – music, basketball, football, track – we seem less comfortable with them in places like the National Honor Society, the debate team, or the computer club (p. 9).

In schools today, the way educators respond to what they perceive as student misbehavior is punishment. The use of zero tolerance policies has been the method of punishment, gaining widespread implementation across the United States in the 1990s and accelerating with the No Child Left Behind policies (Teasley, 2014). Zero tolerance policies mandate harsh penalties for student misbehavior in the form of suspensions, expulsions, alternative schooling, and juvenile justice referrals (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchnamks, & Booth, 2011; Gonzalez, 2012; Skiba, Simmons, Staudinger, Raush, Dow, & Feggins, 2003). Under zero tolerance policies, students as young as kindergarteners have been suspended for minor offenses like bringing paper clips, toy guns, and cough drops to school (Sumner, Silberman, & Frampton, 2010). The ineffectiveness of zero tolerance policies has been well documented in research leading to searches for alternative approaches, including restorative justice approaches (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Davis, Lyubansky, & Schiff, 2015; Eans & Lester, 2012).

Despite the implementation of zero tolerance policies and the efforts to “get tough” on different violations, schools are not necessarily any safer than they were before these measures were implemented (Payne & Welch, 2015). This marginalization of Black males is characterized by over-expulsions and suspensions, over-representation in special, general and vocational educations, as well as their under-representation in rigorous or gifted and talented courses (Darcy, 2014). Black males are expected to comply rather than question, conform instead of
being different, and assimilate, so their White peers and teachers can feel comfortable and safe. Coates (2015) described the use of suspensions as a way to send Black students back to the same streets that many try to escape every day. The problem with zero tolerance policies is that it has become the catalyst for the school-to-prison pipeline (Teasley, 2014). The phrase school-to-prison pipeline refers to school based policies, practices, conditions, and prevailing consciousness that facilitate criminalization within education environments that result in the incarceration of youth and young adults (George, 2015). The use of detentions, suspensions, and expulsions continue to lead to the overrepresentation of people of color in the nation’s prisons (Hart & Lindsay, 2017).

Black males make up almost four million, or 7% of the U.S. student population (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). However, African-American males comprise approximately 26% of students, nationwide, identified as “educable mentally-retarded,” 34% of students diagnosed with serious emotional disorders, and 33% of students identified as “trainable mentally-retarded,” or developmentally-delayed (Harry & Klingner, 2006). Black males are the least likely to secure a regular diploma four years after beginning high school, with only 52% of Black males graduating within four years (Dancy, 2014). Black males are often determined to be the cause of problems in school settings and the target for judicial sanctions (Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012). Traditional discipline approaches, such as in school and out of school suspensions, separates the involved parties for any number of days with almost no actual reconciliation. Discipline that removes a student from the classroom, decreasing their number of instructional minutes, causes significant harm and does little good (Ablamsky, 2017). The reliance on suspension does not yield the benefits that it claims, neither for deterrence or academic achievement (Teasley, 2014).
Research shows that zero tolerance policies and the overuse of suspensions and expulsions have a negative effect on schoolwide academic achievement and climate. Data on a number of school climate indicators have shown that schools with higher rates of suspensions and expulsions appear to have less satisfactory school climate ratings (Bickel & Qualls, 1980). Almost three decades since the implementation of these policies, schools continue to deal with the threat of violence and guns in schools. Looking back on school shootings over those three decades, there are many that stand out including the Columbine High School massacre, and the shootings at Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook Elementary School. Despite there being minimal research on the impact of restorative justice practices in U.S. school settings, international research shows that restorative practices show promise in dealing with conflicts, resolving disputes, improving attendance, and overall academic progress (Evans & Lester, 2013).

According to Gill (2014), educators have struggled to close the achievement gap with Asian and White students achieving at a higher level than Latino and African-American students. Schools need to focus on identifying the strengths of Black male students in order to provide enriched learning opportunities. The enriched learning opportunities are connected to higher levels of achievement for these students. Schools are in search of alternatives to zero tolerance policies that help every student succeed, despite their environments or circumstances. A review of several approaches to classroom management and discipline shows that restorative justice might be an effective alternative (Evans & Lester, 2013). Restorative justice is an invitation to maintain academic rigor, while also building relationships that provide agentive opportunities for students and teachers to practice justice (Winn, 2016). For this to happen at an effective level, cultural competency, targeted interventions, and strong student-teacher relationships are vital.
The Struggle of Black Males

According to Dancy (2014), Black males are more likely than any other student group to be classified as mentally deficient or having a learning disability while Black and Latina females are also at increased risk. The problem schools face in using punitive consequences is that it marginalizes Black males and plays a role in their academic failure and involvement with the judicial system, and has become the catalyst for the “school-to-prison pipeline” affecting major metropolitan school districts throughout the United States (Teasley, 2014).

The teaching profession is one that is, in large majority, made up of white women, with Black males making up less than 2% (1.8%) of the profession’s population, and that percentage being even lower in elementary schools (Toldson, 2013). There are studies that show how Black and Latino students are less likely to receive exclusionary discipline in schools with a higher concentration of Black and Latino teachers (Hart & Lindsay, 2017).

Discipline gaps between Black and White students happen for reasons related to historical and systemic racism. Even though people, including teachers, are highly motivated not to be, or appear to be, racially biased (Girvan, Gion, McIntosh, & Smolkowski, 2016), the marginalization persists. One reason is that Black males have been characterized over the past several centuries as physically strong, mentally inept, hyper-sexed brutes that were well suited for slavery (Flennaugh & Terry, 2012). Therefore, relationships and providing engaging instruction is essential for students in groups who are more vulnerable to negative interactions with teachers (Gregory, Hafen, Ruzek, Mikami, Allen, & Pianta, 2016). There are two distinct types of bias, explicit and implicit, which operate differently and lead to different outcomes. Explicit bias is what we typically think of as prejudice: ethnocentrism, racism, and other consciously endorsed attitudes or beliefs, such as the belief that African-Americans are
inherently criminal or lazy while implicit bias is the automatic, often unconscious impact that stereotypical associations with ethnic and other groups can have on perceptions, judgments, decision-making, and behavior (Girvan et al., 2016).

Negative images of a Black, out of control, subhuman being continue to be portrayed across public social media sites, television shows, in print media, and movies. An example of implicit bias, which has its roots in generalize associations formed by systematic repetitions, regularly seeing images of African-American, but not White, criminals in the media, presuming that an area where there are many African-Americans living must have a crime problem, or locking your car door when seeing an African-American man (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). When it comes to school settings, implicit bias can be seen in staff decisions to send Black males to the office for minor incidents while not referring White students to the office for the same or even more severe behaviors.

Due to a deficit in cultural sensitivity and responsiveness, there is a lack of understanding and trust between Black students and their White teachers (Gregory et al., 2016). The implementation of the zero tolerance approach criminalized Black youth and added to the evidence that students of color, specifically Black males, are punished more severely and at a higher rate than their White peers (Brockenbrough, 2015). When all stakeholders are involved in the process, with a restorative justice mindset, the playing fields can be more leveled. Through the use of community forums, school restorative circle groups where parents are invited, and culturally relative events during and after school will first help students, teachers, parents, and community members better understand the purpose, goal, and effects (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Restorative practices are about changing negative mindsets, repairing harm, and rebuilding relationships (Ortega, Lubansky, Nettles, & Espelage, 2016). Many of these type
behaviors can be tied to misunderstanding and trust of a student’s teacher due to an absence of cultural sensitivity and responsiveness. Despite all of the promise in taking the restorative approach to student discipline, the likelihood of these methods being implemented may be hampered because of the punitive trends that still persist in the handling of school discipline (Payne & Welch, 2015).

Origination and Understanding of Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is a practice implemented in schools in numerous countries such as Australia, New Zealand, England, Chile, Brazil, Scotland, South Africa, Canada, and the United States (Ryan & Ruddy, 2015). These countries utilize restorative justice as a common alternative not only to the criminal justice institutions but also within schools as a support system (McClusky, Lloyd, Stead, Kane, Riddell, & Weedon, 2008). Restorative justice is known for having its founding roots in many indigenous and spiritual traditions that emphasize the interconnected nature of relationships within a community seeking to promote the well-being of all members (Amstutz & Muller, 2005; Hadley, 2001; Lockhart & Zammit, 2005; Morrison, 2007; Pranis, Stuart, & Wedge, 2003; Zehr, 2005). The traditions include that of the indigenous Maori people of New Zealand, Native American tribes in the United States, ancient Celtics of the Brehon laws, and the Aboriginal people of Australia and Canada (Strang, 2001). Howard Zehr (2002) shared the impact the indigenous traditions have had on restorative justice and its globalization, “The river [of restorative justice] is also being fed by a variety of Indigenous traditions and current adaptions which draw upon those traditions: Family group conferences adopted from Maori traditions in New Zealand” (p. 62).

It is suggested that restorative justice practices have been around since the existence of mankind and grounded in ancient codes of conduct. Zehr (2002) stated that some of that
evidence can be found in a wide range of sources such as the Code of Hammurabi, the Laws of Ethelbert, and Homer’s *Iliad* (Bazemore, 1998). According to popular origin myths of the restorative justice movement, contemporary restorative justice began in Canada in the late 1970s when a parole officer from Kitchener, Ontario introduced a process for victims and offenders to meet face-to-face (Peacher, 1989). This method of mediation has been growing in the United Stated starting in Fresno, California, where local Mennonites have implemented sophisticated conflict resolution programs in Fresno’s public schools (Braithwaite, 2002; Morrison, 2002; Zehr, 2002).

Restorative justice does not have a worldwide definition, but Zehr (2002), known by many as the grandfather of the contemporary restorative justice movement, defined restorative justice as a process that involves all who have a stake in the offense so that each can collectively identify and address the wrong doing to heal the one hurt and rebuild relationships. Suvall (2009) defined restorative justice as a way to hold offenders accountable, repair the harm done to the victims, and provide support to the offenders.

The origination of restorative justice in the U.S. is believed to date back to the 1960s during the Civil Rights and Women’s Liberation Movements. Winn (2016) stated that it is irresponsible to discuss restorative justice, in school settings, without speaking of the Black freedom struggle, as well as the struggle of the poor and oppressed people in the U.S. The American Civil Rights Movement was based, in part, on critiques of racism in police practices, courts, and prisons (Daly & Immarigeon, 1998). The first recorded evidence of restorative justice approaches in North America happened in Canada in 1974 with the Mennonite initiative. Later, those initiatives were replicated in the U.S., and the first recorded evidence of that took place in Elkhart, Indiana, in 1978 (Liebmann, 2007). As time has progressed, restorative justice programs
have continued to grow and can be seen in different schools and districts across the U.S., such as California, Colorado, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota (Karp & Breslin, 2001; Sumner, Silverman, & Frampton, 2010). Schools in the U.S. have implemented restorative practices to address a number of reasons including truancy, bullying, disciplinary issues, and interpersonal conflict (Karp & Breslin, 2001; Stincomb, Bazemore, & Riestenberg, 2006). The use of restorative practices directly challenges the notions that have become deeply embedded in western society, homes, schools, and institutions about how to handle misbehavior and discipline (Hopkins, 2002). The research comprised by Payne and Welch (2014) posited that schools with a larger percentage of Black students are less likely to respond to student misbehavior with specific restorative justice practices.

Restorative justice practices were once used as a way for the court systems to deal with criminals (Ortega, Lyubansky, Nettles, & Espelage, 2016). The growing use of restorative justice has become an alternative to utilize not only in the criminal justice institution, but also with social agencies such as elementary and secondary schools (Ruddy & Ryan, 2015). Restorative justice is viewed as a participatory way of dealing with crime, in contrast to traditional, western ways which has been hierarchical, retributive, and offender focused (Ortega, Lyubansky, Nettles, & Espelage, 2016). Morrison and Vaandering (2012) declared that zero tolerance is about social control, while restorative justice is about social engagement. Restorative justice aims to increase participation by both the victim and offender in the judicial process, repairing harm, and holding offenders accountable for their actions (Van Ness & Heetderks Strong, 2010). Restorative justice takes a closer look at the offense rather than the offender. In schools, restorative justice focuses on program types that are best characterized as a non-punitive approach to handling a wide range of conflict (Fronius, Persson, Guckenburg, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2016). There are many
interventions that are utilized in the restorative justice process. These range from restorative conferencing for resolving conflict, victim-offender mediation or reconciliation, and Peacemaking Circles (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Researchers have been conducting more research around exploring the different ways restorative justice addresses student misbehavior but also fosters positive classroom management. One of the end goals of restorative justice is to foster a healthy school climate. Researchers have stated that there is limited information collected on restorative justice, specifically in the U.S. (Summer, Silverman, & Frampton, 2010). Much of the research that has been collected comes from books, non-peer-reviewed articles, or evaluation reports from organizations implementing programs throughout one city or district (Evans & Lester, 2013).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the discipline trends at Lakeside Elementary School (hereafter referred to as LES, a pseudonym), located in an urban school district in the Midwestern United States. Suspension and expulsion rates have become problematic in the district leading to a push for alternative disciplinary needs. Urban school district has more than 39,000 students and its demographic information is displayed in Table 1.

**Demographic Data of Urban District’s Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Urban District</th>
<th>LES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>39,125</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This study aimed to investigate how the use of restorative justice, an alternative disciplinary method, can alter how Black males are disciplined in school. A focus of the study took a look at how teacher perception of restorative justice and the use of a non-traditional disciplinary method by members of the school’s staff, which is made up of predominantly White women, changed over the course of a semester with exposure to professional development. For the purposes of this study, discussions focused on students, particularly Black males, and the unequal use of harsh disciplinary actions, under zero tolerance policy mandates.

Restorative justice in schools and society is important because of the impact it could have on the mindsets of the offenders and the victims and its core value of restoration and relationship building, rather than placement of blame and ostracizing individuals. Karp and Breslin (2001) declared that harm is not defined as a technical infraction but by the effects on other members of the community. When individuals harm one another, whether it is children or adults, it is essential that there is opportunity for restoration. Fields (2003) shared that when individuals work to repair harm, they gain a deeper insight into both the feelings and perspective of the victim and others affected by their wrongdoing. One of the most widely accepted principles of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>2019-2020</th>
<th>2020-2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Demographics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Services</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multilingual Services</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted Education Services</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless Services</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Restorative justice is the restoring of healthy relationships that leads to the empowering of people and communities.

Specifically, the researcher investigated teacher perception on the use of restorative justice and how that changes over time. In the process, the aim was to advance the understandings of restorative justice as an alternate means to student discipline and the need for cultural development in schools as diversity among the student population grows while diversity in the staff stagnates. These two lines of inquiry were brought together to address the research questions for this study.

This study utilized the findings of similar studies to examine the role of the Black male in schools and how lack of cultural knowledge, depth of understanding, and use of harsher punishments by teachers and administrators can lead to stifled youth development and significant increase in achievement gaps.

**Theoretical Framework**

The overarching purpose of this study was to investigate teacher perception when it comes to the use of restorative justice in schools as a means to handle discipline of Black males with a staff of majority White women. Theories exist in order to measure the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of targeted areas. A theory is a “set of interrelated concepts, which structure a systematic view of phenomena for the purpose of explaining or predicting. A theory is like a blueprint, a guide for modeling a structure. A blueprint depicts the elements of a structure and the relation of each element to the other, just as a theory depicts the concepts, which compose it and the relation of concepts with each other” (Imenda, 2014, p. 186-187).

The study is guided by the critical race theory (CRT) and used to create an analysis of a large metropolitan urban school district with a high number of suspension and expulsion rates for
their students of color. Analysis of how race and historical racism in America plays a part in the number of Black male students being sent to the office for minor offenses by teachers who are culturally unaware or racially biased. CRT is a theoretical framework that aims to elucidate the relationships among race, racism, power, and societal structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This theory originated in legal studies as students began to speak out due to the lack of diversity among law faculty members, the marginalization of students of color from the law school’s curriculum, and the overall oppositional direction of the civil rights gain made in the 1960s (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Over time, this theoretical framework has expanded from the legal world to other disciplines, including education. CRT was introduced to education as a means to “theorize race and use it as an analytical tool for understanding school inequality” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 48).

CRT works toward eliminating racial oppressing as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppressions (Matsuda, 1993). A tenet of CRT is that it recognizes that racism is endemic to American life and presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage. The permanence of racism in the U.S. society and education, racial analysis can be used to deepen the understanding of the educational barriers that people of color will encounter throughout their lives (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Adams, 2002; Taylor, 2009). The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Brown v. Board of Education (1954) that the “separate but equal” doctrine was no longer legal and that public schools in the United States must desegregate (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Critical race theorists amenably question the effects of the Brown v. Board of Education decision on Black students and other students of color.
The researcher drew on the CRT as the theoretical justification for the use of restorative justice in schools leading to improved school climate and lowered disciplinary statistics for their students of color. This section described how the CRT was a guide. Though different researchers have conducted studies around the ineffectiveness of zero tolerance policies in schools and the need for an alternative disciplinary method, such as restorative justice, the researcher has personally not read studies on the use of the model where the researcher focuses on Black male youth in the Midwest.

The use of the CRT uses three tenets to critique the common pattern of teacher education in a profession with predominantly White cohorts of teachers working with racially and ethnically diverse students. The CRT was helpful while investigating the feelings and perceptions of a staff lacking racial diversity, while working with a student population that grows in racial diversity. This framework looks through a realization of historical power and oppression held over people of color. The CRT was helpful in the research as it allows for use of personal narratives as valid forms of “evidence” to document inequity or discrimination. Also, the knowledge gained and learned through examination of the racial inequity should be used for social justice and lead to social change. Finally, it allowed for the opportunity to investigate multiple ways teacher perceptions toward disciplining Black males affects the overall school climate, its academic progress, and the future of said Black males.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do professional development workshops influence teachers’ knowledge and perceptions of restorative justice for discipline?

2. What are teachers’ early experiences using Peace Circles in their classrooms?
Limitations of the Study

Findings did not apply to all Black males in all schools. In addition, working with a staff of majority veteran, White women who see me as their evaluator meaning that some of their answers to questions may be what they think the researcher will find acceptable or what will not negatively affect their evaluative rating. Two of the participants where staff members who were evaluated by the researcher during the school year. Also, due to the changing demographic of our student body, teachers may have felt they should give answers or responses that are more socially acceptable and not deemed discriminating, which was apparent and discussed in the findings section of this study. This limitation was addressed by offering numerous methods of data collection tools so participants could voice their unbiased opinions and by continuing to build a positive and professional relationship with the participants over the course of a year.

A majority of U.S. adults are likely to express no explicit racial bias, having a belief in the value of diversity, equity and inclusion in society, but have implicit racial biases favoring Whites over African-Americans, a combination known as aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Pearson et al., 2009). Under the aversive racism theory, people are assumed to be highly motivated not to be, or appear not to be, racially biased. This could have been a possible limitation with my study as teachers may have responded based on what they feel is socially acceptable rather than what they truly believe and how they truly respond when confronted with a situation or classroom disruption. Literature stated, effective top-down policies, such as evaluating administrators and teachers based on levels of disproportionality, are more likely to mitigate the effects of explicit bias (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).
Definition of Terms

Quite a few definitions are central to understanding the research questions, literature review, and study. Unless otherwise noted, the definitions below are from the International Institute for Restorative Practices (Watchel, 2016).

**Restorative Practices** - a social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making.

**Restorative Practices Continuum** - restorative practices are not limited to formal processes, such as restorative conferences or family group conferences, but range from informal to formal - the informal practices include affective statements that communicate people’s feelings, as well as affective questions that cause people to reflect on how their behavior has affected others.

**Restorative Justice** – a way of looking at criminal justice that emphasizes repairing the harm done to people and relationships rather than only punishing offenders (Zehr, 1990)

**Restorative Conferencing** - a structured meeting between offenders, victims and both parties' family and friends, in which they deal with the consequences of the crime or wrongdoing and decide how best to repair the harm.

**Restorative Circles / Peace Circles** – a versatile restorative practice that can be used proactively, to develop relationships and build community or reactively, to respond to wrongdoing, conflicts and problems.

**Family Group Conference or Family Group Decision Making** - brings together family support networks—parents, children, aunts, uncles, grandparents, neighbors and close family friends—to make important decisions that might otherwise be made by professionals.
**Victim Offender Mediation** - Facilitated meetings between offenders and victims of their crimes with the intent to discuss the effects and triggers of the harm and to provide options of developing an agreement to repair the harm.

**Zero Tolerance** - a policy of giving the most severe punishment possible to every person who commits a crime or breaks a rule.

**Black** – racial classification of ethnicity used to describe a person perceived to be dark-skinned compared to other populations. Used in this study except for direct quotes where the author uses African-American.

**Summary**

In stating the problem for this study, the researcher focused on the ominous need for a new approach to how disciplinary actions are taken against Black males in schools. "Black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than White students. On average, 5% of White students are suspended, compared to 16% of Black students" (U.S. Department of Education, 2014, p. 1). With each study, more students, especially Black males, are falling further behind academically and socially, becoming a part of the school-to-prison pipeline, and joining the continued growing list of negative statistics that is becoming normalized and expected to so many classroom teachers and building administrators.

The goal was to provide data that shows how the use of restorative justice and change in teacher perception towards restorative justice can lead to Black males being more academically successful in schools and if not, what are the reasons or barriers. National statistics and studies have indicated that African-American males are overrepresented in juvenile detention centers and prisons, overrepresented in special education classes, underrepresented in secondary school
honors and advanced courses, underrepresented on college campuses, and consistently reported as academically underachieving in today's schools (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011).

Through effective professional development and coaching, teacher practice can be shifted, but not without a challenge. This qualitative study explored how a group of staff members in an urban school saw the use of restorative justice impacting their relationship with all students, particularly Black males. The literature reviewed for this study presents numerous empirical studies on the themes as was addressed in Chapter 2. The methodological orientation for the study was qualitative in nature and addressed in Chapter 3. Finally, Chapters 4 and 5 present findings from the study and offer recommendations for future research that could potentially help inform the future decisions of others interested in the effects of restorative practices. Based on the data collected and analyzed, the following themes were pulled out of the study; 1) Putting the Human back in Humanity, 2) Removing the Black and White in Discipline, 3) The Need to Care for the Whole Child.

Thus, this study and many more like it is needed. The findings will contribute to the clear need for change in school discipline policies and procedures. The goal was not for a quick fix, but rather, lasting changes in schools across the nation that helps prepare students, especially our Black males, for being successful both inside and outside of school buildings.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The body of literature that shaped this study consisted of empirical studies on the implementation, use, understanding, and effects of restorative justice in schools and the country over the past three decades. Research is shared on how the use of zero tolerance policies has caused more damage to a school’s culture and is used as a way to justify disproportionate use of disciplinary actions on Black males. Additionally, research has been done on the traditional ways schools handle discipline and how this has led a growing achievement gap among male Black males, as well as contributed to lowered graduation rates and the “school-to-prison pipeline.”

Teaching responsibility and building relationships between staff and students, Kane (2006) reported that social justice is very important to address in schools, especially with urban youth.

The review of the following empirical studies begins with setting the stage for the need for teacher development when it comes to racial disparities. This study and other current studies help set the stage about changing teacher practice and perceptions regarding racial disparities in office referrals for Black males. I present relevant studies related to closing the racial discipline gap by highlighting different disparities that exist in education in U.S. public schools.

**Closing the Racial Discipline Gap**

Education is the key to success and the greatest possibility for upward mobility for populations that have been marginalized. We continue to say these words and tell the youth the same. However, education is in a poor state, especially for Black males. State and district policies, in Ohio, dictate that school funding is based on the property values in a community. This leads to students in working class or below poverty level communities automatically having less resources and opportunities than their peers in middle or upper-class communities (Augencliek, Myers, & Anderson, 1997). Society says that everyone has an equal shot at
“success” but students in wealthier communities have a larger advantage in their educations communities. Not only do these students have more opportunities, they are treated differently when it comes to disciplinary actions. The punitive discipline systems in public schools mirror that of the criminal justice system in the United Stated (Hirschfield, 2008). We often see these punitive types of discipline polices in lower income areas where public schools are struggling to obtain academic resources and continuing to isolate, suspend, and expel Black males.

Racial disparities, particularly for Black students, have been an issue plaguing schools for decades (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975). These disparities go back to the days of segregation where Black students were not allowed in “white only schools,” and to the days where Black students were allowed to attend said schools but did so among open hatred and racism. As time has progressed, we see a more modern take on this form of separate but equal. The racial disparities in discipline does not just represent differences in behavioral infractions but may be reflective of differential use of discipline procedures and policies on the part of school personnel (Rocque, 2010; Skiba, Homer, Chung, Karega Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011). Research documents that Black students remain overrepresented in school disciplinary sanctions after accounting for their achievement, socioeconomic status, and teacher and self-reported behavior (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O’Brenna, & Leaf, 2010; Fabela, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011; Finn & Servoss, 2015). Schools continue to search for ways to lower referrals to the office in order to keep students in classrooms which would increase instructional time and interrupt the negative trajectory of students, specifically Black males. While data shows the clear racial disparities in schools, it is vital to look closely at the lack of trust Black males have towards their teachers.
Empirical evidence has shown that Black students receive harsher punishments for infractions that involve more subjective judgement (Skiba et al, 2002). For example, in the 2011-2012 school year, nationally, administrators used out-of-school suspension to discipline 8% of African-American elementary students and 23% of African-American secondary students, compared to 2% of White elementary students and 7% of White secondary students (Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, & Belway 2015). A study done by the University of Oregon found that African-American students were more likely to receive subjective office discipline referrals (ODRs) than White students. Along with that, African-American students were at a much greater risk of subjective ODRs than White students when in the classroom compared to others school settings. Despite there being an increase in diverse student bodies across schools, the workforce continues to be predominantly White, leading to the potential for greater discrimination through implicit bias (Feistritzer, Griffin, & Linnajarvi, 2011).

Teacher-student relationships showed that teachers tend to report less warmth in their relationship with Black students compared to White students (Hughes, 2011). In connection, Black students discipline records follow them through secondary school and in some sense lead teachers to have lowered expectations and set up patterns of negative interactions leading to office referrals (Gregory, Hafen, Ruzek, Mikami, Allen, & Pianta, 2016). Restorative justice focuses on the key component of relationship building and it is important teachers focus on building positive relationships while providing engaging instruction as this is essential for the well-being of students who fall into groups that are more vulnerable to negative interactions with teachers (Gregory et al, 2016).

Few experimental studies demonstrate how teacher development can help with the reduction of racial disparities in discipline referrals. An exception is a study done on a teacher-
coaching program called My Teacher Partner Secondary (MTP-S). In the study, teachers from five middle and high schools were recruited to participate in this intervention study. The schools are located in a district in Virginia where the surrounding neighborhoods serve a predominately low-to middle-income, ethnically diverse community. In this location, the median household income ranges from $35,000 to $49,000. The student enrollment is made up of 71% of racial-ethnic groups. The researchers presented their study to teachers as a plan for staff to learn more about how to best support classroom interactions and lessons that will enhance engagement and motivation. This made teachers unaware that the goal was to see if the intervention led to reduced use of office discipline referrals.

The study focused on addressing how the use of teacher development can effect classroom discipline. In this study, the first randomized controlled trial (RCT) of MTP-S showed that teacher participation in coaching did result in student achievement gains (Allen, Pianta, Gregory, Mikami, & Lun, 2011), increased behavioral engagement (Gregory, Allen, Mikami, Hafen, & Pianta, 2014), and improved peer interactions (Mikami, Gregory, Allen, Pianta, & Lun, 2011). This study focused more on the individualized coaching and feedback which shows more promising development in teachers rather than the expert-led workshops that districts require all teachers to attend, which are less likely to change a teacher’s everyday practice (Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

To collect information from participants, researchers collected teacher completed surveys, the district provided student records, and observers coded videotaped instructions. Prior to the start of the intervention, teachers reported their sociodemographic characteristics, including their race and years of teaching experience, as well as the range of student and classroom characteristics. A handful of studies show the importance of race in teachers and have
shown that Black teachers tend to perceive Black students in a more positive light compared with White teachers (Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Pigott & Cown, 2000; Zimmerman, Khoury, Vega, Gil, & Warheit, 1995). In addition to that, one study found that female teachers and teachers with fewer years of experience tended to see more negative interactions among students compared with their male or more experienced colleagues (Gregory et al., 2010).

Of the 97 teachers who participated in the intervention, 86 completed both the first and second year. The 11 teachers who did not complete the study at the end of year two were due to attrition and not related to their program participation. The results of teachers who took part in the MTP-S group showed these teachers averaged 0.95 referrals while teachers in the controlled group averaged 2.21 referrals (Gregory et al., 2016). The study indicated the effects of the teacher-coaching program, once consistent, resulted in reducing the racial discipline gap. The effects in the second year were consistent with those in the first year of coaching (Gregory et al., 2015). Improvements in teacher instruction were found to be in connection to the closing of the racial discipline gap. Studies have shown that students are more engaged when they have cognitively challenging tasks (Stodolsky, 1998) and opportunities to solve meaningful tasks (Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992). Engaged students, no matter race or cultural background, tend to be perceived as more cooperative (National Research Council, 2004).

A limitation found in this study is the lack of any significant positive or negative effect on discipline for students who were not Black. The researchers stated this is likely because of the already low number of discipline referrals leaving little room for their improvement. In the future, the researcher might examine processes that occur with more regularity across all racial and ethnic groups to determine if the program has a more subtle behavior-related effects to see if there are improved quality of interactions across all racial groups (Gregory et al., 2016).
Restorative Justice versus Zero Tolerance

Since the 1990s, the dominant discourse of school discipline has been zero tolerance, which originally was developed as an approach to drug enforcement (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Teachers and administrators often favor zero tolerance policies because they require less work and time (Wadhwa, 2010), two things necessary for effective use of restorative practices in schools. Wadhwa goes on to share her findings that students were often suspended for the sheer reason that teachers would not have to “deal” with them and their misbehaviors for a set amount of time. Her findings also show that teachers used punitive methods because they addressed the situation in the shortest amount of time and with minimal work, passing the buck of discipline onto other officials in the justice system such as judges, police officers, and parole officers (Wadhwa, 2010).

Zero tolerance policies related to drug and alcohol infractions revealed that these policies have placed a heavy emphasis on rule-following over the institutional goal of an educated community (Stamm, Frick, & Mackey, 2016). The policies or tools tie the hands of administrators to respond to discipline in a manner that exhibits equality, but does not allow for equity, fairness, or the latitude to act in the best interest of the student (Stamm et al., 2016). Schools are operating under the mandates of predetermined consequences that are severe and punitive in nature and intended to be applied regardless of the behavior or situation context.

Schools and teachers have worked under zero tolerance policies with the assumptions that removing students who engage in disruptive behavior will deter others from disruption (Ewing, 2000). Despite the belief that stronger discipline would be the answer to a positive school climate and achievement goals, it has been found that relying on suspensions does not warrant the
benefits so many claim it does, neither for behavior deterrence or academic achievement (Skiba, Simmons, Staudinger, Raush, Dow, & Feggins, 2003).

As time has progressed, researchers and districts across the U.S. are questioning the need for zero tolerance and if this “cure all” for school discipline problems needs to be changed. A 10-year study of zero tolerance policies done by the American Psychological Association concluded that the use of exclusionary policies “did not improve school safety” (Gonzalez, 2012). Studies actually suggest that zero tolerance policies have multiple negative effects on student behavior as this method of discipline is more focused on isolation and dismissing students, rather than working on altering students’ negative behavior.

A statewide investigation of the Texas public school system, tracking seventh through twelfth graders, found that 6 out of 10 students had been suspended or expelled from middle or high school (Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011). From that investigation, the rate was 75% for African-American students, and 83% for Black male students (Fabelo et al, 2011). Punitive school discipline problems actually deprive students of education opportunities, increase likelihood of future discipline problems, and ultimately, youth contact with the criminal justice system (Gonzalez, 2012).

A large body of research has documented disproportionate use of severe discipline for minority students (Rocque, 2010; Skiba et al, 2002). One study in particular examines the impact of zero tolerance policies and its negative effects on Black students (Hoffman, 2014). Hoffman (2014), who explored the outcomes associated with the expansion of zero tolerance in an urban district, found that it resulted in a near doubling of expulsions for Black students. This study does show that zero tolerance policies can exacerbate racial disparities in discipline; however, this data draws only from a single school district and does not necessarily generalize the broader
American school system. Zero tolerance has been tied to being the catalyst for the “school-to-prison pipeline” (Fabelo et al., 2011; Gonzalez, 2012; Skiba et al., 2003) with the influence of zero tolerance varying across school districts (Curran, 2016).

A study of a large school district was completed by Curran (2016) on the effects of zero tolerance laws on exclusionary discipline. This study helps contribute to the understanding of zero tolerance discipline by examining the laws and policies of school districts. The study also examines the extent to which zero tolerance discipline affects principals’ perceptions of certain behavioral offenses in their schools. The results of the study suggest that the presence of any mandated expulsion laws predicts a 0.005 increase in the proportion of students suspended in the district, equating to an approximate 8% increase when compared with the average suspension rate in the final year of the data. Curran (2016) found that these laws predicted an increase in use of exclusionary discipline measured by proportion of students suspended and few appreciable decreases in school leaders’ perceptions of problem behaviors (Curran, 2016). This will connect to my study as I will be examining teacher perceptions of restorative justice at an elementary school in a large metropolitan school district.

A limitation that many studies done on the effects of zero tolerance is the lack of focus on the school-level policy that prompted the use of suspensions and expulsions. These studies typically focus on the impact of being suspended rather than the impact of school policy on the likelihood of being suspended and how these policies truly affect overall school misbehavior levels (Curran, 2016). It could be stated that the use of suspensions and expulsions have a negative impact on the students who are punished (Teasley, 2014) but the threat of punishment has a deterrent effect on student misbehavior overall. Another limitation when working with the
perceptions of individuals is just that, they are perceptions. An individual’s perception, teacher or principal, can be influenced by the policies/laws that are in place in the school district.

Another problem or concern when it comes to the use of zero tolerance policies is the fact that people of color, particularly African-American and Hispanic youths, have been carrying the brunt of disproportionate school disciplinary measures since its implementation (Howarth, 2008; Skiba et al, 2003). Over three decades later and that pattern has stayed the same. After witnessing the harmful effects of the punitive policies on the educational outcomes of children and youth, there continues to be a calling for a change. Districts are moving towards less punitive measures and less of an algorithmic approach to school discipline. There is a growing movement away from zero tolerance policies and toward the use of less punitive methods.

A limitation when it comes to comparing restorative practices to zero tolerance policies is the narrow research on school-based restorative programs. Even though these programs are becoming a part of numerous school districts, in many stated, research is still not as in depth. Armour (2013) shared that findings in various stated, using restorative practices, indicated that expulsions, misconduct, and violent acts decreased; school engagement and academic achievement increased; and teacher turnover was reduced. Preliminary studies suggest that restorative practices have led to a significant impact in redirecting students of color away from the “school-to-prison pipeline” (Armour, 2013). There is less empirical research on interventions to reduce disproportionality in discipline, or even what variables should be targeted for the intervention. (Martinez, 2013; Staats, 2014).

**The Need and Benefits surrounding Restorative Justice**

While one specific definition of restorative justice cannot be pinpointed in academia, the benefits continue to be researched and shared. Restorative justice focuses on holding individuals
accountable for their actions within a system of encouragement and support with an eye to reintegrating, or integrating for the first time, the individual into the classroom or broader community (Braithwaite, 2002; Morrison, 2002). The aim while integrating or reintegrating the individual is to show them how the community as a whole was harmed. Vaandering (2010) argues that restorative justice stands for the worth of all individuals regardless of their brokenness. Unlike zero tolerance policies, restorative practices focus more on relationships between people rather than the determining factor of “right from wrong” (Vaandering, 2010).

Safety in schools is often listed as a priority in school, district, and state documents, but is schools focused on truly ensuring the safety of their students or the appearance of said safety (Maslow, 1943). The go to method for dealing with students who exhibit unsafe behaviors is to enact exclusionary discipline consequences, based on zero tolerance policies, on the child, separating the child from their peers and creating a sense of isolation (Buckmaster, 2016). From analyzing offenders of school violence, researchers find that alienation is an accelerator and motivator for school violence and promotes rampages at school (Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, & Roth, 2004). What schools are currently doing to make school safe is actually working against that goal. Perhaps what schools need to focus on is not simply the physical safety of our students, as that is a goal of zero tolerance policies, but the safety and development of our students morally, which restorative justice aims to accomplish. Covaleskie (2013) argues that it is in school where students are educated not only academically, but also morally, through the process of developing democratic virtue. By forcing policies that stifle a student’s voice and space to think about or consider their actions beyond threat of punishment, we take away the opportunity for moral formation and growth (Buckmaster, 2016). It is important for schools and administrators to emphasize the concept of care by modeling compassions and understanding as
a more purposeful approach to giving value to student voice and community building (Noddings, 1992), especially for our students of color. The relationship between students and educators continue to be studied and is determined to be a chief factor in the aspect of schooling (Roorda, Koomen, Split, & Oort, 2011).

Buckmaster (2016) shared how restorative justice and restorative principles sets itself apart from the status quo of U.S. school discipline policy, according to three significant factors:

- The focus of providing necessary support to all parties involved, including the offender and the victim.
- A focus on rehabilitation for the offender, specifically regarding Braithwaite and Braithwaite’s (2001) theory of reintegrated shame.
- The focus on the community as a key component to the process of effective discipline responses.

In a traditional school setting, administrators would use the code of conduct to determine how many days the student would be suspended. This leads to the loss of instructional time, the student possibly being left at home alone, and then returning to school with no integration plan and a sense of alienation from and saddens toward the school community. Restorative practices break the mold of traditional discipline which can be seen as a cold, lifeless process where punishments are typically delved out in order to isolate and instill fear. Instead restorative justice deemphasizes broken rules and instead lifts up broken people, broken community, and a collective moral commitment to do what is right (Buckmaster, 2016).

The largest study of restorative justice in schools took place in Queensland, Australia. Queensland is also the site of the first documented school restorative justice conference, taking place in 1994. This restorative justice conference was in response to a serious assault that was
committed at a high school. The majority of these conferences dealt with assault and serious victimization with eighty-nine of them being conducted during the course of two studies. Suvall (2009) shared that findings from the conferences were very positive and showed a high compliance rate by the offenders, within the terms of the stated agreements.

A study conducted in Midway High School in New Zealand, done by Kaveney and Drewery (2011) reported that teachers using restorative practices felt closer to and developed better relationships with their students, while noticing an improvement in student awareness of the impact they have on other people. Teachers shared that the use of restorative practices positively changed teacher and student relationships and the way each school functions (Kaveney & Drewery, 2011). Ultimately, the views of the staff and students reflected positive changes in student relationships and conflict resolution skills (McClusky, 2008).

Studies in the United States also show the positive effects that restorative justice can have in different communities and forms. One of the largest and most recognizable school districts to lead the charge in the restorative movement is the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), located in Oakland, California. The Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY) is a district-wide initiative focused on implementing restorative justice in Oakland. A study done by the University of California at Berkeley found that the 2007 pilot program of restorative justice in Oakland public middle schools “eliminated violence and expulsions.” In addition to that, the study found that suspension rates were reduced by 87% in said pilot school. The same study found positive results on a two-year trial period. Student suspensions were reduced by 74% in a two-year trial and disciplinary referrals for violence were reduced by 77% after the first year in the trial period (Davis, 2014).
A study conducted by the University of Virginia, compared the association between school suspension rates and dropout rates in a statewide sample of 289 Virginia public high schools. In a large district in Virginia, containing 23 high schools, researchers looked specifically at the implementation of threat assessment guidelines in the school district (Cornell, Gregory, & Fran, 2011). Threat assessment, according to Buckmaster (2016), is a departure from zero tolerance as schools aim to abandon the “one size fits all” approach to discipline. Under the guidelines of threat assessments, schools use restorative practices to help students learn the harmful consequences of their actions and how that affects others and the community. The study found the schools that implemented the guidelines boasted a 52% reduction in long-term suspensions and a 79% reduction in bullying (Cornell et al., 2011).

A study done by Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey showed in surveys from a variety of high schools, in two large school districts, a link between the implementation of restorative practices and narrowing the discipline racial gap (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2014). This particular study looked at the outcomes, including students’ perception of a positive relationship with their teachers. Results in the study showed that classrooms with high levels of restorative practices implementation had fewer disciplinary issues related to rebelliousness and delinquency. The study also showed a narrower gap in the average number of misconduct/defiance referrals between Asian/White and Latino/African-American students in the classrooms with high levels of restorative practices compared to the classrooms with low levels of restorative practices (Gregory et al, 2014).

Restorative justice offers different practices that focus on addressing misbehavior and student conflict. One of known practices, Restorative Circles (RC), has a goal to hold a space that promotes understanding, self-responsibility, and action (Barter, 2012). Prior to holding the
actual Circle, the facilitator conducts separate preparatory meetings, called pre-Circles, with the author(s) and receiver(s). The terms author and receiver are not meant to be labels for people but terminology to understand one particular act or interaction (Wachtel, 2009). After the Circle is done, post-Circles are used to check in on the agreed actions and how things have been going since the Circle (Barty, 2012). What separates the use of RC apart from other dialogue based restorative practices is that it makes use of reflection in the dialogue process (Oretega et al., 2016). Research done on the success of RC is scarce, but most is based on schools in Brazil that found over a 98% reduction of police visits to schools following a schoolwide adoption of RC and a 93% satisfactory rate by participants in a study of over 400 RC in Sao Paulo, Brazil (Gillinson, Horne, & Beck, 2010).

A study done by University of Maine on Restorative Circles at a high school in a large urban center in the Southeast United Stated reports their findings on how staff and students experience the RC program at their school and also what outcomes were reported as results of the RC program. The study participants were made up of 35 high school students and 25 school staff and administrators. Students’ participation ranged from only taking part in the pre-Circle to participating in multiple Circles. For this study, principles of grounded theory methodology (GTM) were used as they provide useful tools to learn about individuals’ perceptions and feelings regarding a particular subject (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The results of the study were categorized into two outcomes: negative outcomes and positive outcomes. The negative outcomes included the subcategories: (a) frustration particularly by lying and fighting and (b) disappointment, which included the theme of being unwilling to be vulnerable. Students reported frustration because they felt that others taking part in the Circle experience had lied and were not aligned with the values of the RC. Adults reported that they felt
the lying from students was due to distrust of the facilitators because the students did not have time to build positive relationships with the facilitators. Students and adults both reported disappointment in the lack of some peers being unwilling to participate or be vulnerable in the Circle and basically not taking the experience seriously.

For the positive outcomes, these included five subcategories: (a) taking ownership of process/bypassing adults, (b) interrupting the School-to-Prison Pipeline, (c) improving relationships, (d) preventing destructive ways of engaging conflict, and (e) conducting meaningful dialogue. With ownership of the process, students talked about using the Circle process as their method of dealing with conflicts because it was better than the method previously used which was to physically fight one another. Students and adults both reported a shift in the use of punitive methods when dealing with student conflict. Students shared that a positive aspect of the program was not getting suspended or “locked up.” Along with that, a majority of the student participants talked about improved relationships as another positive outcome of the Circles. The student participants stated that relationships with peers who they previously had conflicts with were now “cool.” Adults in the school building reported a noticeable difference in students being more focused on academics, having more confidence, and being better behaved, due to participation in the RC process.

Denver Public Schools (DPS), one of the recognized leaders in the use of restorative practices, utilized practices ranging from informal classroom meetings to more formal victim impact panels (Suvall, 2009). During the informal classroom meetings, teachers would call an impromptu Circle to address a student’s misbehavior, while the more formal victim impact panels would have student offenders learn about the effects of the type of offense from victims of similar offenses. DPS began the use of restorative practices across the district and saw positive
effects in discipline data showing a 47% decrease in suspensions. Other notable outcomes from the study included a disproportionate decrease in suspensions for Black and Hispanic students as well as a significant increase in test scores for each of the racial subgroups (Gonzalez, 2014).

In the state of Minnesota, both state and federal money was used to create the Minnesota Restorative Justice Project in order to help school districts implement effective violence prevention programs (Karp, 2001). Early findings from the use of this program suggested a 27% reduction in suspension and expulsion rate in schools that implemented the program. In a study of one Minnesota school district, Stinchomb, Bazemore, & Reistenberg (2006), found that behavior referrals for physical aggression in one elementary school were reduced from 773 to 153, suspensions in the junior high school reduced from 110 to 55, and in senior high school suspensions dropped from 132 to 95.

After the tragic shooting that took place at Columbine High School in 1999, the school responded by implementing zero tolerance policies and created a narrative that implied a group of children did not belong in school and needed to be excluded (Artello, Hayes, Muschert, & Spencer, 2015). Since studying the effects of exclusionary discipline, Columbine has since turned to restorative practices (Muschert, Henry, Bracy, & Peguero, 2014) in efforts to rebuild and restore its community (Varnham, 2005).

It is vital for schools to find ways to adjust their discipline policies which thrive on the shaming of the offender, isolating offenders from their peers, and placing them back in classrooms without any work to adjust their behavior. Shame is used as a control mechanism in a hegemonic or dominant fashion (Vaandering, 2010). Sociologist Antonia Gramsci theorized that social hegemony is created through the interaction between “civil society” and the “state” (Gramsci, 2005), with the dominant class directing schools to socialize students to live up to the
ideals of the upper class. Schools do this to students through suspensions, expulsions, and grading practices. The systems of oppression strip students of their humanity (Freire, 2005).

Restorative practices recognize the constant growth of students and community members while working towards improving and healing the community. Teachers and administrators must reflect and ask themselves if they would rather discipline students through fear of punishment or through productive strategies that will help the development of the child and the community. Many psychologists contend that school discipline is not about getting students to behave but rather getting them to want to behave (Henderson & Buchanan, 2013). The same goes for restorative discipline where the focus shifts from punishments to reestablishing relationships, supporting a positive school behavior, and establishing a positive school climate (Henderson & Buchanan, 2013).

**Concerns Surrounding Restorative Justice**

One of the major concerns when it comes to restorative justice is the need for more research. Advocates of restorative justice would argue that more research needs to be conducted to support its validity. In the United Stated, there is minimal research on the impact of restorative justice practices in school settings (Evans & Lester, 2013). International research on restorative practices in schools demonstrate the promise of restorative practices when dealing with conflicts, resolving disputes, and improving attendance (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001; Morrison, 2005; Ritchie & O’Connell, 2001; Tinker, 2002). Much of the limited research in school-based restorative justice practices often comes from books, nonpeer-reviewed articles, or evaluation reports from organizations implementing programs throughout one city or district (Evans & Lester, 2013).
Scholars within criminal justice fields have written much about restorative justice, but there still continues to be a lack of “conceptual clarity” (what it looks like) in school settings (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). In the world of academia, there must be more space created for further restorative practices to be supported in learning communities so that it comes from the margins of schooling to the mainstream (Brathwaite, 2006; Morrison & Ahmed, 2006; Sherman & Strang, 2007). Challenges continue to arise for restorative practices to flourish in many areas due to the punitive discipline system that restorative justice is often forced to work within. Kathleen Daly (2002) argues that proponents of restorative justice creates a vision of the effects of restorative justice as a “composite” that is “visions of the possible,” but cannot be widely accepted as a time-tested and proven academic truth. In addition, restorative practices are used to address racial disproportionality in school suspensions, but there are few theories surrounding the intersection of race and how it interacts with restorative justice (Wadhwa, 2010).

Braithwaite, a leading restorative justice scholar, finds his work being critiqued by researcher Daly who stated that Braithwaite’s work focuses on “re-colonizing” indigenous cultures by claiming understanding of indigenous practices surrounding crime across different cultures and re-appropriating them for his own argument for restorative justice ideologies (Daly, 2002). According to Woodard (2009), restorative justice lacks a systematic epistemological and ontological theory. Bazemore and Schiff (2005) agreed that a coherent, explanatory theory is lacking and would make sense of why restorative practices works in some contexts and not in others.

Restorative justice is the antithesis of traditional discipline policies which are rooted in judgement and punishment. The shift to a restorative mindset includes dramatically different concepts such as “moral learning, community participation and caring, respectful dialogue,
forgiveness, responsibility, apology, and setting things right to make amends” (Adams, 2004, p.3). These ideas are difficult to mandate in school policy and organizational procedures.

Despite the fact that restorative justice, as a philosophy, has been adopted by many school boards, one major concern is that restorative practices are not being implemented with fidelity. For example, Chicago Public Schools utilize restorative practices as a way to prevent suspensions, but the policy is still written so that consequences for offenses can be exclusionary, such as suspension or expulsion (Sartain, Allenworth, Porter, Mader, & Steinberg, 2015). While some see restorative justice potentially existing alongside more punitive systems, most restorative justice educators see the two systems as incompatible (Stinchcomb, Bazemore, & Rienstenberg, 2006). What is happening across school districts is that restorative practices are not replacing traditional discipline policy, but instead one supports the other; either restorative practice supplements the new restorative philosophy, or the traditional practices support the new restorative philosophy (Buckmaster, 2016). So like the example of CPS, restorative practices did not eliminate exclusionary practices (Wearmouth, McKinney, & Glenn, 2007; Satain et al., 2015; Muschert et al., 2014), leaving restorative justice to function within a zero tolerance framework.

An example of tensions rising when it comes to the fidelity of restorative implementation arose in a school in Australia. Researchers found that the school administrators were prone to a control mindset which led to direct conflict with the principles of restorative justice. A control mindset is the idea that to have schools operate well, teachers and administrators are to be the sole authority of disciple decisions (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). Many districts across the United Stated focus on the paternal mindset and belief that educators are more equipped to know what is best for disciplinary actions instead of the community, the victim, or the offender (Buckmaster, 2016).
In a New Zealand school, another implementation concern was brought to the forefront. The study determined that some school leaders might have difficulty with the restorative justice process if they were not sensitive to cultural mismatch (Wearmouth et al., 2007). Another example of where the mindset of implementers can affect the fidelity of implementation. Schools, like the one in my study, must change the mindsets of the adults implementing the practice before expected change can occur.

Furthermore, an obstacle to the implementation of restorative justice in schools is the general resistance to abandoning existing punitive models of discipline (Sumner et al., Suvall, 2009). Systematic changes in school climate are not something that occurs easily. Schools that are “entrenched in policies and practices that value control and compliance over relational ecologies that nurture growth and well-being” (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012, p.148), are likely to have resistance towards restorative principles. The time, resources, and funding that goes into ensuring that restorative practices are implemented with fidelity causes many schools to shy away from utilizing this alternative to traditionally punitive discipline.

According to Blood & Thorsborne (2015), three to five years might be required before significant structural changes are seen. Funding is also required for training and brining in personnel to facilitate restorative practices (Fields, 2003; Suvall, 2009). For those reasons, many districts and schools choose to stick with traditional, punitive ways of handling discipline. Stinchcomb, et al., (2006) agree that, in the short term, punitive models may seem more effective and efficient; however, when weighed against the long-term cost of suspending and expelling students (increased academic failure, dropout rates, the cost of new prisons, the loss of social capital), they advocate for the use of restorative justice.
Finally, teacher buy-in to the use of restorative practices is vital for success. Taking time to discuss and dialogue about school practices, rather than making a unilateral decision to implement restorative justice (Evans & Lester, 2013) is important. Cameron & Thorsborne (1999) recommended involving the entire community including students, parents, faculty, administrators, and custodial and kitchen staff. According to Morrison and Vaandering (2012), for restorative justice to become a viable approach for both addressing misbehavior and developing healthy and respectful school climates, paradigm shifts are required in the very ways schools view students, their behavior, and their value.

**Outcomes of a Restorative Circle Program**

Restorative justice, at a broader look, constitutes an innovative approach to challenging the mindset of how discipline is handled when dealing with offensive or challenging behaviors. When this is done, the focus turns to repairing harm done to relationships and people over and above the needs for assigning blame and dispensing punishment (Wright, 1999). The use of restorative practices are not limited to the better known formal processes, but range from formal to informal practices that include statements that communicate the feelings of those involved, as well as questions that lead to individuals reflecting on how their behaviors affect others. Some of the different processes and approaches of RJ include: restorative conferencing, family group conferences or family group decision making, victim offender mediation, and Restorative/Peace/Peacemaking Circles. These interventions require a certain skillset on the part of the facilitators or mediators and, could be stated, that the members of the community should possess those same skills when involved in the intervention (Hopkins, 2002).

Over the past few decades, Peacemaking Circles have received a great deal of attention within the international restorative justice movement. These Circles were found to be an
effective approach involving the community members in the process of holding offenders accountable for repairing the harm they caused and to foster a great sense of connectedness among all those affected by the crime (Coates, Umbreit, & Vos, 2003). The first exploratory studies of Peace Circles in the U.S. took place in Saint Paul, Minnesota. According to Baldwin (2004), the use of Peacemaking Circles for restructuring communication and decision-making in many diverse cultures is probably as ancient as humankind.

Peacemaking Circles have been emerging as a process and structure that encourages community participation in resolving conflicts and matters of justice. Throughout history, in many native traditions, Circles were used in resolving disputes and conflicts. The use of Peace Circles have become recognized as a fitting approach under the rubric of restorative justice which seeks a balance focused on the needs of victims and offenders while enlarging the role of community volunteers in the justice process from prevention, to sentencing, to aftercare (Pranis, 2001). Peacemaking Circles bring victims and offenders together in face-to-face interaction and reach out to family members and friend of victims and offenders. Research stated that proponents of holding Circles, as an approach to doing justice, does more because it draws on the inherent values of traditional discipline steps. Peace Circles does so by explicitly empowering each individual in a Circle as an equal, and by explicitly lifting up the relationships between justice and the physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of participants in the context of their community and culture (Lajeunesse & Associates Ltd, 1996; Stuart 1996, 1997). The goals of a Restorative Circle are to hold a space that promotes understanding, self-responsibility and action (Barter, 2012).

In using a Restorative Circle, once an act of harm is identified, the facilitator invites those involved to participate in the Circle. This particular process involves three key participants, the
The conflict community often involves family members, neighbors, and witnesses, or anyone affected by the harm done (Barter, 2012). The terms author and receiver were coined by Barter as recognitions of the bidirectional of conflict and the complexity of roles. The terms author and receiver are not meant to be labels for people but terminology to understand one particular act/interaction (Wachtel, 2009).

Before the actual Circle meeting occurs, the facilitator conducts separate preparatory meetings, called pre-Circles, with the author(s) and receiver(s). A similar preparatory meeting is also done with the community members, sometimes collectively. With the use of the pre-Circles, the goal is to build connections, identify feelings and needs of participants as they relate to the act, explain the Circle process, and obtain content from each individual to move forward with the process. The Circle, once in motion, is a facilitated dialogue in which all individuals are supported by the facilitator in understanding each other, taking responsibility for their choices, and generating actions or agreements moving forward. Once the Circle is over, post-Circles are used to check in on the agreed actions and how things have been going since the Circle (Barter, 2012). An important distinction between Peacemaking Circles and other dialogue based restorative practices is that it makes the participants reflect in the dialogue processes. Participants are asked to reflect back, using their own words, what they heard the speaker say to ensure that listening and understanding is taking place.

A majority of the research on school-based restorative justice focuses on outcomes dealing with decreases in student problem behaviors and reductions in suspensions and expulsions. In Sao Paulo, Brazil, research findings included a 98% reduction of police school visits following a schoolwide adoption of Restorative Circles (Gillingson, Horne, & Baeck,
2010) and a 93% satisfaction rate by participants in a study of over 400 Restorative Circles (Gillinson et al., 2010).

A study conducted by the South Saint Paul Restorative Justice Council (SSPRJC) came to be in the fall of 1996 out of conflict and a desire to find alternative ways of dealing with conflict in the community and the school. The study done by the SSPRJC, along with the Dakota County Community Corrections, was to provide a qualitative look at the nature of Circle work and how participants believed Circle participation has impacted them, the community, and the formal justice system. The study included a total of 62 individuals including 15 victims/family members, 15 offenders/family members, 8 Circle keepers, 17 community residents, and 7 people who worked in the formal justice system. Also, 13 Circles were observed. Findings from the study showed that the Circle process is explicitly value driven.

The SSPRJC facilitated several kinds of Circles including Circles of application, healing, support, agreement and follow-up. The typical Circle length is one and a half to two hours; however, Circles held within schools are usually shorter. According to a participant of the study, “What makes a Circle a Circle is the affirmation of shared values. You can feel when a Circle is not a Circle for there is lack of respect for others, for self, and for the process.” Another participant stated, “It is incredible when a person feels heard, what a difference that can make in a life. Taking time to listen may be one of the greatest gifts we can give.”

Over 40% of the Circle participants in the study indicated that having offenders take responsibility and being held accountable for their actions was the one most important result of the Circle process. Participants reported that they liked that the process connected them with other people in the Circle. Some shared that the relationships built from the Circle were brief and others long lasting. Another positive take away was the opportunity to both tell their stories and
to listen to those of others. Things that participants did not like included the amount of time required for Circle participation and the sense that there was too much talking and the difficulty of remembering what everyone else had said when it was in individual’s turn to speak.

A concern with Peacemaking Circles as an alternative way of shaping justice is the limited availability of descriptive or evaluative research on their use within the justice process. School-based research particularly on Restorative Circles is scarce and is mostly based on schools in Brazil. According to Stuart (1996, 1997), the concerns stem from Peacemaking Circles being evaluated solely on traditional criminal justice measures such as recidivism, but that broader objectives behind Circles, such as community building and empowering community members, should not be ignored.

Restorative Circles have unique characteristics that set it apart from other restorative approaches which include not assigning labels such as victim or offender. Restorative programming also impacts other important factors such as the culture or climate of the school, social skills development, and student-staff relationship quality.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Researcher’s Orientation

For this study, qualitative research was the method of choice as a search for a more in-depth understanding of individual’s attitudes, behavior, and motivation connected to the use of restorative justice in schools. Kozleski (2017), stated that qualitative research is particularly well suited to the study of education treatments which are situated and dynamically interactive. In qualitative research, the researcher is aware of the socially constructed nature of reality and is embedded in the context of the study, with the key concept being referred to as the central phenomenon in scholarly writing (Yates & Leggett, 2016). A qualitative researcher is one who is aware of the research setting, participants, the data being collected and his or her own political and cultural perspectives. High-quality qualitative research begins with a question or set of questions that help guide the researcher (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Qualitative research searches for the ‘why’ and suggests that we can get to deeper levels through interrogative strategies (Barnham, 2014). When using qualitative research method, data collection is often open-ended and includes interviews, focus groups, observations, reviewing student documents, key informants, alternative assessments, and case studies (Yates & Leggett, 2016). An interview, rather than a paper-and-pencil survey, is utilized when interpersonal contact is important and necessary for follow-up comments. Focus groups are seen as an in-depth group interview of typically ten participants lasting up to two hours. The researcher initiates the discussion by asking open-ended questions so participants are comfortable and willing to participate and discuss the specific topic freely. Both interviews and focus group sessions can be recorded digitally, with the participants’ permission, and recordings then transcribed. I transcribed the recordings from each session of this study.
The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand and explore what impact restorative justice had on Lakeside Elementary School (LES), a pseudonym. This study needed to be conducted because Black male students across the United States continue to be mistreated and disproportionately disciplined in the streets, court rooms, and classrooms.

**Research Setting and Participants**

Lakeside Elementary School, a pseudonym, is a public elementary school located in a large metropolitan school district in the Midwestern United States. LES is a pre-kindergarten to eighth grade school and has a yearly attendance that ranges between 490 and 510 students. The district has elementary (PreK-8) and high (9-12) schools. There are 60 K-8 schools, 30 9-12 schools, and 3 K-12 schools. The school is a part of one of the largest metropolitan school districts in the state. Once a neighborhood school, students used to come from two-parent households, within a 10 mile radius of the school. A majority of parents of these students were doctors, lawyers, teachers, or parents in other similar type professions. Over the past four years, the student population of the school has changed drastically. With the implementation of the new enrollment district plan, schools now operate under an open enrollment policy, and students from all areas of the district can attend any school of choice. If the school is not in the range of the assigned district bus routes, parents/guardians are then responsible for getting their child(ren) to school.

Despite the consistent and continued change in the student racial diversity at the school, there has been little to no change in the racial diversity of the staff at the school. LES has a staff of 65, and its demographic information is displayed in Table 2.
Demographic Data of LES Staff

Table 2

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<th>Demographic Category</th>
<th>Urban District</th>
<th>LES</th>
<th>Staff</th>
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<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
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<td>19.9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<td>15%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<td>56.4%</td>
<td>88%</td>
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<td>51%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

During the 2014-2015 school year, the school underwent a change in both administrative positions. After having the same principal and assistant principal for almost 10 years, both positions were filled by new administrators. There was tension created among the staff due to the changes in the administrative team as many of the veteran teachers in the school were accustomed to the leadership style of their previous administrative team. One of the areas of contention stemmed from a different belief in how discipline should be handled. Many of the veteran staff members are more familiar with students who exhibit problematic behaviors being suspended or expelled leaving only “well-behaved” students making up a majority of the school’s population. The new administrative team handled discipline in a more restorative approach and less of a zero tolerance approach which the staff was more familiar with and in support of when it came to discipline.
Negotiating Access

When conducting research and collecting data that involves the happenings of people, there are different aspects that require careful attention, such as access to information and permission to work with students. The narrative helps further knowledge to be produced that illustrates, supports, and challenges initial thoughts around the use of restorative justice practices in schools. It is vital to be able to have access in order to conduct ethical research. Time and access played a role in this study. Gaining access to the school, district, and teachers being observed will be needed for the study and is a part of consent procedures (Espelage et al., 2016). The uses of consent forms were used.

With the use of various teacher participants and perspectives, this will create multiple realities of the restorative justice process (Zehr, 2002). Data secured through questioning may be recorded, as well as copious notetaking by the writer. The methodology being proposed is supported by Yates and Leggett (2016) as forms of data collection which include: interviews, focus groups, observations, reviewing document studies, alternative assessments, and case studies. The forms of data collection used in this study are: focus groups, interviews, journal responses, and documentation of implemented practices. According to Yates and Leggett (2016), interviews are utilized when contact with the participants are important, observations help guide the protocol required for narratives describing the events and activities, and documentation is helpful in providing a more in-depth background.

In order to provide adequate protections of all human participants, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to research being collected. IRBs are regulatory committees that are mandated to approve, oversee, and maintain ethical standards for human
subjects of research. The criteria for IRB approval according to the Department of Health and Human Service (2009) included:

1. Risks to subjects are minimized.
2. Risks are reasonable in relation to any anticipated benefits.
3. Subject selection is equitable.
4. Voluntary informed consent is sought.
5. Informed consent is appropriately documented.

**Researcher’s Positionality**

As a Black male growing up on the island of St. Croix, one of the three major islands in the U.S. Virgin Islands, being a person of color placed me in the majority. However, when it came to my schooling that did not match my environment. My parents placed me in a private, Christian school that operated under the umbrella of the Southern Baptist Church Association. In the earlier parts of my education, a large number of my teachers were Black females. Upon entering middle school, that changed drastically and my teachers were mostly White women. These teachers were often educators who taught as a part of their missionary work. I went from having teachers who were of the same race as me and spoke with the same accent to having teachers from Mississippi, the Carolinas, and other U.S. states.

My classmates and I began getting into trouble for things that were culturally normal to us but foreign to our teachers. We would be assigned after school detentions or sent to the office for minor classroom disruptions or non-disruptive behaviors. For instance, the use of Caribbean slang, outward body expressions, and not making direct eye contact with adults which would be considered disrespectful. There is one particular day I remember vividly when I was not feeling well. While in my ninth grade English class, I placed my head down on my desk. A few minutes
later, I felt something hit me on my head. My white, female teacher threw a paper clip at me and said she did it in an attempt to get my attention so I would lift my head up. I had never had a teacher throw an object at me before. What once was a place of safety became one of micro-aggression. During my years in school from kindergarten to twelfth grade, I never had a Black male teacher. My first exposure to being taught by someone of the same race and gender as me was my sophomore year of college.

Growing up, I always wanted to be a teacher, but I did not realize how much the lack of having a Black male teacher affected me until I entered college at a predominantly white university. At this university, I was constantly reminded of my status as a “minority”. Coupled with that, the first time I was called a “nigger” happened one evening of my freshman year. Two White students came back to the residence halls, clearly intoxicated. As they walked by, the female student bumped into one of my friends and then proceeded to turn around and call us niggers. We all reported the incident to our resident assistant, who was a Black male. While discussing the situation with our resident assistant, the female contacted campus police and told them, “There were a bunch of Black people outside of her door and she felt threatened.” After campus police arrived, we all, including our resident assistant, tried to explain what happened. Rather than speak to the female about the use of that derogatory word and the fact that she was intoxicated and underage, we were questioned about why we were in the hallways and not in our rooms. A key point to mention, both campus police officers were White males.

In the long run, my college experiences made me even more determined to be that Black male teacher for young Black students; the one I never had but needed. I valued my educational experiences and appreciated my school and most of my teachers. However, there was a shift that became more evident to me once I became an educator and saw things that happened to me as a
Black male student now happening to Black male students that I taught or worked with as a building administrator.

As time progressed throughout my career, I began hearing certain comments when it came to working with Black students. Comments around being able to “get them under control” were used by many of my colleagues. Some of the comments I am referring to are: “If you have any problems with the Black males, just send them to Mr. Monell,” or “I am not like these kids, I’m sure you understand that Mr. Monell,” and “What would you do Mr. Monell, and can you just discipline them for me?” I felt I was not seen as an educator but as a disciplinarian for Black males, the firm hand of authority who would assist my colleagues in the “school-to-prison pipeline” that so many of our Black males encounter due to teacher bias and lowered expectations.

In schools, Black male teachers have been cast into the role of authoritarian, similar to how they have been placed in that same role at home and in society (Brockenbrough, 2015). At the beginning of my career, teachers would often send students to my room as a time out space or for me to speak to them about their behavior. I did not give that a second thought because I had good classroom management and went out of my way to make certain I had a positive relationship with all of my students, regardless of race, gender, and/or ethnicity. Being a Black male, I knew that working with Black males, would help me in building a relationship with those students because we had an obvious similarity. However, it is imperative for a teacher to find ways to look beyond external similarities and differences when building relationships with students. When there is an absence of equity in schools, students of color, and Black males in particular, do not fare well in the public education system (Gill, 2014).
Now in the role of a building administrator, in a new school system and state, I noticed that the role of firm-handed disciplinarian of Black males had followed me. Teachers would often call me to their classroom to deal with students and situations that could have been and should have been be handled by the teacher, during class or after the period was over. So often, many of the teachers at LES wanted immediate and harsh disciplinary actions that included lunch detentions, isolation, or suspensions. This is why the use of restorative justice caught my interest. I wanted to be a part of the change schools across the U.S. need when it comes to how Black males are disciplined and how teachers of all races respond to cultural differences.

As a Black male who researched a topic that focuses around the mistreatment of Black males in schools, there can be internal and external biases that can cloud the study and research. As a researcher, it was important to be aware of those biases, identify them, and allow them not to cloud the work being done. As a classroom teacher, I was often the one asked to “deal with the difficult or extreme students” and more times than not, those students were Black and male. Being a reflective researcher requires the willingness to consider how one’s upbringing, values, and experiences affect how they observe and analyze things (Best et al., 2016).

The questions I sought to answer in this study were:

1. To what extent do professional development workshops influence teachers’ knowledge and perceptions of restorative justice for discipline?

2. What are teachers’ early experiences using Peace Circles in their classrooms?

Data Collection

In order to show data that was relevant, authentic, and verifiable, it was important that the research be timely and consistent with a present need in schools. The strategy used in data collection involved interviews with probing, focus groups, and journal entries. This structure was
used because of the different types of data collected and to make certain data were well organized and secured. Please see Appendix A for timeline.

My initial contact with teacher participants was by a letter of invitation to the study. The letter was used to inform participants of the research purpose, goals, and what was expected of them. All participants were asked to convene in the school’s computer lab, where the letter was distributed and participants signed their IRB consent form. Once this step was completed, participants were notified of the date and time of the initial focus group meeting.

Teachers took part in two focus group sessions, one as an opening group activity and the second as a closing group activity. During this time, I reiterated the purpose of the study, which was to identify if the learning and use of restorative practices could change teacher perceptions when it comes to discipline practice with students, particular Black male students. The focus group session was an open forum for teachers to discuss their knowledge, understanding, and the pro/cons of restorative justice and its benefits or drawbacks of use in their classroom and the school. A matrix was created of the participants and their responses, so that commonalities were more easily identified. The matrix configuration is complex, but can also be efficient and effective, especially when the environment is unpredictable (Burton, Obel, & Hakonsson, 2015). The focus group sessions were recorded on a digital voice recorder so that no wording was lost in transcribing. See Appendix B for focus group questions, Appendix C for individual interview questions, and Appendix D for journal entry questions.

There were other forms of data collected such as article readings and written responses, video observations and written responses, journal entries, the closing interviews and focus group sessions. Journal entries were collected bi-weekly. Participants were sent weekly online journal entries through Microsoft Forms. Some journal entries were based on provided prompts; see
Appendix D, while others were based on teacher reactions and findings to readings and incidents in their classrooms. Participants were allowed to free write, which will be welcomed and encouraged. See below for data collection table and designed timeline for each data point.

**Data Collection Table**

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Participant(s)</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
<th># of Times</th>
<th>Collected on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Focus Group Online Questions</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>Participants pre-knowledge about RJ and Peace Circles</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>January 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article Readings, Written Responses, &amp; Journal Entries</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>Participants exposed to RJ and Peace Circle examples</td>
<td>Bi-Weekly</td>
<td>January 22, January 29, February 5, February 12, February 26, March 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Observations &amp; Written Response</td>
<td>K-2 teachers 3-5 teachers 6-8 teachers</td>
<td>Participants exposed to RJ and Peace Circle examples</td>
<td>Bi-Weekly</td>
<td>January 24, January 31, February 8, February 14, February 28, March 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Entries</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>Response to learned resources</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>January 26, February 2, March 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*PD from Trained RJ Professionals</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>Participants exposed to RJ and Peace Circle examples from individuals already implementing RJ at their schools</td>
<td>Twice</td>
<td>February 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing Interview</td>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>Participants will share their thoughts on the study and their knowledge gained</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Week of March 12 and 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Focus Group Online</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>Participants post-knowledge about</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>March 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>RJ and Peace Circles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data collection added to original listing as requested by participants in the study through focus group sessions and online survey response.

* RJ = Restorative Justice

**Sampling**

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defined sampling as “the act, process, or technique of selecting a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population.” Purposeful sampling is probably the most commonly described means of sampling in the qualitative methods of literature today (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). According to Benoot, Hannes, and Bilsen (2016), sampling is an exhaustive process that is highly rigorous and risks too much time being lost due to large data sets, while purposeful sampling focuses more on selecting information-rich cases for in-depth studies. For this study, purposeful sampling for participants was based upon the number of years taught in Urban District.

Participants were 11 school staff members, involved in the learning process, as well as the implementation of restorative practices in classrooms. Staff participants’ knowledge with the use of restorative justice ranged from having basic knowledge about the practice to no knowledge at all. With this being a purposeful focus for the selection of participants, it allows those involved to start with a fresh mindset when it came to restorative justice practices. Three of the participants had a basic level of knowledge while eight had no knowledge of restorative justice or its practices. The gender breakdown for teachers and staff members include eight females and three males. The majority of the staff members identify as Caucasian. In regards to race, the breakdowns of participants are nine Caucasian and two African-American. Adult
participants included eight content specific teachers, one connection (physical education) teacher, and one support staff member. The building has a staff of majority veteran teachers. In this study, one teacher has ten or less years of experience, three with 11-20 years of experience, six with 21-30 years of experience, and one with over 30 years of experience.

**Study Participant Table A**

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Knowledge Level</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant A</td>
<td>None 1</td>
<td>Female 1</td>
<td>Caucasian 1</td>
<td>20-30 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant B</td>
<td>None 2</td>
<td>Female 2</td>
<td>Caucasian 2</td>
<td>20-30 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C</td>
<td>None 3</td>
<td>Female 3</td>
<td>Caucasian 3</td>
<td>30+ (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant D</td>
<td>Basic 1</td>
<td>Female 4</td>
<td>Caucasian 4</td>
<td>0-10 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant E</td>
<td>None 4</td>
<td>Female 5</td>
<td>African-American 1</td>
<td>11-20 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant F</td>
<td>Basic 2</td>
<td>Male 1</td>
<td>Caucasian 5</td>
<td>21-30 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant G</td>
<td>None 5</td>
<td>Female 6</td>
<td>Caucasian 6</td>
<td>21-30 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant H</td>
<td>None 6</td>
<td>Female 7</td>
<td>Caucasian 7</td>
<td>21-30 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant I</td>
<td>None 7</td>
<td>Male 2</td>
<td>African-American 2</td>
<td>11-20 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant J</td>
<td>None 8</td>
<td>Male 3</td>
<td>Caucasian 8</td>
<td>21-30 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant K</td>
<td>Basic 3</td>
<td>Female 8</td>
<td>Caucasian 9</td>
<td>11-20 (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the time of the study, teacher or student participation of restorative justice at the school was non-existent. The majority of staff members in the school building identify as Caucasian and female. Adult interviews included teachers and a support staff member. Below is a specific breakdown of the study participants.
Study Participant Table B

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years in the District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant A</td>
<td>1st grade</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant B</td>
<td>2nd grade</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C</td>
<td>3rd grade</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant D</td>
<td>4th/5th grade (gifted)</td>
<td>Math/Science</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant E</td>
<td>5th grade</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant F</td>
<td>6th – 8th</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant G</td>
<td>6th – 8th</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant H</td>
<td>6th – 8th (SpEd)</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant I</td>
<td>6th – 8th (SpEd)</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant J</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant K</td>
<td>School Support</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Materials

Participants were provided with information about restorative justice through articles, journals, and online videos. The articles and journals were read as a part of a newly created Restorative Justice Team and individually when necessary. Additionally, participants were
invited to explore different websites that further explain restorative practices and how they were used in schools. There were videos on certain websites that participants were directed to view as a whole group. Please see Appendix E for journal articles, online websites, video links for viewing, and restorative justice information packet that will be used and shared with participants of this study.

**Procedures**

Participants took part in an initial group meeting where the purpose of the study and forms of data collection was discussed. Participants signed their IRB consent forms at this meeting. The first part of this process, where data were collected, was a focus group session with all participants. In this session, participants spoke freely about restorative justice, the study, its topic, and their knowledge or understanding of what restorative justice was and if they felt it would benefit their students and the school. After participants shared their initial thoughts, a PowerPoint presentation was shared to give each participant an overview of what restorative justice was and aimed to do as a practice.

Participants were informed that they would be reading articles and viewing videos on restorative justice as a whole and one of its targeted practices, Peace Circles. Participants were asked to complete journal response questions after each article was read and video was viewed. Along with prompted writings, participants were able to write freely about different things they learned on their own about restorative justice or Peace Circles and also about different practices attempted in their classrooms with students, parents, and/or staff. Journal responses were collected bi-weekly.
Professional Development

“Teacher professional development in project-based learning advanced service to the profession by creating effective and scalable teacher supports, resources, and tools while cultivating and improving knowledge, leadership, and accountability with other educational professionals” (Martin, 2017, p. 442). The purpose of this study was to insure that teachers, while taking part in effective professional development initiatives, gained knowledge about restorative practices and Peace Circles. Effective professional development involved ensuring actual learning, that what is learned is fit to practice, and that participants of the learning know of the why and the how (Schostak et al., 2010). A series of professional development opportunities were offered to each participant and those included video observations, article readings and discussions, and direct learning from trained restorative justice leaders.

The video observations allowed for participants to observe different schools and teachers who had implemented the use of Peace Circles in their classrooms and schools who had applied the use of restorative practices to their school culture. The article readings and discussions investigated the different levels of restorative practices and was a place where participants were able to share their thoughts in a group based on what was read or questions that were posed by the group facilitator. The group facilitator was the researcher of this study for a majority of the study. There were two sessions led by other facilitators.

During the originally planned professional development sessions, participants made it known verbally and in their online responses that they would like to have a trained restorative justice leader come in and lead a few sessions. There were three different facilitators brought in to lead two separate sessions. The first session was led by two district administrators who had been trained in restorative practices. The second added session was led by a district
representative who attended a restorative justice training in Chicago. The researcher arranged for those sessions to take place during month two of the study. These sessions focused on the theory, philosophies, and actions of restorative practices. The participants had the opportunity to learn more about restorative justice and take part in different role-playing activities that placed them in the role of a student and/or victim and perpetrator. Finally, participants were able observe the facilitator lead a Peace Circle in a fourth grade classroom at LES. The outcome and time requirements of this activity was shared in Chapter four.

“The change process involved in professional development is extremely complex,” with numerous factors influencing the process and not all can be controlled (Guskey, 1991, p. 240). Guskey shared five guidelines that are related to effective professional development. Those factors are: (a) recognizing that change is an individual process, (b) think big: start small, (c) work in teams, (d) include procedures for personal feedback on results, (e) provide continued support and follow-up.

**Data Management**

Participants in the study contributed to the data by taking part in two focus group sessions, participated in an individual closing interview, documented their findings as they utilize the practices in their classrooms, and submitted bi-weekly journal entries. Additionally, notes were collected based on the use of restorative justice practices during disciplinary conferences.

The collected data were stored both electronically and on paper. All transcribed noted from focus groups and interviews, referrals, documentation, noted, and other forms of data were scanned on to my laptop and stored on an external hard drive. The external hard drive, along with the paper versions of the files, will all be stored in a locked box in a filing cabinet that will be kept locked. The key to both the file cabinet and box were kept in my possession at all times.
The key was kept private so that no other individual knew the purpose of the key and what it opens.

To ensure minimal disruption and confidentiality, work on the files were done at times where students and staff members were not in the building. The writer also made use of time on the weekends where there would be no distractions and no possibility of participants or non-participants seeing any version of the collected data. Collected data were analyzed and stored appropriately each weekend to stay abreast of trends and shifts, but also so that there was not a large accumulation of data which could slow down the analysis and findings process.

**Data Analysis/ATLAS.ti**

Analyzed data came from participants: teachers and staff members. The data collected were in the form of interviews and journal entries written by the participants and collected bi-weekly as discussed in the data management section. Collected data were coded to help guide the analysis process and was arranged in an organized manner through a developed matrix that will organize each interview question and response from participants. ATLAS.ti is a scientific qualitative analysis software that was used to code the data. This type of software was helpful when in search of finding and making meaning of themes, patterns, and code families. In using ATLAS.ti, data were able to be coded, annotated, and compared to other pieces of information.

In efforts to ensure that chapter four is of high quality, the researcher followed guidelines that address the quality of qualitative research. According to Merriam and Associates (2002, p. 23), those guidelines are:

1. Are participants of the study described?
2. Are findings clearly organized and easy to follow?
3. Are findings directly responsive to the problem of the study?
4. Does the data presented in support of the findings provide adequate and convincing evidence for the findings?

Using the ATLAS.ti software, after all focus group sessions, teacher shared stories, and exit individual interviews were transcribed, uploaded and used to assist with analyzing participant words and phrases to establish a particular theme. All comments were coded and code families were established. Merriam and Associates (2002) tell us that in any qualitative report, the audience needs to be taken into consideration. With that in mind, the findings were organized based on themes that surfaced throughout the data analysis process. These were the areas that participants either felt were most important, a major concern, or unknowingly discussed a majority of the time. In reading over the transcriptions of each focus group session, the transcription of the two PD led sessions by trained facilitators, and the individual exit interview of each participant, it was apparent that there were certain words and phrases that were continuously reiterated. In realizing the flaws and bias from a human standpoint, it was imperative to utilize the ATLAS.ti software so that words and phrases iterated throughout this study could be properly and accurately coded and placed into coded families. Figure 1 and 2 provides a visual representation of initial open coding method where code families where revealed based on group sessions, teacher shared stories, and exit individual interviews.
Table 6 outlined the five most prevalent code families and the number of iterations from the greatest to lowest number of iterations. For this table, similar words or phrases were combined for one total in that specific area.

### Code Families and Iterations

**Table 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Families</th>
<th>Number of Iterations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ, Restorative, Justice, Restorative Practices</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZT, Prison, Punitive</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC, Peace Circles</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black males, Race</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative research calls for rich descriptions to ensure trustworthiness of findings (Merriam & Associates, 2002). To ensure this, participant data from the most prevalent code...
families were analyzed with the use of the ATLAS.ti software. One of the abilities of the software is creating a word map based on specific coded families and other words that relate. The figure captured the words and phrases that participants would have mentioned during different sessions or interviews. The figures also support the work by providing a visual of the data which supports the narrative of the findings. The visual representation of the data reiterates the theme associated with participants experience in the focus groups and exit individual interviews. Figure 3 has been included to provide readers a visual example of the word map figures generated from the use of ATLAS.ti.

Figure 3. Coding Theme and Participant Responses

The use of constant comparative analysis aided in reducing the data through constant recoding, beginning with open coding to develop categories from first round data collection that potentially could lead to new categories emerging (Fram, 2013). This process was done to address any concerns of credibility, dependability, and confirmability, adding trustworthiness to
the study. I also coded for instances of evidence of racial discrimination and lack of culturally
relevant pedagogy to show whether the use of restorative justice practices made a consistent and
lasting change in schools when it comes to working with Black males. My goal was to identify
any commonalities in response to the collected data and findings in the literature surrounding the
disproportionate rate of harsh disciplinary action used towards Black males.

Confidentiality and Ethics

In research, both confidentiality and ethics are important to all parties involved. According to Trochim (2006), confidentiality assures those involved that any identifying information will not be made available to anyone not directly involved in the study. Trochim also stated that ethically, researchers are required not to put participants in a situation where they might be at risk of harm due to their participation. As a researcher, I was the interpreter of the collected data and conclusions made. For the research and findings to be credible and accepted, securing files and following all required protocols for research needed to be followed so that truth is a set expectation and clearly a part of the outcome. The study took place over a three-month period. This allows for adequate time to research and collect data. Reflection upon original ideas and thoughts persisted as time progresses. All participants were assured their names would be left out of the study. Pseudonyms were used throughout the entirety of the study.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness with each participant, transparency and consistency of this study was vital to the findings. Participants needed to know my purpose and what I aimed to discover in findings. Honesty was needed so that participants felt comfortable in sharing their truths. Along with being trustworthy, it was important for the findings to be dependable,
meaning that the findings are consistent and can be repeated. Shenton (2004) stated that a key criteria for research and its validity is that the study measures or test what is actually intended. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Steps to creating a sense of trustworthiness, according to Shenton (2004), include;

- adoption of research methods.
- development of an early familiarity with the culture of participating organization
- random sampling
- triangulation, which included the use of different methods or data sources, such as observations, focus groups, or individual interviews

For this study, random sampling was not used. Purposeful sampling was used as participants will be selected based on grade levels, subject taught, years of experience, and stance on disciplinary practices. To ensure validity with the data collection, both ATLAS.ti and Constant Comparative Analysis will be utilized throughout the study. This topic is one that I am familiar with based on personal experience. More importantly, teachers were selected purposefully to have things be seen as transparent and fair. Finally, data were collected from documentation, noted, interviews, and focus groups so that findings were clear, consistent, and credible.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

“Restorative practices embrace the fact that people make mistakes and that they cause harm. We all do it. It’s natural. But that doesn’t mean we don’t expect to be punished for it.”

Participant D, Focus Group Session, January 29.

Introduction

The National Education Association, in their 1918 report, *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, listed seven aims of education. These are: (a) health, (b) command of the fundamental processes, (c) worthy home membership, (d) vocation, (e) citizenship, (f) worthy use of leisure, and (g) ethical character (Kliebard, 1995, p. 98). Despite those seven aims, according to Noddings (2003), she suggested that the most important aim in education should be happiness, yet it is something rarely mentioned as a goal of education. So often schools put a lot of emphasis on test scores and data points, so much so that emotions and a search for student or teacher happiness is never a goal listed. Noddings (2005) went on to share how over time, great thinkers and researchers have connected happiness with qualities such as a rich intellectual life, rewarding human relationships, love of home and place, sound character, good parenting, spirituality, and a job that one loves. “We know that healthy families do much more than feed and clothe children. Similarly, schools must be concerned with the total development of children” (Noddings, 2005).

The total development of children includes not only their happiness, as stated above, but also their relationships with the teachers who spend roughly 40 hours a week with them for 32 weeks. While working with the teacher participants, this researcher was able to explore how restorative justice can help build strong relationships with students, and so serve the total development of children.
At the start of the study, during the February 8 focus group session, participants were asked to do an activity where they wrote on a notecard three words or phrases that came to mind when building a safe and trusting relationship with students. After collecting the cards and going over the responses, the top three words mentioned the most were conversation, consistency, and getting to know students. After completing the notecard activity, participants viewed a video where a school had implemented restorative practices and were in full implementation. When asked what were some of the common threads seen in the video that connected to student relationships and the benefits of using restorative justice in schools, participants mentioned things like building relationships, trust, being consistent in your approach, asking the same questions, continuity, allowing students a chance to talk, and students being more happy.

The purpose of the study was to investigate how teachers perceived the use of restorative justice in schools after being exposed to targeted professional development around what restorative justice is, what it aims to accomplish, and how to utilize one of the main practices, Peace Circles. Also, to look into the possibilities of the use of restorative practices that addressing the cultural and emotional gap often evident between teachers and students, particularly Black males. The findings from the data collected through focus groups, journal entries, and individual interviews will be presented in this chapter and interpreted to address the following research questions that guided this qualitative study:

1) To what extent do professional development workshops influence teachers’ knowledge and perceptions of restorative justice for discipline?

2) What are teachers’ early experiences using Peace Circles in their classrooms?

1Please see Appendix G for this visual example
This study aimed to give a guide for schools and districts both in and out of the state to possibly replicate or guide their practice when it comes to alternative methods of discipline. The study calls for educators to realize that restorative justice is an actual paradigm shift rather than just another rung on the ladder of disciplinary practices, one that requires teachers to be both open-minded and vulnerable at times.

There are three major themes to explore within the research framework, including how Black males are treated in society, the benefits of taking race out of the equation when it comes to discipline, and how the process of restorative justice works to care for the whole child.

**Putting the Human back in Humanity**

Traditional approaches to discipline manage student behavior rather than actually develop a student’s capacity to facilitate their own growth. In contrast, restorative decisions include things such as community service, restitution, apologies, or specific behavior change agreements, such as the offender agreeing to comply with certain conditions, something in exchange for incentives (Stinchombe, Bazemore, & Reistenberg, 2006). While framing an understanding of restorative justice and its connection to criminology, the most well-known framework is that of the “reintegrative shaming theory” (Brathwaite, 2004). Schools and teachers are more accustomed to negative shaming where a student may be yelled at or isolated for a certain amount of minutes during the school day. The main distinction between the two forms of shaming, reintegrated shaming and negative shaming, is that the reintegrate method leads to reconciliation with and reacceptance of the wrongdoer and attempts to reintegrate the offender back into the community, rather than isolate the perpetrator from the community (Fronius et al, 2016). This method is not always easy for teachers to master because there is a fine line with shaming and how it may affect students negatively.
To help the teacher participants start to ponder these ideas, participants were asked not to research any information about restorative justice prior to the first session. Participants were asked the question, “What is restorative justice?” at the beginning of every focus group session and as a question in all but two of their online questionnaires. This was purposeful so that participant understanding of restorative justice and their learning of the definition could be documented throughout the study. Participants’ responses and understanding of what restorative justice is and how it looks was collected. Each participants’ initial response was documented and compared to their individual exit interview response which was the last opportunity that each participant was able to share their overall perception of restorative justice and its use in their classroom. This comparison can be seen in appendix I².

Through the study and with exposure to targeted professional development, each participant was able to give a more clear description of what restorative justice is based on, and a more in-depth response in their individual exit interview. An explanation of the three parties involved in restorative justice was described with shared definitions and a visual example for all participants³. There were words that participants were able to use, with confidence, when describing restorative justice, words that were not used in their initial description. Some of these words include harm, peace, and tolerance, conversation, hearing the child, reflection, and responsibility. This shows a clear growth reached due to targeted professional development and the influence it had teachers’ knowledge of using restorative justice when dealing with student discipline infractions.

²Please see Appendix H for this visual example

³Please see Appendix I for this visual example
From Zero Tolerance to Restorative Justice

In addition to asking about restorative justice in the pre-focus group questionnaire, participants were asked what zero tolerance meant to them. Participants responded describing ZT as “no warnings or second chances,” “all or nothing and no grey area for compromise,” “one size fits all discipline,” and “the practice of viewing a situation through black and white glasses.” At the start of the study, participants were not completely against the use of ZT in schools. Many felt that students needed to follow the “law” or rules and that this was a good way to keep students in line. One participant shared in her pre-group response that she already saw the problem with ZT and why there was a need for change. She stated:

> Zero tolerance means treating others with a policy that never takes circumstances into account. At times, zero tolerance policies can cause more problems than solving the problems that are intended to solve. Many times there is more to a story than just what appears on the outside and if there is no room for explanations, circumstances and empathy, the problem receives a punishment that many not be just and only lead to more problems. (Participant G, Pre-Focus Group Questionnaire)

Zero tolerance policies have led to larger numbers of youth being “pushed out” (suspended or expelled) with no evidence of positive impact on school safety (Losen, 2014). Zero tolerance policies, which became popular in the 1980s and 1990s, according to Losen (2014), have had negative impact on students and schools. Research also goes on to indicate the disparity among students who are receiving exclusionary punishments such as suspension and expulsions. Gregory and colleagues (2014) found that African-American students were 26.2% more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions for their first offense than White students. This finding is
consistent with other completed studies, another which indicates the disproportionate use of punishment with racial and ethnic minorities and students with disabilities (Losen, 2014).

More school misbehavior is being handed over to the police (particularly with programs that have police in schools, such as School Resource Officers), leading to more youth getting involved with the official legal systems – thus contributing to a trend toward a “school-to-prison pipeline (Petrosino, Guckenburg, & Fronius, 2010). This is in contrast with restorative practices, which are viewed as a way to keep students in school, while addressing the root causes of the behavior issues, and ultimately repairing relationships between students and/or teachers.

Participants also answered why they felt districts across the United Stated were looking for alternative methods to traditional discipline. One of those being finding ways to lower the number of suspension and expulsions across the board, but with an emphasis on Black males and student with disabilities. District administrators and building leaders have been given the charge to lower these numbers in their school buildings. The Urban District is a major district in search for effective ways to lower their suspension and expulsion rates, particularly with their students of color and special education students. Teachers in LES believe the search for alternative methods of discipline is clearly because what is currently being done in schools is not working. Two participants shared:

I believe that school districts across the U.S. are in search of alternative methods of traditional discipline because more and more students are dropping out of school at a young age or not continuing on to higher education. Also, I believe that society is currently struggling with youth as a whole. (Participant H, Pre-Focus Group Questionnaire)
Well here’s the deal though, we have zero tolerance signs but we really don’t follow zero tolerance. I mean because it is impossible to follow zero tolerance, because I think that we need to know that there are different circumstances for different kids. Like my student S, he needs different kinds of adjustments to help him function in the classroom because his behavior is so poor, borderline ED. But it is working. We can’t have no tolerance with him because no tolerance sets him off so we have to have guidelines. He has to understand those guidelines and move on. So what we do is we create a something we can’t keep to. That is what we have done over the years. Zero tolerance and we can’t keep to it and our behaviors have gotten worse over the years. And society is a contributor too. (Participant C, Focus Group Session, January 22)

As more articles were read and discussions held, participants slowly began to speak up more about how the use of ZT has more of a negative effect on students and directly contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline. It took some time to get to that point in this study as a majority of the participants, seven out of the 11, stated they were not aware of what the school-to-prison pipeline was and how it affected played a role in students’ future involvement with the judicial system. During one focus group session, participants were asked to look at a picture, take a minute to analyze what it meant, and then share their thoughts on the message. The photo reminded one participant of a student she taught the previous school year.

She shared with the group:

I immediately think of [student name]. Like I honestly think of him. Not that we did it meanly, but that is kind of what happened with him. After he left LES. That is what he

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4Please see Appendix J for this visual example
did. He joined a gang and now he is living in [other state]. (Participant H, Focus Group, January 22, 2018)

The discussion continued and participants shared how they felt the pressure to be-all and end-all for students in schools today, as opposed to how things used to be at the start of their careers. Two participants, both veteran teachers with over 25 years of experience, shared their feelings in the change over time:

It’s overwhelming in a way because I feel that we are responsible for all the errors that are out in society. So like bad parenting and we are supposed to fix it and then I understand that we can make a difference but when they go home and the parents don’t value education, the parents don’t value respect and responsibility, there is only so much we can do and it feels overwhelming to me at times. I mean this job is overwhelming to me. (Participant C, Focus Group, January 22, 2018)

I have been doing this for 27 years now and I feel like when I first started all I had to focus on was teaching and now we wear so many hats that it does become overwhelming to us to where we need the counseling or support because we are giving so much of ourselves that it becomes really difficult and I know we can make a difference or a dent and I have had students who were difficult come back who have made the right choices, but we can’t save everyone. You can try your best to but physically you can’t. (Participant G, Focus Group, January 22, 2018)

By the end of the study, in their post focus group questions, participants described zero tolerance as an “unrealistic process that is impossible to follow,” a way of “treating everyone the same no matter the back-story or reason,” that it “does not allow for student growth or change,” and
“allows for no consideration of circumstances.” One participant maintained her strong stance against the use of zero tolerance, describing it in her post questionnaire as:

Zero Tolerance is the judge, jury and executioner for a student at risk. Often times students who are at risk are at risk due to no fault of their own. Zero Tolerance doesn't allow for understanding of a conflict, so there is no solution. (Participant E, Post Focus Group Questionnaire)

It is important for teachers to realize that despite the use of zero tolerance checking the two boxes off faster and easier, it does not lead to effective change over time and actually does more harm to a student’s academic potential, teacher relationships with their students, and the overall morale of the classroom, school, and community. Zero tolerance can seem like a quick fix in the moment but over time leads to more problems and creates a space for additional concerns.

**Movement takes Time**

Teachers in the United Stated spend more time with students than teachers in most other countries. According to Merritt (2017), a typical elementary teacher in the United Stated spent about 32 hours a week with students and are paid to work 38 hours weekly on average. This allows for very little time to accomplish other tasks that would influence what they do when with students. In this study, participants felt that time would be a major challenge for both learning and plans for implementation. In one of the online journal questionnaires, sent to all participants, one question asked was what was seen as the biggest challenge. Eight out of the 11 participants selected time as their response. Two participants selected the cost/funding and one participant selected dealing with extreme students. The concern of time continued to be brought up throughout focus group sessions and in participants individual exit interviews. Time was the word iterated the most during this study as it was a major concern of the participants. Time to
learn. Time to practice. Time to be trained. Time to model. Time to implement. Time to perfect. Time to improve. The word/phrase/topic of time came up or was said 466 times, which was the most of all words iterated. One participant shared her concern in this area:

My biggest fear is the time factor and the training, as I have said before. But the time factor is kind of worrisome because I just know that I don’t have enough time in the day now and trying to fit this in the day. I do think with practicing it, it will go faster. So the way I look at it now, I already spend all of my planning period working with kids or taking care of issues so now I am thinking I am going to need to do this more because in a sense, I am going to want to do it more and hear from the kids who never do anything wrong. (Participant C, individual exit interview)

Restorative justice requires staff time and buy-in, training, and resources that traditional methods of discipline do not impose on the school. Implementation of restorative justice requires teachers to perform duties traditionally outside of their job description, such as attending restorative justice trainings, conducting Circles during instruction time, and spending more one-on-one talking with students. Two of the participants shared why it has been so much easier using traditional methods of discipline. These teachers stated:

Time, is it much easier to go to the principal’s office. It is much easier to send them home. It is much easier to give them a writing assignment. It is much easier to do things that would simply involve removing them from the situation immediately and send them home. (Participant I, individual exit interview)

I have been doing this for 27 years now and I feel like when I first started all I had to focus on was teaching and now we wear so many hats that it does become overwhelming
to us to where we need the counseling or support because we are giving so much of
ourselves that it becomes really difficult. (Participant G, Focus Group, January 22, 2018)

When it comes to time, this will always be a possible limitation with any new initiative.
Researchers suggest that a shift in attitudes away from zero tolerance may take one to three years
(Karp & Breslin, 2010). Time will be needed to shift the attitudes of teachers, as researchers
Evans and Lester (2013) argue that the deep shift to a restorative-oriented school climate might
take up to three to five years. Numerous participants in the study gradually came to believe that
despite wishing there was more time in the day, there is a clear need for restorative practices in
schools and at LES. They also felt that time needed to not be seen as a limitation because the
change in practice was a necessity. When asked some ways the time concern could be combated,
two participants’ stated:

I am not really sure how you would tackle that one, other than I really don’t think it is as
big of an obstacle as you think it is. I think most of the time the little things can be taken
care of quickly because you lose that class time anyway if the situation continues to
escalate. So, really, it [zero tolerance] is like a balance of time but that is really a
perception-rather than an actual way to make it move faster. (Participant D, individual
exit interview)

You know what, in group people kept saying time, but you got to take the time. So time
is not an issue with me. I am willing to take the time because you got to act on it right
away. You can’t be screwing around and I will take care of this at the end of the day.
Because number one, kids notice that and at the end of the day you could be really busy
and then it gets shoved underneath the table. I can’t say time is going to be one for me
because I am going to stop and do it. Because it one of those things where either you are
going to address it or you run the risk of make it less effective. (Participant E, individual
exit interview)

In order to combat some of the fear around the concern time, it was imperative to have
the different restorative practices, specifically Peace Circles, modeled for participants. At the end
of the February professional development session led by the two district administrators in Urban
District, participants were given the opportunity to witness a Peace Circle led by these two
individuals. The researcher asked the facilitators if they would be willing to lead an actual Circle
and they were happy to model what a successful Circle looks like. Participant D welcomed the
opportunity to learn more and offered her classroom as the room for this Circle to take place. The
Circle activity begins by the facilitator asking the students for their help as they were doing this
as an example for their teachers.

Facilitator – so good morning everyone.

Class, also referred to as C – Good morning.

Facilitator – so I need your help, I need to model how to do a circle for the adults that are
in the room, do you think that you can help me?

C – yes, sure.

Facilitator – so this is how it is going to work. I’m going to have each and every one of
you grab a card, we are going to start off by having you take two. So take two and pass
them around.

C – Passing cards around

Facilitator – so we are going to start with a sharing activity and this is going to be my
talking piece (cell phone). So the only way you can talk is if you have my cell phone in
your hand.

Participant D – and that is trust right? That’s trust, she is showing you some trust.
Facilitator – so here is what I would like you to share about. What is your favorite order of operation? I’m doing to start. My favorite order of operation is multiplication and I am going to go to my right.

C – Participates and each give their answer

Facilitator – we are going to play a game to help us review our multiplication facts. We are going to play a game called, “I have…who has?”

Facilitator – the directions are as follows; I will begin by reading my cards. The person who has the card with the correct answer to my question, read his or her card allowed and then it goes on and on and on. Please listen for your turn to avoid breaking the chain.

Facilitator – so I am going to start, I have 54, who has 8 times 9?

Circle activity begins at 9:50am

Facilitator – I have 56, we made it! Thank you so much for participating in our circle.

Circle activity ends at 9:55am / *Facilitator begins a second Circle activity

Facilitator– I would like to share one of your favorite multiplication strategies. My favorite multiplication strategy is multiplication

Participant D – explains to class what different types of multiplication strategies are for example (algebraic method, traditional method, etc.)

Circle starts at 9:57am

Each student shares their favorite multiplication strategy

Facilitator– so thank you so much that ends our circle

Circle ends at 10:00am

Facilitator - to adults – that’s how it works

Facilitator - to students – what do you guys think?

Student 1 – I liked it
Student 2 – I liked this version
Class – yeah we did

Both of these Circle activities took a total of 10 minutes from beginning to end. This allowed for participants to actually see the simplicity behind having a Circle in their classroom and how it
could help build community among their students. Along with the facilitators modeling successful Circles to the participants, as the researcher of this study, it was important to take on that role as well to enhance the learning from our professional development sessions. On February 2, 2018, the researcher attempted a Peace Circle with two students who often came up in the focus groups as very “challenging” students to deal with. Both of these students were in third grade and struggled with controlling their anger. During recess time, there was an altercation that arose between the two boys. The researcher saw this as a valuable opportunity to attempt a Peace Circle in hopes of being able to share positive results back with the focus group.

After the Circle was complete, the researched documented his thoughts so that they could be shared with at the next focus group.

So on Feb 2, 2018 during our second recess around 12:55pm, there were two students who were angry with each other. The first student, Student A, was in the bleachers stomping his feet which is something that he does and he typically does it to get attention. After about three minutes he stopped the stomping and then got up and went to confront the other student who upset him, and it was, Student B, who are both third graders and both are known for having anger issues.

They started arguing and pushing each other so then I intervened, brought them both over, and had Student A and Student B sit down. I asked another student what happened and then I actually attempted a Circle moment with both of the boys. I had them both sit on opposite sides of me and told them that at any moment if they yell at me or raise their voice then the conversation is done and that we are here to just talk this through. So I let Student A go first and explain his side and made sure that Student B knew to be quiet and listen. Then I let Student B give his side and made sure that Student B knew to be quiet and listen. Then I let Student A go first and explain his side and made sure that Student B knew to be quiet and listen. (this would have been a good place to introduce a talking piece to help with interruptions)

We went through the restorative questions.

What happened? What could they have done differently? How did it make you feel? How could we make this right?

It was an interesting moment because these are kids who are typically very angry, non-responsive, and don’t want to take responsibility, yet during the conversation, they both talked and they both listened to one another. There were moments they would say “but”
to justify their behavior and I explained to them that saying but can be a way to make up an excuse, instead just own what you did and take responsibility and they both did that which was quite surprising for me. I think even more with Student B because Student B and I haven’t had the best relationship since he has been here. Student A and I have had a good relationship in the past. But even Student B was taking ownership.

What happened was they were playing a basketball game, 3 on 1, Student A wasn’t happy about it so he started yelling Student B’s name and putting his hand in his face, then Student B pushed him. And Student A took responsibility. I asked him what he did that he shouldn’t have. What did he do wrong?

Student A – “I shouldn’t have been yelling. I know he wasn’t listening to me but I shouldn’t have been yelling. I shouldn’t have put my hands in his face.”

Student B – “I shouldn’t have pushed him.”

I asked them both what are some things they could have done to handle the situation differently.

Student A – “After he (Student B) wasn’t answering me, I could have come and got you.

Student B – “I shouldn’t have made a game where someone gets eliminated and kicked out.”

They both were responsive and at the end they both said they were doing better, they felt better, and they shook hands. I was a little concerned that they would bump heads during the day because they are in the same class but I went on checked on them at the end of the day and they both seemed fine.

Student A – “I am doing good. I’m not angry at Student B anymore.”

It was interesting doing it with those two because they can be so angry and nonresponsive. It would have been easier to go to the typical you go to your corner or giving my usual punitive punishment, but instead we sat down and talked and it took some time, we went over into the next lunch/recess time but it seems to have worked.

That’s an example of RJ working because these are two of the students that teachers, in our group, often speak about the extremes, students who are on the extreme side. I do think it will take a lot more to get them to truly be thinking that way but it’s a start. I think it was definitely a positive moment.

*** At the end of the school day, I saw Student A walking in line and checked on him to see how the rest of the day went. Student A said that the day was fine and that he and Student B did not have any more issues that day.

I checked in with the teacher and she did verify that the two boys did not have any more issues with one another that day, but other discipline concerns did come up. The work with these two will be something that definitely takes time.
I did share the success story in group discussions and teachers were both impressed and surprised that the students, especially Student B, was so responsive in that moment.

*This took under ten minutes for the researcher to complete

The two modeled examples of Circles, one as a community builder and the other as a way to de-escalate a behavior situation both took less than ten minutes. For more severe incident, more time will be needed, but these examples were helpful in getting participants to realize that holding these Circles may not be as time consuming as they first envisioned. Participants recognized the importance of caring for the whole child and felt strongly about taking the time to show students that they mattered. As time went on in the study, more participants felt less overwhelmed by the pressure of time. There was a drop in participants who found time to be the main challenge. With the individual exit interviews, six out of the 11 participants stated time, as opposed to ten at the start of the study in their questionnaire response. As the study proceeded, teachers began to recognize the value in restorative justice. They were able to see that dealing with small problems and building relationships in the beginning with students left more time for valuable instruction.

**Surviving in a Separate & Unjust System**

During the study, participants spoke on the plight that is Black males in schools. Many shared how working on restorative practices opened their eyes more to a struggle many of their past and current students face on a daily basis. A participant in this study shared the same feeling when it came to Black males in schools:

I feel that as a whole right now, Black male youths are in crisis. I also think that maybe because they are in such crisis mode right now they are automatically given a stigma so they are automatically looked at differently. I think they need more support and more
help. I have taught in schools that are 100% African-American and I see that there are in crisis mode right now. (Participant H, individual exit interview)

Statements and realizations like these are vital for any possibility of shift in schools. Teachers have a major impact of the success or failures of their students, but without being able to address the different needs and struggles of students, particularly Black males, there will be no change in practice and the treatment of students in their classroom. Statements like these would often open the mind of others and lead to more pertinent conversations about the unfair treatments of Black males at LES, in schools, and around the country.

In chapter one, this researcher shared the names of some of the Black males, like Philando Castile, shot and killed by police officers. In 2017 alone, 1,146 people were killed by police officers. Of those individuals, 25% of were Black. In 2018, the killing of unarmed Black males continues. The shooting of Cleveland youth, Tamir Rice, was discussed in Chapter one as well. The officer who fatally shot Mr. Rice was never criminally charged. Two and a half years later, Mr. Loehman, the officer, was fired for providing false information when he applied for the job that put him in the position to “serve and protect.”

News and social media headlines can often portray Black males as threats and builds on the stereotypes placed on the lives on Black males in society and in schools. These unfortunate stories of the shootings and deaths of unarmed Black men continue to take over news headlines. On March 18, 2018, Stephon Clark was shot and killed by two police officers in Sacramento, California. Mr. Clark was shot eight times, in the back and in his grandmother’s backyard. The mayor has stated that their community is in anguish.

As society struggles to integrate Black males into society, school districts, administrators, and teachers struggle to serve the whole student - especially students of other races.
Teachers and Black Males: Oil and Water?

When asked why Black males may be discipline more severely than other student groups, nine out of the 11 participants used specific words such as racism, stereotypes, historical biases, prejudice, and lack of cultural awareness, segregation, and profiling as direct reasons. Participant K, who works with students who are often sent out of class for different behavior infractions, shared that she feels the reason Black males are punished more severely is because it is a racial issue. In an example she gave, she stated how there are two students, one Black male and the other is not. She mentioned how the Black male often is given more severe consequences, like in-school-suspensions or being placed in isolation for less severe behaviors when the other student may be given a lunch detention for consequences that should require something more severe based on the code of conduct. Participant B reports that these different stereotypes faced by Black males have been around neighborhoods and the country for a long time and paint them as “uneducated, mean, and that they are going to hurt you.” Participant F echoed that feeling by sharing that Black males are often portrayed negatively in the media as always doing wrong. Because of that, he then went on to share that society automatically assumes that Black males are going to be in trouble and so do most teachers. Participant H, someone who stated throughout the study about her time working at schools that had a 100% African-American student population, shared how she feels as though what we are doing in schools isn’t working. She said, “I feel that as a whole right now, Black male youths are in a crisis. And it has been going on for a long time, since the 60s, when you think about segregation.”

As participants continued to share their thoughts about why they felt Black males are punished more severely, it was clear that many were uncomfortable answering these questions. Often times, responses began with statements like, “This is going to sound bad coming from a
white person,” “I’m not racist,” “I do not do this, at least I hope I don’t”, or “I treat all of my students fairly. I look at who they are and not the color of their skin.” After getting past that uncomfortable moments, participants opened up about more specific reasons they see this happening in schools. Participant D shared that she believed this all stems from a historical bias that schools were in actuality created for white males. She went on to state that, “There are some things that are still a part of that institutional bias that occurs and has become normalized even for any teacher that is working, whether female or male or a person of color or not.”

So many of the participants called for a change of mindset in society but realize that changing the mindsets of teachers will be challenging. Participant K tells how many teachers in schools today are “Caucasian, white, and they were working in schools that were primarily Black students and they [the teacher] was brought up in certain eras where you didn’t walk on the same side of the street with them [Black people].” She does however feel that the use of restorative justice can help with changing the mindset of people but understands that it will be tough.

**Removing the Black and White in Discipline**

There is a racial/ethnic disparity in what you receive as school punishments and how severe their punishments are, even when controlling for the type of offense (Skiba, et al., 2002). During the time of the study, the topic of race and how disproportionately Black males and special education students are punished. One participant shared her view on how LES was playing a role in that disproportionate treatment towards Black males. She stated:

If you look at LES alone and we look at the statistics of what kinds of kids are suspended and what kind of kids are in SSI (student support intervention) and stuff like that, they are usually Black and Hispanic -- yeah...many a day I would go past that little room [Planning Center or ISS room] and there was nothing but Black and Hispanic kids in
there. And I was like, “What how does this happen?” (Participant E, Focus Group Session, January 31)

In response to that comment, another participant, Participant C shared why she thought this might be the case. She stated:

But I think that we also have to look at...and this is just being open and honest, a lot of students from the Hispanic families or the Black families, are from a broken family. Or there from a family that is struggling economically or social issues or they have parents that tend to accept their behavior. The one boy that we were talking about from last year, his mom came in here with an attitude every day and she would brush past me and I would say where are you going, and she had the attitude of “Don’t you question me,” which is the same attitude her son had, so, do I think kids are unfairly treated, Yes! I think sometimes Black or Hispanic kids are unfairly treated but I think in a lot of cases, if they have a record of misbehave, misbehave, misbehave...and then someone else gets in less trouble for the same thing, its kids of like, “We’re just sick of this.” It is more than just what happens in school.

While transcribing sessions, notes were written based on the responses of participants. These were the notes written in reflection to the above comment:

My thought is why do teachers always go directly to the broken home answer. Are there not white students who come to school from broken home who are also discipline problems? Is this just another cop out for unconscious bias or racism? The assumption seems to be that all Black males who get in trouble have some kind of record and have been misbehaving their whole life. This is not the case! And what about White students who come from broken homes?
This was an area where many participants felt uncomfortable addressing due to not wanting to come off as racist or biased. This could be seen in the facial expressions and body language in chairs as participants either became silent or spoke up with their different thoughts. Realizing that some participants became somewhat distant during our group discussions about race, the decision was made to utilize the online survey tool so participants could give their response in private and use their pseudonym. The question posed to participants was, “Which student group do you think is more negatively affected by punitive consequences?” When it came to race, all of the participants selected Black males. When asked which subgroup was more negatively affected by punitive consequences, 60% said Black males and 40% said special education students. One participant shared how she feel that with restorative justice practices, race does not enter and finds that the best part. Participant E goes on to share her disdain for the common phrase of “Black on Black crime,” saying that, “I hate that term Black on Black crime. Because number one, it is a bigoted term. Because don’t white folks kill white folks? Yes. But you never hear white on white crime.” With restorative justice, she sees the focus dealing with the people and the offense that happened.

**Your Perception is not my Reality**

Addressing perceptions is an important piece of any growth process. When meeting with participants, that was an area often discussed so that as a group it could be addressed or talked through. This would allow for all involved to share their thoughts, hear the thoughts of others, and get a deeper look at their own thoughts, as well as those of their colleagues. At the conclusion of the study, in each individual exit interview, all participants were asked to share their overall perception of using restorative practices in classrooms. All 11 participants discussed how they really liked what restorative justice had to offer and wanted to see it implemented in
the school building during the next school year. Participant H stated, “I am really excited about it and excited to start implementing it.” She feels that this can help students in schools who come from unstable homes or as a way for kids to come to school and feel that someone really cares about them and supports them.

In order to have restorative practices be implemented effectively, it was important to learn about each part individually, one step at a time, so that staff members did not feel overwhelmed. Many participants felt that starting with the use of Peace and/or Community Circles in each classroom would be best and lead to a smooth transition with all teachers. Participant A felt that as a school, they would need to “start slowly and positively with a focus on conversations and assure teachers that there would still be consequences but to make sure to work through why the child has these extreme behaviors.” Others shared their concern with the overbuilding schedule. They felt it was important to adjust the daily schedule so that all teachers can have time to learn and utilize the strategies that would help make the overall school more restorative.

One of the participants shared his fears about this group study being another meeting with no actual outcome. Teachers often are asked to sit in on meetings about meetings that end with the date of the next meeting. He shared how he did not plan to sit in on a meeting that he did not see value in, but after the first initial meeting, he felt restorative justice is a good option for schools and stated that the more he learned about restorative justice, “the more I think we need to do something” and ended saying that he does “see value in doing it.” This was an outcome that showed the benefits and success of the study. Time is one of the most valuable tools that a teacher can have and he felt that this was a positive use of his time. Another teacher, Participant G felt strongly that restorative justice should be taught and utilized like anything else and
become a part of the daily expectations for teachers and students. Participant E stated that restorative justice is a strength in the classroom sharing, “If we get enough schools to do this, it strengthens our society as a whole because this is embedded in them.”

Other participants felt that incorporating restorative justice in their classroom and the school overall would lead to more consistency and increase the sense of community so that people would understand each other better. This was echoed by Participant F who shared how he is all for it and likes how it brings a “sense of community back in schools.” He felt that teachers were an intricate part of society and the goal of teaching is to get students ready for the big picture. Not simply the 50 minute lesson teachers have planned, but having those 50 minutes be a lifetime for them. Since starting the use of restorative practices in her classroom, Participant B shared that she really hasn’t sent anyone to the office.

**Suspension is not the answer, it is the Problem**

Black students continue to be suspended and expelled at a rate much higher than their Caucasian peers. Studies point to the clear disproportionate treatment of these students. According to Hart and Lindsay (2017), Black children represent 16% of K-12 enrollment nationwide but made up 43% of students who receive multiple out-of-school suspensions during the 2011-2012 school year. Another study done in Texas public schools found that in tracking seventh through twelfth graders who were suspended, 75% were African-American students, and 83% of those were Black male students (Fabelo et al, 2011). A rationale often given is that Black students are more threatening and violent; however, are the reasons for these suspension or expulsions typically more violent? The answer is no. Black males are not more innately violent or aggressive than other students. They are simply misunderstood and/or feared. Fear allows many teachers the comfort to live in a place of ignorance, operating under the mindset of, “If I
don’t know, then it is not my job to care.” When teachers choose not to know, they choose to not have to do better or be better. Countless teachers and administrators continue to treat Black males as criminals walking the halls of prisons rather than the hallways of engaging and safe school buildings. Classrooms are built with cinder blocks and illuminated with fluorescent lighting fixtures. Resource officers are at the front and back doors as students enter and leave the school building as prisoners are subject to each and every day. One of the participants discussed how the use of zero tolerance has had a negative impact on schools:

One of the things we want to be as teachers are we want to be nurtures and understand and provide a safe space. With zero tolerance, what ends up happening is the people that we should be nurturing and looking at and saying there is another way to go, is the first ones kicked out. Because something happened and what we end up doing is we end up pushing them back to the world that they know rather than the world they could know. Giving them that change and there is no chance with zero tolerance. (Participant E, individual exit interview)

As an educator, the researcher often pondered on what teachers could justly do if they took a second to get to truly know these males, their stories, and hear their voice. Not just hear their voice when angry but when truly attempting to share real pieces of who they are, how they feel, and ways they are validated and negated in school, their community and home. Tyler (2006) argues that by giving people, particularly students, a voice in the decision-making and justice process, leads to them viewing institutional power as more legitimate and fair. So often these students are seen as threats, but if there could be a shift in mindset, change would be immediate. More than 80% of the classroom teacher are Caucasian females and will have different cultural norms than the Black males in their classrooms so what easily can be seen as disrespect and
defiance could actually be a cry for love and support from a child in pain. One participant shared how the cultural differences, often a factor in classroom discipline issues, have to be addressed if there is to be any change. She shared:

> The whole idea of having a difference in your cultural norms and not necessarily being comfortable with a student’s normal behaviors, teachers might be a little more irritated because it is not something we grew up with as normal and as that irritations continues, if that problem isn’t event reflected on, or discussed, or put out in the open, then it could lead to major problems. I think it just makes it more likely that there will be conflict with people of different backgrounds. They [teachers] are like that is not how you [students] act in school, but that is not always communicated very effectively to the kid who is supposed to be acting a certain way that is not their norm, then you have all of these issues that can arise. (Participant D, individual exit interview)

These type of connections are important as teachers learn and address cultural norms and biases. Listening to this teacher speak about her experience, with what is seen as normed behaviors for students in schools, reminded me of how this is a factor for all teachers and of all races. Simply because a student is Black and their teacher is Black does not mean that their cultural norms are the same. Cultural norms are often not the same for two people or students so it is important for all teachers to be aware of cultural differences no matter their race or gender. Another participant said that she saw the cultural difference in one of her students of color and had to learn to adjust to his “normal behaviors.” Participant C shared that one of her students, a Hispanic male, would be singing and dancing all day. She recognized that this was a part of his culture and what he does. She described his actions as very, “Salsa.” She felt as teachers, sometimes they tend to
react because they don’t know. “We just want them to sit and learn and be quiet,” she continued, “but that attitude leaves a lot of kids hurting academically and affects their behavior.”

In schools, we see Black males continue to survive – not live – in times where physical chains may not be on the ankles of Black males any longer, but we are still seen as disposable, both in the streets and in the schools. Schools must find a way to care for the development of the whole child, cultural differences and all. “In a democratic society, schools must go beyond teaching fundamental skills” (Noddings, 2005). Until that becomes a focus, computer programs and education jargon such as “differentiation,” “rigorous” and “best practices” will continue to be placed on a wheel that spins and ultimately has no positive ending.

**Restorative Justice is a Possible Answer**

Restorative justice continues to be a new concept to many teachers. In learning about this alternative approach to discipline, all participants felt strongly about restorative practices being able to curtail the negative issues and stereotype so many face in schools daily. Participants felt that what is most important in addressing the matter is the fact that these students are now able to have a voice. Participant H shared that she feels using restorative practices is an absolute necessary first step in repairing the damage among Black males. Participant D shared that “Any program that encourages conversation, open and honest conversation is going to be good,” and feels that it will help not only the school but the community as well. She went on to explain that what she feels restorative justice does over zero tolerance is that there is the opportunity for discussion and addresses the “gray areas that should help people who is having the system abuse them.” Along with allowing students to have a voice, restorative justice helps build trust in teachers and the school. Participant J shared that he felt the use of restorative justice would be helpful because it shows the individual they are cared for rather than just being pushed to the
side. Participant F shared how Black males are losing faith in adults. He said, “This is one thing that scares me the most, they don’t have faith in us to help them.” Many of the participants had this same feeling. Participant C felt that teachers are not even teaching them [Black males] how to treat each other nicely and “if we are treating them like that, we are just perpetuating the problem.” So often, in schools, students are talked at by adults as opposed to talking with adults. Restorative practices focuses on making sure that both students and adults are able to communicate their feelings and thoughts surrounding their actions.

One participant shared a personal story of a family member who was arrested for a crime in the early 70s and how 15 years after that, he still could not find a good job. This teacher went on to share in more detail his feelings towards so-called rehabilitation of offenders in the prison system. “So there is rehabilitation supposedly but you are not restored back into society because he never was. But I think the idea of restorative justice is that you are brought back into the society or the school and it is not so much that we are dismissing what you did but we are getting you to look at what you did and say hey, you are accepted back with us.” This statement was a powerful connection from the teacher in how he connected restorative justice as a way to not only help students be welcomed back into the community but be able to have a chance to repair the harm done and be accepted. Restorative practices addresses the hurt that leads to the harm caused by offenders and finding ways to repair that harm for the victims, leaving no space for judgement based on race. Participant E tells that restorative justice has no color and sees the strength of the practices as the fact that you are “trying to relate people to each other and draw on common ground, not looking at Black human and a white human, just relating human to human.”

In one of the journal response questions, participants were asked if they were in a conflict with a person who is important in their life, would they prefer the conflict be handled using
restorative justice or zero tolerance and why? All participants selected restorative justice. Their reasons ranged from, “because the RJ approach allows the opportunity to repair hurt feeling,” to “because RJ allows for “respectful and thoughtful conversations.” Participants felt it would be important to have their voice heard and that it would allow for both parties involved the chance to see things eye to eye. One participant said with the use of restorative justice “respect, fairness, caring, and trustworthiness is present” where with zero tolerance, they felt all of those adjectives were missing. In the post focus group survey responses, 10 out of 11 participants said they do believe that the school could benefit from a restorative practice- based school program. Only one participant selected “maybe” as a response to this question.

When asked if participants felt they would use the information learned on restorative justice after the completion of the study, all participants answered, “yes.”

The Need to Care for the Whole Child

Today’s schools and teachers must realize the importance of a child’s social and emotional learning and how that connects to their behavior and academic achievements. During the time of the study at LES, a Black female student had to deal with the emotional trauma of having her home burned down. In the fire, the family lost everything. When this happened, the child pleaded with her mother to go to school the next day because she did not want to miss taking her state test. The student made it through the day and unless you knew of her home situation, others would not have realized how much pain she was dealing during the day. The next school day, the student returned to school again, determined to take part two of her state test. That morning, in homeroom, her teacher brought up the fact that she was not in dress code. The student explained her present home situation and the teacher responded, “That is not an excuse to not be in dress code.” This caused the student to become upset and start crying. One of
the participants in the study, who also works with this student, took her into her classroom and said she would keep the student with her all day. While walking past my office, I could see this teacher, the participant in the study, was upset so I called her in to my office to speak. The teacher began to cry and share her reasoning for being upset and shared how frustrated she was that a teacher would make her [the student] cry. She mentioned our restorative justice meetings and how it applies:

This is an example of what I wrote in my thing (journal responses). How could someone just not care or come off that way. This student begged her mom to come to school to take her test knowing what she has going on at home. And she lost everything in that fire and what she was most concerned about was her mom being okay. This is what causes so many students to shut down because teachers can come off as if they do not care and students pick up on that. Children need to feel like someone really cares about them as opposed to just trying to punish them and figure out ways to make their life better.

( Participant H, personal communication, April 12, 2018)

Effective Professional Development leads to Learning

Researchers argue that there is a need for strong professional development, also referred to as PD, programming for teachers and administrators when it comes to understanding specific restorative techniques and the reasoning behind the shift from traditional punishment approaches to restorative practices (Mayworm, Sharkey, Welsh, & Scheidel, 2013). The benefit and impact of this targeted form or professional development is that when teachers are able to participate in restorative justice and understand its potential effectiveness, they can then facilitate students doing the same (Kiddle & Alfred, 2011). Increasing a teacher’s understanding of restorative approaches through discussion and training with school-based restorative justice consultants
allows for more focused programming and fostering group cooperation to reach the best outcome. There is a need for more research on the benefits of PD workshops on both a teacher’s understanding and practice with restorative justice. This study aimed to address that gap.

The participants in this study contributed to the findings by taking part in numerous focus group sessions, professional development sessions, and a closing exit interview session. Along with those data collection points, all participants also completed online questionnaires via Google docs. The first question asked to the participants was “What is restorative justice?” This question was asked several times over the time of the study so that responses could be tracked the level of understanding of what restorative justice actually is in general. Early on in the process, each participant was asked if they believed that the PD workshops they had been taking part in during the first month of the study was influencing their knowledge of restorative justice. The results showed that 20% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, 10% were undecided, and 20% strongly disagreed. In asking what more could be done to influence their knowledge, the response was to bring in individuals who were officially trained in restorative practices or working at a school that is currently implementing restorative practices. During month two of the study, two additional PD sessions, led by trained restorative justice professionals, were added to the schedule. The first session was led by two building administrators from another school, but in urban district, whose building is currently in year two of implementation with restorative practices. The second session was led by a member of the district’s “Humanware” network support team. This facilitator actually attended an official restorative justice training in Chicago and is also a former primary teacher at LES.

The first session was received well by the participants as all responded that they found the session helpful and informative. Participant H shared that she found it helpful because, “we
met educators that are currently implementing the program and getting their insight about what works for implementation.” Participant G said that the strategies they shared on using restorative language helped her see what she could do in certain situations. While one participant, Participant F, appreciated the fact that these were teachers who were from the same district and were able to “give real life experiences to validate how we can make this work for us.” The facilitators began the meeting by introducing themselves and explaining the purpose of the meeting and posting an agenda for the meeting. The lead facilitator then worked with the group to create meeting norms for the session. After that, each participant was asked to share what they hoped to gain from the session. Three participants shared interesting reasons on what they wanted to learn and why. The responses were:

I am here because I think it is important. A lot of the things that we are doing now as a society are falling short. Our solutions aren’t good. As a society we need to do something different. We need to not excuse the problem but understand it and that’s why I am here. (Participant E, Focus Group Session, February 21)

Adding on to what everybody said, knowing that you all teach in Urban District, I would like to know what strategies you use. (Participant J, Focus Group Session, February 21)

How to better use it in the classroom but not even just there but at home. I have a 16 year old so I am thinking about how to approach him in a different way that I have been. (Participant I, Focus Group Session, February 21)

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5Please see Appendix K for this visual example

6Please see Appendix L for this visual example
The third comment was one that stood out as this participant was taking his learning and newly gained knowledge of restorative practices home and wanting to utilize the strategies with his son. Fullan (2007) argued that external approaches to instructional improvement are rarely “powerful enough, specific enough, or sustained enough to alter the culture of the classroom and school.” With that knowledge in mind while planning focus group session and bringing in trained facilitators to lead PD sessions, it was imperative to have participants gain a deep understand of restorative justice to the point where they wanted to incorporate these practices in their classrooms. Having a desire to take the knowledge learn outside of the school shows that this participant saw the benefits and was eager to learn more at this point of the study.

After sharing what each participant wanted to learn from the session, the facilitator stated that she wanted to gauge the knowledge level of each individual when it came to restorative practices by completing a T-chart. Each participant was to list what they thought restorative practices were and were not. As the session continued, the facilitators presented each participant with supporting documents around restorative practices, specifically Peace Circles. Participants were also asked to do some role playing with scenarios where asking restorative specific questions were the goal to change the mindset and response norm of teachers. The session ended with a closing where participants shared what they appreciated from the session and their desire to have a part two so they could continue learning from a school that is already in full implementation. The lead facilitator shared some of the steps it took for their school to become a

7Please see Appendix M for this visual example
8Please see Appendix N for this visual example
9Please see Appendix O for this visual example
restorative school and other changes that were made to their normal school expectations. She shared:

We do have a behavior flow chart and in the flow chart we have incorporated restorative practices so we still use the referral system because contractually we have to but we do encourage all our staff to use the restorative questions. So we try to group things into minor offenses and major offenses and typically the minor offenses can be answered with restorative questions or affective statements of one of the restorative techniques. But when you move to something that is a level 3 or 4 that is something that should come to us. But there is still harm and we would want to address that harm. (Lead Facilitator, Focus Group Session, February 21)

The second session was more straightforward. Participants sat at tables and the facilitator presented information over a PowerPoint and handed out forms that presented information on restorative practices\(^\text{10}\). This session was more of one where participants “sat and got” rather than take part in different scenarios or activities. The facilitator shared information about what restorative justice is and what it should not be seen as:

Facilitator – RP is not an extra layer. So often people say that this is one more thing I have to do but it is really not. It is integrated into the very fabric of your building and into what you do every day in your classroom. So its PATHS, its PBIS, its class meetings, its Second Steps. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. It is an enhancement. It is a culture. It is the climate of who you guys are.

The facilitator also shared some statistics with the group about why there needs to be a shift in the way schools are moving when it comes to discipline:

\(^{10}\)Please see Appendix P for this visual example
Facilitator – so the culture starts in preschool, yet, less than 1% a million students in preschool were suspended. So 8,000 three and four year olds in the nation were suspended and for what? When we think of three and four year olds, kind of puts a different spin on it. We can’t really work with three and four year olds? And I want you to know more than 2500 were suspended more than once. So that cause and effect thing, no they’re just impulsive. We need to take that time to build that relationship.

That statistic left the researcher pondering the research that speaks about students who have been suspended at least once seeing their chance to graduate on time lowered by 20%. In noted taken after the session, the comment was written, “What are these kids doing to get put out of school and at such a young age? We are already contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline at the age of three and four.” To end the session, the facilitator reminded participants that things may get tough at the start before it gets easy:

Facilitator – restorative practice always gets worse before it gets better. There is that period, that growing period where it is tumultuous and it is uncomfortable.

One participant left feedback that she did not find the session helpful. Her reasons were due to looking for something more in depth. Participant D shared that, “I found her slides to be informative, but more appropriate to where I was weeks ago.” Overall, with these two additional PD sessions, participants responded in extreme favor to the sessions influencing their knowledge of restorative justice when it comes to discipline. Each participant showed growth in their understanding of what restorative justice is and how it is used.

Participant C shared that for this to work, everyone is going to have to buy into it because she sees the value and how it can be “helpful to relationship building.” Participant K shared
those same feelings, saying that she sees it working but “we have to be all in, because once we
start falling off, then it is no longer going to work.”

**Teachers’ Experience using Peace Circles in their Classroom**

As the study continued, participants became more exposed to how to hold both
impromptu conferences and Peace Circles. This learning took place in focus group sessions,
through article readings, and video observations, as well as in the February professional
development session. During that session, participants were able to role play what an impromptu
conference would look and sound like. One participant shared during the February 8 focus group
session that she has attempted a brief impromptu conference with a student returning from
suspension. The student, who had been suspended for using profane language towards the
teacher in front of the entire class, was also known for having anger issues. Having been a part of
the study, she wanted to handle things different with this student once he returned from his
suspension and met with him prior to returning to class. The participant shared with the group:

Participant G – I had a moment with [student name] when he got back from his
suspension, remember from when he cursed at me, and I asked him questions kind of like
those [restorative questions]. I mean didn’t know them that well yet. I went, “What could
have happened differently, that made me feel disrespected, I don’t curse at you so you
shouldn’t do it to me.” Then he told me what he should do the next time when he gets
angry instead of cursing at me he is going to do this.

Monell – what if the next time he doesn’t do that (and still curses at you)

Participant G – I think I would just have to redo the questions. It is not always going to
work the first time so you have to try again.
The participant seemed to benefit from her exposure to restorative practices as noted by a shift in how she handled a situation with a student who had publicly disrespected her, in her own classroom. Rather than isolate him or ignore his presence in the classroom once returning from his suspension, the teacher greeted him at the door and began a restorative dialogue that allowed for some relationship rebuilding to be down between the student and teacher.

A powerful observation from the focus group sessions is the eagerness with which many of the participants had to attempt these impromptu conferences and/or Peace Circles. One participant even saw her reflecting on scenarios where she should have stopped and made it a restorative moment. Participant C shared a moment with the group where a student was having a rough time in class with their behavior but unfortunately due to time, wasn’t able to address the situation. She shared that afterwards, she sat in her classroom thinking, “Gosh I would love to do that [hold Peace Circles] in my class and I am definitely going to try it. But I need to know what to do when it doesn’t go that smoothly.” There was a fear of what if it goes poorly or she isn’t able to facilitate the Circle or conference appropriately, along with working with some of her more challenging students. During the focus group session held of February 8, participants commented on different ways to combat those fears:

Participant C – yes, I think it would work; the problem is what do we do with the kids who would really push back on that? I love all that. I love having the talking piece. I love all that but how do I respond when [student name] responds, “He did it, it wasn’t me.”

Participant D – an individual conference first perhaps.

Participant C – but see the thing is that how do you respond to that if you are in a group.

Participant B – you say “shhhhh” you don’t have the basket.

Participant C – well he’ll argue, you know him.
Participant D – In order to do an impromptu conference, they both have to be willing, like
he (Monell) said earlier. You have to speak to each and know if they are willing to come
together. If [student name] is not willing to come to the Circle, then you are right, he
would not be successful in the Circle. A Circle is supposed to a group of people who are
coming together to repair harm done.

Participant C – so he is the one that did something and the other children are ready to talk
but he’s not, nobody gets to talk?

Monell – you can do the Circle without [student name] until he is ready.

Participant C – so [student name] is not going to hear this

Monell – no, [student name] has to be ready and if not, he is going to ruin the Circle

This moment was important to include because it showed the strength and support of the group.
Participants who came into this process knowing little to nothing about restorative justice and its
effects on individuals, were coaching and supporting a colleague in how to do a Circle, even
when all involved parties may not be ready. This is an example of why working with a small
focus group was the selected route for possible implementation. Teachers are each other’s best
advocate and working with a group of teachers who believe in this method is more powerful than
just having an administrator tell his or her staff that this will be the new way, with no discussion
or voice from teachers. Restorative justice focuses in on the voice of individuals, not just
students, teachers and adults are included in that as well.

At the end of this session, a participant spoke about other schools in Urban District that
may be implementing restorative practices and the desire to speak to individuals in the district
working with restorative justice. This suggestion led to the researcher reaching out to a school in
Urban District and set up a possible PD session for all participants. We were able to confirm this
session to be held on February 21, 2018 at 8:30am. The push for this addition was due to this suggestion from the study participant, as well as comments made in the online journal responses where other participants were interested in having a trained restorative justice facilitator come in and lead a session.

One of the most impactful practices during the February 21 PD session, which was led by trained facilitators, involved participants doing mock impromptu conferences to become more comfortable with the restorative language.

Facilitator – so we are going to do a quick activity so on page 2, where it says, please practice using affective statements, with your partner. Read example one on the handout and then asks the question, what would be a traditional response?

Participant G – stop pushing

Facilitator – exactly, don’t do that again, what’s your problem, get it together

Participant E – dude, you know the rules

Facilitator – absolutely, but instead, what should you say to be effective, to be restorative?

Participant C – It makes me uncomfortable when I see you hurt other people

Facilitator – absolutely! Any other examples

Participant G – I am frustrated that I told you not to push would that be how? No, that probably is not restorative huh?

Facilitator – no it is not restorative, so how can you make that restorative?

Participant G – I am frustrated when…wait that isn’t it either

Facilitator – when I see you hurt

Participant G – when I see you hurting someone else
Facilitator - mmhm

Participant C – especially when they are a frequent flyer, wouldn’t you think that would be an appropriate comment?

Facilitator – any other examples?

Participant C – I feel sad when you hurt people or when you’re not patient or when you don’t use your words

Facilitator – absolutely

After learning about what Peace Circles are and the different ways they can be utilized to deal with student misbehavior and to build classroom community, teachers shared what they saw as strengths and limitations of using Peace Circles in classrooms. These responses were based on their personal experience of attempting Peace or Community Building Circles in their classrooms. Nine of the 11 participants all stated that students being able to have a voice and be heard as a strength of utilizing Peace Circles in classrooms. Participant B reported that her class actually enjoys the Circles and looks forward to doing it often. She stated, “I just think it is really nice that each person gets a chance to say what they need to say because sometimes when you let that build up in your head it becomes worse than it was in the beginning.” Participant C shared that it allowed the kids to have a voice and reminds her to stop talking and actually listen to what they are saying. Participant J has the same feelings as he attempted Circles with his middle school gym classes. He tells how it helped his classes go more smoothly because as soon as class started, they did their Circles and that led to fewer distractions through the periods.

Another participants who also teaches middle school students shared that he saw the use of Circles as powerful because of their proactive nature. Participant F said, it allows teacher to “spot certain things about when somebody is going to do something and we can stop it before it
starts.” That statement is indicative of one of the things Peace Circles aims to do, be proactive. As Participant K shared in her individual exit interview, “Peace Circles get open communication with students and staff and that is never a bad thing.” The two participants who did not specifically state student voice as a strength did not stray too far from that sentiment. Participant I stated that he saw strength as that it helps bring closure to situations and allows for students to have a better understanding of one another. While Participant D shared that it allowed an opportunity for people to develop their conversation skills and get that resolution sometimes needed when conflict arises.

**The Strengths and Weaknesses of Peace Circles**

The use of Circles can have many different strengths. The Circle shape implies a sense of community, connection, inclusion, fairness, equality, and wholeness (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2010). When teachers are getting started with Circles in their classrooms, their needs to be a balance of two factors: helping students get to know one another and teaching course content. While many use Circles for problems or to deal with discipline incidents, Circles can be imbedded into the structure of course content through different games and activities. The idea of Circles can be intimidating to both students and adults, but the trick is to introduce them when things are going well so all parties can become familiar and build the needed confidence.

Despite showing positives based on the participants early experiences using Peace Circles in classrooms, it was imperative for the validity of the study to also find out what participants found as limitations when it comes to using Circles in their rooms. Of the limitations given by each participant in their individual exit interview, these were the topics that came up from most to least.

1. Students not taking part in the Circle (five participants)
2. Time and lack thereof (four participants)

3. Vocal students taking over the Circle (one participant)

4. Teachers not holding Circles (one participant)

Most of the participants shared concerns about the newness of this practice and how students not being willing to take part in the Circles could be something that stalls progress. Participant D specifically stated, “A weakness might be that everyone has to be willing to step forward and participate and if they are not then that kind of halts the process and some of the effectiveness of trying to do one.” This was echoed by other participants. Participant I felt as though this being new may make it hard for students to want to sit with someone who they felt disrespected by and put down as a person. Participant J said that we would have to take things in small steps so students can trust the process because these are kids and setting unrealistic goals would only lead to failure. Participant H shared that if people are not as open and the anger is still there then that may cause issues because they may not be ready to listen. Lastly, Participant F tells us that he sees some issues with students no wanting to get on board and be a part of the process. Right after making that statement, he went on to share that rather than giving up, we would need to be willing to make them feel comfortable and maybe start with a one on one conversation before having a full Circle with both of the parties involved. This is valuable because this shows that this participant is willing to push through limitations and sees the effectiveness in using Circles with students.

**Summary**

The primary goal of this study was to take a deep look into understanding teachers’ perceptions of using restorative practices. The findings throughout this chapter provided a factual reporting of the collected data. Through targeted professional development, each participant had
their perceptions and thoughts on restorative justice acknowledged, recorded, transcribed, and articulated during the course of this section. Working with a large group of teachers and staff members who all represented different grade levels allowed for different voices to be heard and multiple perspectives addressed. The participants in this study provided valuable information that can be used as a guide, both at a school and district level, when it comes to the benefits and limitations of using restorative practices in schools. The findings from participants also provides necessary data for a topic that is continuing to be studied across the country. Ultimately, this study might be of support to those interested in finding an alternative to traditional forms of discipline that meets the needs of students, teachers, the community, and society.

In this chapter, the findings and factual information of this study were presented. The findings included a shift in teacher thinking in regards to restorative justice, as well as how teachers explored and experienced restorative justice within their own classrooms. In chapter five, a more succinct summary of the overall findings will be presented. These findings will be linked to the information presented in previous chapters. In addition, chapter five will include the importance of this research and other research in the field, as well as recommendations for the future.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF THE STUDY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

For decades, students have been told that education is the key to success. However, for many, those keys are being held for ransom and the cost is more than most can afford, especially our young Black males. Of all the socially constructed and contested images of Black men that circulate the American cultural landscape, one that continues to resonate with multiple audiences is that of the Black male patriarch who exercises disciplinary authority over Black children (Brockenbrough, 2014). We see this in many television shows such as The Bernie Mac show and Good Times, or movies such as Lean on Me and the OWN Network’s Blackboard Wars. Black males on television shows are being depicted as disciplinarians. For Black males, these forms of entertainment present an image that unfortunately does not reflect scenes in schools. As a student, this researcher did not have a Black male teacher until his sophomore year of college. With that being said, it is vital to the success and survival of Black males in schools that all teachers, especially White women who make up more than 80% of the profession, work to be more culturally aware of who they are teaching and learn alternative ways of dealing with students who are not from the same neighborhood, or environment, or struggle.

The balance between holding children accountable and creating a positive environment for learning is sometimes difficult to achieve (Costello, Wachetel, and Wachtel, 2009). This can often be a battle for teachers in all school districts, but also in unique and more challenging ways for teachers in urban school districts, like LES. The information shared in this chapter summarizes the thoughts and responses of a group of educators who took part in a study focused on the benefits and limitations of restorative practices in schools and with students of all ages and abilities. Although the focus of this study was solely based on teacher perceptions of the use of restorative justice and their experiences with the use of Peace Circles, it was interesting to
both hear and read, through focus group sessions and journal entries, the shift in mindset for these teachers. The investigation revealed that the group of teachers - who once believed that zero tolerance was a necessity in schools-became dedicated to shifting their practice and utilizing the restorative strategies learned through targeted professional development. In this chapter, readers will be presented a summary of the study, a discussion of the study’s findings, including a discussion of the most important findings, and suggestions for future research. Chapter five will also address some of the limitations, recommendations related to the study, and ends with a conclusion.

**Summary of Study**

Based on historical data and current literature (Skiba & Losen, 2016; Smalkowki et al, 2016; Mirsky & Wachtel, 2007; Dancy, 2014), there is a need for alternative types of discipline in schools, especially for Black males. The need to understand how classroom teachers perceived the use of restorative justice in their rooms and school buildings was apparent. Along with this information, the limited amount of research available on the use of restorative justice in classrooms across the United Stated was another driving factor in the need for this study. Schools continue to rely on tough sanctions that do not build social skills or resolve conflict (Ashley & Burke, 2010). These researchers see restorative justice as a tool schools need to use to prevent or address conflicts before it escalates, and deal with conflict/misbehavior as it occurs. The purpose of this study was to conduct an investigation that added to the literature available to better understand what restorative justice is and study how teachers perceive and use restorative justice after professional development was completed. This study relied on the information presented and collected from the participants. Those responses can help guide and support schools who
wish to effectively and meaningfully implement restorative practices at their school, especially schools in large, urban districts.

The following two research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent do professional development workshops influence teachers’ knowledge and perceptions of restorative justice for discipline?

2. What are teachers’ early experiences using Peace Circles in their classrooms?

The researcher’s personal experience as a Black male in school as a student, classroom teacher, and current administrator, along with seeing a need for change in how discipline is being handled in schools is what encouraged him to conduct this qualitative study. The setting was a large metropolitan school district, in the Midwestern United Stated, with approximately 93 schools, and new schools slated to open in the upcoming school year. The school where the study was conducted is a public elementary school with a yearly attendance between 490 and 510 students. Being aware of his own assumptions when it comes to discipline in schools, especially when it comes to Black males, it was imperative for him to rely on the participants as informants for this study.

Multiple formats were used to collect data. These included focus group meetings, journal entries, teacher shared stories, article reading responses, video observation responses, and individual exit interviews. In the study, one-on-one interviews and focus group sessions were both utilized to investigate teacher responses. Interview questions were developed prior to the start of the study and adjusted as the study moved forward as the researcher saw new avenues to address and answer the research questions. After the interviews were conducted and all data collected, they were transcribed solely by the researcher. Coding was done and code families were created using the ATLAS.ti software.
Eleven participants were included in the study. Participants included teachers and staff members who worked with grade levels ranging from Prekindergarten to eighth grade, and students who fall into the special education, regular education, or gifted and talented categories. This allowed for a variety of perspectives and responses. Purposeful sampling was used in this study because each participant would bring a different background because of the grade level they were currently working with in the school building. Rather than focusing on one grade level or school level, the researcher wanted to allow for teachers of all grade levels to be a part of the study.

This study contributes to filling the gap in research around the use, benefits, and limitations of restorative justice in classrooms in a large, urban, school district, in the Midwest and how teachers’ perceptions affect the success or failure of the implementation of said practices. The experiences of these participants play a role in the research around what teachers feel they need in order to view this practice as both necessary and effective.

**Discussion of the Findings**

The discussion of findings provides an in-depth guide to explain the outcomes which are supported by examples provided by all participants in the study. The discussions of findings were organized based on the themes found in the study. This section provides both schools and districts with feedback on teacher perceptions of using restorative practices in classrooms and steps that can be taken based on the participants’ experiences and exposure to target and various professional development sessions. Through qualitative data analysis, I was able to answer my research questions.
To what extent do professional development workshops influence teachers’ knowledge and perceptions of restorative justice for discipline?

When working with adult educators, it is important to help them understand where they are in their beliefs. An essential component of coaching or professional development, for educators, is supporting others to become conscious of their belief systems - about children, learning, students of color, immigrants, and so on (Aguilar, 2013). For over two decades, policymakers responded to concerns about school safety and disruptions with a “get tough” philosophy relying upon zero tolerance and frequent out-of-school suspensions and expulsions (Skiba and Losen, 2016). Black males remain one of the most marginalized student groups in US schools (Brown, Dancy, & Davis, 2013; Dancy & Brown, 2012; Ferguson, 2003; Howard, 2013; Lewis & Erskine, 2008; Noguera, 2003; Polite & Davis; 1999). This marginalization includes over-expulsions; over-representations in special, general, and vocational education classes, and under-representation in rigorous or gifted and talented courses (Ford, 2011; Grantham, 2011; Noguera, 2003; Ross, 2012). Realizing the many decades that teachers have been operating under the confines of zero tolerance, when it came to learning about restorative justice, the use of effective professional development workshops would be a vital part of any shifts in mindset and classroom practice.

At LES, the school has stated on numerous online platforms such as their school webpage and Instagram page that they focus on the whole child. Focusing on the whole child means more than their academic abilities and achievement. This includes their behavior, emotional needs, and communication. According to Martinsone (2016), successful student achievement is should be comprised of academic skills and social skills. This will also allow students to be better prepared for life after school. Ashley and Burke (2010), shared that restorative discipline provides
opportunities to socialize youth and teach them how to be productive members of society. Although more districts and schools are taking on the charge of finding alternative methods to discipline, it is ultimately up to the classroom teacher to ensure that student needs are being met – both academically and socially. This study provided an inquiry to the perception of teachers who were learning about the restorative justice and attempting different practices in their classrooms.

As discussed in chapter four of this study, teacher perception of restorative justice was heavily in favor of utilizing this practice after the meetings and professional development were completed. Participants felt that what made restorative practice most helpful was the way it provided an easy framework for what can at times be intense conversations filled with emotions. Participant H stated that she found restorative practices helpful in that they have “changed my mindset on how to guide students to repair harm done and make amends.” Another participant shared that they saw the benefits of using restorative practices with students who are not seen or classified as normal behavior problems. Participant F felt that the practices also worked when dealing with minor infractions when using the restorative questions as a guide to ask student what happened and what could be a resolution.

Another participant shared a story of using the restorative questions learned in the focus group session with a pair of students after class. These students had got into a confrontation during class and rather than handle things the “normal” way, this teacher waited until after class to speak with the students. Asking questions like, “what happened?” and “how can you make this right?”, the students talked through the situation and by the end of conversation, shed some tears and according to the teacher, understood each other’s side of the situation better and was able to repair the hurt right then and there. According to Fullan (2002), one of the most challenging
characteristics of education is the management of change. Many of the participants in this study were veteran teachers who were used to doing things one way for decades, so this was a major breakthrough. To see Participant J take steps to change their normal routines, and take steps to change how they would normally deal with a situation like this in class, was a clear example of a shift in teacher practice. Taddeo (1997), tells us how teacher attitudes clearly have an impact on a students’ learning and development. The above example shows that to be factual.

Participants were asked if they would use the information learned on restorative justice after the study was complete and to explain their choice. All participants stated they would use the strategies learned in their classrooms, some going as far as saying they would whether the school decided to go with full implementation or not. Participant H stated that she would use the information learned even if the program was not implemented within the school because she felt “the process of RJ will allow me to continue to build more trust and meaningful relationships with my students.” Another participant shared how she had already been implementing restorative practice techniques in her classroom this year and had seen a positive response. Participant G goes on to share that she has seen students respond more positively when she uses the restorative questions rather than “me just telling them what to do but talking it through and making them think about what they had done and what they could do better.”

Many of the participants did call for more training so that they could feel more comfortable using the practices. Participant D stated, “If the information comes with tools and techniques to try I will definitely use them, but if the information is just theory, I will most likely struggle with implementation.” Participant C would like to be trained more so that she is not simply doing ‘restorative justice-ish’ practices.” Others shared the same sentiment. The participants call for further professional development was almost universal.
At the start of the study, less than half, 45.5% of participants believed that the school could benefit from a restorative justice-based school program. By the end of the study, 90% of participants believed that the school would benefit from this type of program by selecting “yes.” One participant selected “maybe,” saying she would like more training.

*What are teachers’ early experiences using Peace Circles in their classrooms?*

Restorative justice programs provide an opportunity for harm to be repaired. According to Wachtel (1999), those who fail to punish naughty children and offending youths and adults are often labeled as “permissive.” Mindsets like the one described are why so many schools continue to operate with a zero tolerance approach to discipline. Despite the fact that school districts across the country continue to not see the positive behavior and academic results expected with a zero tolerance discipline approach, the shift to a more restorative approach is what might be the answer. With the use of practices such as Peace Circles, schools and teachers are allowing for the opportunity for students’ voices to be heard and find new ways to get a view into what a child is feeling in the moment of harm. Circles, or Peacemaking Circles, bring people together to talk about issues and resolve conflict (Ashley & Burke, 2007). By offering opportunities for safe and open communication, Circles help to resolve conflict, strengthen relationships, teach empathy and respect, and empower all involved.

With anything new, there is a time frame of uncertainty and fear. Teachers were hesitant at first to attempt Peace Circles in their classrooms because of reasons such as; “I don't know how to do it,” “I haven’t seen it done before with kids like ours,” and “Kids aren’t going to want to talk about their feelings.” This researcher took all of those comments seriously and used them to drive the study. By finding targeted articles and video observations that showed examples of effective Peace Circles, teachers were able to become more familiar with a base level knowledge
of the how to conduct a Peace Circle. In order to address the comment about videos showing kids who are not like the ones at LES or a part of Urban School District, two separate professional development sessions were planned and executed where participants listened, took part in role playing activities, and witnessed these trained professionals lead Community Building Circles in a fourth grade classroom at an urban school, with “kids like ours.”. As time progressed throughout the study, participants became more comfortable with the use of the restorative questions and were able to hold impromptu Circles and whole class Community Building Circles.

After the study was completed, teachers continued to use the strategies learned to hold Peace Circles and community building Circles in their rooms. The researcher became aware of this practice as teachers would come and report back about how the Circles they held went. One of the participants came to my office and share their story of an attempted Circle. Participant D shared,

So this morning I just wanted to try, just a little bit, so I kept it simple. I just called them (students) all up to the carpet and sat them on the perimeter. And I said, this is called a communication Circle, I just call it the Circle. And I had a monkey hat and I said this monkey is the only time you can talk is when you are holding it. And I went through what they talked about on the video (Healing Circles at Shaw High School Video – on February PowerPoint). I went, “You can’t even go, oh yeah, I have seen that before. I was amazed; they did not talk, unless they were holding the monkey so that was really good.
And we were talking about some of the issues we had yesterday; we had a bad afternoon yesterday. So I asked, “Why it was bad and what could we do better and I am here to come up with a solution so I need your help.” I know put it on me. I said, “So this is how I was feeling yesterday.” So I said raise your hand and I’ll toss you the monkey when it’s your turn to talk. And it went pretty well (teacher smiles).

After meeting with the teacher, I reflected on the conversation:

This is interesting that she tried this so soon after our group sessions were done because she was a bit hesitant about trying it. Hesitant because she feels she needs to learn more about the Circle Process and the questioning, but also about doing it right. We talked about how we have more learning to do but it’s not about being perfect but growing. She requested finding videos where the Circles may not be as perfect as the ones I have been showing. So for her to immediately go and try it with her homeroom is great and shows that she is buying in and willing to give this a true effort! She is also a teacher that constantly makes note of the time issue and how stressful teachers already have it with testing and many other responsibilities. So it was great to see her willingness to make this attempt.

Overall, teacher response to their experience with using Peace Circles was positive. After being exposed to effective professional development and having trained restorative justice professionals come in and share more specific information to the group, it was apparent that this group felt that the use of Peace Circles in their classroom would be a positive addition to their routines.
**Teachers’ Learnings and Takeaways related to Restorative Practices and Race**

When working with the participants in our focus group sessions, the topic of discipline and the impact zero tolerance has had on schools, students, and specifically Black males was discussed on numerous occasions. Participants were asked to respond in one of their online journal responses why they believed school districts across the United Stated are in search of alternative methods of discipline. All participants felt that school districts are in search of alternative discipline techniques because what is currently being done is not working or helping students. Participant G shared, “When zero tolerance policies are put into place, students may become more angry and more reactive because their social-emotional needs are not being met and the student does not view the policy as justice.” Another participant felt that schools are fighting a battle they are struggling to win with all the violence and disrespect students are exposed to both inside and outside of schools. Participant C believes that public schools are a microcosm of society. She felt as though “social media, violent video games and movies, and a lack of respect affects the school environment.” She also felt that schools have to find alternative methods of discipline to meet the changing needs of society as “schools have lost the authority to discipline children based on society’s views which has led to children having more rights than teachers.”

According to Losen (2014), research shows that punitive sanctions may be the toxic effect that drives students – particularly minority and poor students – out of school altogether, resulting in a “school-to-prison” pipeline. What participants were able to discover as we went through the study is that, even though Black males were being suspended at a higher rate than their White peers, these students were not committing more serious offenses. Black males were receiving exclusionary discipline for offenses defined as “disrespect,” “willful defiance,” and
“disruption.” A possible explanation for the disparity in discipline could be the move toward more surveillance and law enforcement activities in schools, particularly those in urban environments with large numbers of youth of color (Fronius, 2016). These activities include, but are not limited to, armed police, security forces patrolling the grounds, metal detectors, security cameras, and locker searches. All of these additions to school buildings leave students perceiving that their schools are like prison and that they are viewed as criminals who will commit a crime. Participant E shared that same feeling and said so in both her pre and post focus group survey journal responses. She shared:

**Pre Focus Group Response** – “The population of Black and Brown people in America are no longer a minority. When you read about school and prison reform, it is those populations who make up the majority of discipline and incarceration issues. It gives society the idea that Brown and Black people are not as “good” or have something within themselves that lacks control for which they happen to end up in those kind of situations.”

**Post Focus Group Response** – “Too many minority students aren't able to live the American Dream of being successful. Minority students are seen differently. Even in 2018, there are still educators, police, and people in authority in general who look at minority individuals (especially young Black/Hispanic males) as non-learners. Those same groups of people mentioned seem so surprised when a minority achieves success. The thing about Restorative Justice is that everyone is equal—even the offender. There isn't that uneven view of a group of people. Disrespect is inbred in Traditional Discipline practices—This is what I mean, you disrespected someone and hurt them, so you should be
disrespected in discipline. It's just not a solution. When you don't take the time to understand the why of a situation, guess what? It's going to happen again.”

With the work of this study and others, we see that as long as Black males are treated as criminals simply waiting to be convicted, rather than students deserving a valid education, schools will continue to spin the wheel of insanity in doing the same thing while expecting different results and outcomes for these students. At the end of the study, each participant gave a response to what was their biggest takeaway or learning about restorative justice and its use with students. See appendix Q for responses.

**Teachers’ perceptions of using Restorative Justice in classrooms**

Teacher participants were a part of a created restorative justice team. There were weekly meetings held during each month of the spring semester. In January, team members took part in pre-focus group sessions questionnaire where they were able to share their understanding, comfort level, and support of restorative practices. In March, team members completed a post focus group session questionnaire to see if their teaching practice changed or was impacted through the gained knowledge and implementation of different restorative practices in their classrooms. Teachers met during the allotted two hundred minutes of the school schedule, which meant they did not need to meet outside of contractual hours. The team met to discuss the understanding, learning needs, and bridges/barriers of the implemented practices in their classrooms.

Team members were also asked to complete a brief, bi-weekly journal prompt that collected information on the positives and negatives of the implemented restorative practices during that week outside of the meeting time. Each month, a reflection was done by participants to track the growth of their knowledge of restorative practices and if their teaching practice had
been modified. It was vital to this study to better understand teacher perception and their attitude toward this new approach to discipline. It is believed that teacher attitudes and beliefs are important in the understanding of the success and failures of educational innovations due to their attitudes being deeply connected to the strategies they use to promote teaching and learning (OCED, 2009).

**Limitations of the Study**

Not acknowledging the limitations of the study would be a disservice to this study and those interested. As a researcher, it was imperative that the limitations were known prior to the study so that there were no red flags during or at the conclusion of this study. One of the limitations going into the study was the topic of race, specifically around Black males. Because all except two participants in the study were Caucasian, there was a fear by this researcher that the participants would hesitate to share their true feelings for fear of being seen as “racist”. In this study, participants had three different ways to address the topic in hopes that during one, if not all, they would feel comfortable sharing their honest opinions. These three ways included the focus groups with colleagues, online journal responses where participants used pseudonyms, and in the individual exit interview. Another limitation of the study ended up being addressed during the study based on participant feedback. The scheduled professional development sessions were all going to be led by the researcher. As time went on and participants learned more on the subject matter, they wanted to hear from fully trained professionals. This was taken care of and three trained professionals were brought in for two separate sessions.

The participants provided more than a sufficient amount of information to adequately and effectively answer the proposed research questions. With that being said, the research presented in this study is solely based on a group of teachers learning about restorative practices and
attempting one of the specific practices, in their classrooms. No one in this group left the study an officially trained and qualified practitioner of restorative practices. Having the participants learn through this study was vital in gaining the support of staff members in the building. Focusing more on actual classroom attempts and learning specific restorative techniques, as opposed to just learning about restorative justice through article readings and video observations, allowed for more personal responses on the functionality and effectiveness of restorative practices by the participants. It was important to hear how these techniques impacted teacher practice and addressed any unconscious or conscious bias towards behavior in students, particularly, Black males.

The limitations of this study should not be overlooked nor seen as a weakness. Rather, the limitations are shared so that for future research and for researchers who have similar interests, they can address and confront any assumptions that are left after reading through this study and its findings.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study suggested many possibilities for further research, including the inclusion of students in the research process so that their voices could be heard, documented, and become a part of the data analysis. One of those ways could be to allow for these students to voice their thoughts and truly be heard. The benefits of being able to hear directly from students on how they felt about the use of restorative practice could be a new avenue for future research.

A growing body of researchers have reported that educational leaders are constantly searching to find the best methods for teaching African-American students who attend urban public school (NCLB, 2002). One out of every 10 African-American students drop-out of high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). We continue to see how the American education
system has failed to address properly the educational and cultural needs of African-American students who attend public schools, which has caused major behavioral, social, and academic problems (Cholewa & West-Olatunju, 2008; Shockley, 2007). These behavioral concerns need to be addressed differently based on what has been become evident under zero tolerance policies. This can be the use of restorative justice which calls for a paradigm shift for teachers and an increased student voice.

Because the use of restorative justice caters to all student races and abilities, another study could explore that what many perceive as the “challenging” student versus the “not as challenging” student. So often during this study, participants would equate the use of restorative practices with the students perceived as most difficult in their class or the school. However, all students can benefit from these practices. It would be interesting to see the outcomes and teacher responses based on working with the two perceived student types. It would be beneficial for teachers and readers of the research to show clear benefits to students who fall on both sides of the behavioral spectrum. Experts argued that educators should teach students:

“Academic skills that are supposed to be taught using culturally relevant instructions that connect the content of the lessons to the children. Students should exit classrooms and school with some socio political awareness as well as cultural knowledge about themselves.” (Boutte & Strickland, 2008, p, 55)

We also know that nationally, Black and Latino students are suspended and expelled at a much higher rate than white students, even for the same or less egregious offenses. Another study could focus on the teaching experience students receive in their classrooms by taking a closer look at students in classrooms where culturally relevant education presents learning in a way that addresses the cultural needs of the student body. Black youth are more likely to be disciplined
and more likely to receive harsh discipline when those punishments were discretionary (Kang-Brown, Trone, Fratello, Daftary-Kapur, 2013). It is important that educators pay attention to the need for these students to experience culturally relevant education.

**Conclusion**

Since the conclusion of the study, teachers have been inquiring into the next steps and when they will be implemented at the school. They shared how much they want to continue the learning and the work. Participants will continue to participate in targeted focus groups and professional development sessions led by the researcher and trained restorative justice professionals. Along with these steps, a visit to a school in an urban district will be scheduled so that participants can see restorative practices in action with students similar and different to those at LES. Hands-on learning, with intentional design, allows for participants to apply their learning more easily and effectively. This qualitative study answered the following research questions:

1. To what extent do professional development workshops influence teachers’ knowledge and perceptions of restorative justice for discipline?

2. What are teachers’ early experiences using Peace Circles in their classrooms?

The participants in this study shared their perception of the use of restorative practices in their classrooms as necessary. Seeing the necessity for change in how discipline is being handled in this school and schools in general, participants did ask for more targeted training over time so they would feel more confident in what they were doing when it comes to utilizing restorative practices. Participants felt that their time and exposure to restorative justice was useful and allowed for a change in mindset along with practice. Participants also felt validated by their new found knowledge when making attempts with the restorative practices in their classrooms and seeing success from these attempts. A majority of the participants used the word “excited” when
asked what their perception was about using restorative practices in their classrooms at the conclusion of the study. All participants appeared to leave with a feeling of motivation and they were even inspired to share what they learned with others. Many shared how they were continuing to learn about restorative practices after the study by sharing different conversations they had with colleagues or family members. These anecdotes were shared with the researcher via text, email, and face-to-face conversations.

This study provided insight into how teachers perceived the use of restorative practices in their classrooms and how PD would influence teachers’ knowledge of restorative justice. The results shared in this study are a direct result of participants’ experiences. Utilizing the voice of all participants through focus groups and individual exit interviews was invaluable as this allowed for multiple perspectives to be recorded and presented when discussing the effectiveness of the development of each individual. Participants were motivated by the small successes they experienced and the interactions amongst the group as they learned together. Participants appreciated being a part of the process and shared how this was a more effective way to create change across the school instead of the top-down mandates that so many of them have been exposed to over the years they have worked in an urban district. Being a part of the team left participants feeling included and supported. Because discipline continues to be a major topic of discussion in districts across the country, especially when it comes to Black males and special education students, schools and district leaders should explore the use of Restorative Justice and work to implement it with integrity in their schools as part of a growth mindset and a strategy of change.
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Appendix A

SIGNED CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Study:

TEACHERS’ PERCEPTION OF USING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN CLASSROOMS

Researcher's Contact Information:

Ajayi Monell
216-246-6269
Ajayi.monell@clevelandmetroschools.org

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research study conducted by Ajayi Monell of Kennesaw State University. Before you decide to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Description of Project

The purpose of the study is explore what happens when teachers are made knowledgeable about restorative justice and its methods of support around discipline and relationship building. Specifically, teachers will engage in professional development where article readings, video observations, and open dialoguing will take place in both group and individual settings. The anticipated findings will be around finding ways to both engage and improve teacher understanding and use of restorative justice in their classroom settings.

Explanation of Procedures

Participants will take part in an initial group meeting where the purpose of the study and forms of data collection will be discussed. Participants will sign their IRB consent forms at this meeting. The first part of this process where data will be collected is a focus group session with all participants. In this session, participants will be able to speak freely about RJ, the study, its topic, and their knowledge or understanding of what RJ is and if they feel it will benefit their students and the school. After participants have shared their initial thoughts, a brochure with information about RJ along with a PowerPoint presentation will be shared to give each participant an overview of what RJ is and aims to do as a practice.

Participants will be informed that we will be reading articles and viewing videos on RJ as a whole and one of its targeted practices, Peace Circles. Participants will be asked to complete journal writings after each article is read and video is viewed. Along with prompted writings,
participants will be able to write freely about different things they learn on their own about RJ or Peace Circles and also about different practices that are attempted in their classrooms with students, parents, and/or staff. Journals will be collected bi-weekly.

Participants will be asked to take part in or complete the following:
Focus Group 1
Article Readings & Written Responses
Journal Entries
Closing Interviews
Focus Group 2

Time Required

The timeline for this study will be December 2017 – March 2018. During this time, different forms of data will be collected. The time required for each task will vary. Group meetings will last no more than 45 minutes and happen twice a month.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th># of times</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Time of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Focus Group</td>
<td>Twice</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>Beginning and end of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Article Readings</td>
<td>Bi-Weekly</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>Throughout study</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Video Observations</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>Throughout study</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Journal Entries</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Time varies</td>
<td>Throughout study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Closing Interview</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>End of study</td>
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Risks or Discomforts

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts for participating in this study. The researcher will be the only one with access to the collected data. None of the collected data will be shared with the other teachers’ supervisor(s). None of the collected data will be included in teachers’ files, or used for evaluative purposes. Participants will be encouraged to be honest throughout the process and with their reflections. Participants will be made fully aware of the data collection and data usage in the informed consent form. Participation in this study is voluntary and participants are able to withdraw at any time during the process.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefits to you for taking part in the study; however, the researcher and participants may learn more about restorative justice and the benefits that can be tied with the use of this approach. An outcome of this study could be that teachers learn a new method of dealing with classroom discipline, re-establishing broken relationships, and build a more successful
cultural connection with their students, particularly Black males. This may in turn lead to affect and increase classroom student achievement as target student groups will be spending more time in class while experiencing a more positive environment with teachers and peers.

**Compensation (if applicable)**

Not applicable

**Confidentiality**

The results of this participation will be anonymous. All participant, including the school, district, and staff names will be assigned a pseudonym name for the entirety of the study. All printed documentation will be maintained in a locked, safe location. This place is a location file cabinet in the private residence of the researcher. All electronic content will be saved password protected files on a password protected computer.

Individual interviews will be conducted in a private room. During this time, a “Reserved – No Interruption Please” sign will be placed on the door to prohibit interruptions. The window of the room will be covered. Only the researcher and the research participants will be present during interviews. Focus groups participants will be asked to keep all discussions confidential, not sharing what is discussed with other staff members or anyone else.

**Inclusion Criteria for Participation**

For this study, random sampling will not be used. Purposeful sampling will be used as participants will be selected based on varied grade levels, subject taught, years of experience, and stance on disciplinary practices. These teachers will be of any level of experience or seniority who are teaching at least one class during the current school year. The gender breakdown of the staff members includes seven females and three males. The majority of the staff members identify as Caucasian.

**Signed Consent**

I agree and give my consent to participate in this research project. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

__________________________________________________
Signature of Participant or Authorized Representative, Date

____________________________________
Signature of Investigator, Date
PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding these activities should be addressed to the Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 585 Cobb Avenue, KH3403, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (470) 578-2268.
Appendix B

Timeline for Study

December - confirm participants for study (teachers in multiple grade bands and disciplines)
  - Initial focus group session

January - Article reading focus group & video viewings
  - Topic – What is restorative justice?
  - Have teachers collect discipline data
  - Have documented conversations about discipline by race in our school and teacher classrooms

February - Article reading focus group & video viewings
  - Topic – What are peacemaking Circles (PC) and how does it work/look?
  - Teacher attempts in classroom and track data
  - Teacher completes question of the week on implementation of PC

March - Focus Group Session and
  Closing interview with participants
Appendix C

Pre/Post Focus Group Questions

1. What is Restorative Justice to you?

2. What are your initial thoughts about restorative based programs in your classroom?

3. Please share your thoughts on what you consider to be some strengths of using restorative practice based programs in schools?

4. Please share your thoughts on what you consider to be some risks of using restorative practice based programs in schools?

5. What does Zero Tolerance mean to you?

6. Why do you think school districts across the U.S. are in search of alternative methods to traditional discipline?

7. Do you believe that your school could benefit from a restorative practice based school program?
Appendix D

Individual Interview Questions

1. Do you feel zero-tolerance policies are an effective way to control discipline at schools?
2. Is student voice both valued and utilized at your school?
3. How do you feel the staff will respond to alternative ways of discipline?
4. What is restorative justice and how does it work/look?
5. What are some strengths of RJ? What are some limitations of RJ?
6. What is your overall perception of using restorative practices in schools?
7. What are peacemaking Circles (PC) and how does it work/look?
8. What are some strengths of PC? What are some limitations PC?

Added Questions

1. Do you think ZT has had more of a positive or negative effect on schools?
2. With time being something that is a major concern with the group, what are some things or ways you think it can be combatted?
3. What are your thoughts on how RJ could work with the extreme students?
4. What has been your experience using PC in your classroom?
5. What are your thoughts on why Black males being discipline more severely?
6. Do you think the use of RJ can be effective when it comes to how Black males are being punished more harshly in schools?
Appendix E

Journal Entry Questions

January 26, 2018 Journal Questions

1. Between zero tolerance and restorative justice, which do you believe is more effective?
2. Give an example of a time where the use of ZT policies solved a problem?
3. Give an example of a time where the use of ZT policies made a problem worst?
4. How do you see the school-to-prison pipeline affecting the students in our school population?

February 2, 2018 Journal Questions

1. What is Restorative Justice to you?
2. Imagine you are in a conflict with a person who is important in your life. What values do you want to guide your conduct as you try to work out the conflict? Restorative Justice or Zero Tolerance? Why?
3. What change would you like to see in your school community? What can you do to promote that change?
4. Do you feel you will use the information learned on restorative justice after this study? Why or why not?
5. I believe that the PD workshops are influencing my knowledge of RJ for discipline?
6. What is the definition of a peace Circle?

February 12, 2018 Journal Questions

1. What is Restorative Justice to you?
2. Share your biggest learning so far with Restorative Practices.
3. Where do you find Restorative Practices most helpful; what is working for you?
4. What other supports or training do you need to better utilize Restorative Practices to help make the PDs more influential on you knowledge of RJ?
5. Please match the term with its correct definition.
   a. Affective Statements
   b. Restorative Questions
   c. Classroom Circles
6. What is the definition of a peace Circle?

February 20, 2018 Journal Questions

1. Did you find the Feb 21st PD session helpful and informative? (Led by staff from Luis Munos Morin)
2. Please share why you found the session helpful or not.
3. Did you find the Feb 22nd PD session helpful and informative? (led by Ms. Tilow)
4. Please share why you found the session helpful or not.
5. What do you see as the biggest challenge for implementing RJ/RP at LES?
6. Which student group do you think is more negatively affected by punitive consequences?
7. What is the definition of a peace Circle?

March 2, 2018 Journal Questions

1. Can you share a time when you reacted to a situation in a negative way and wish you could have changed things?
2. Write about a time, as a teacher, where you were pushed out of your comfort zone?
3. Share an experience, as a teacher, where you discovered that someone was very different from the negative assumptions you first made about that person?
4. Share an experience, as a teacher or colleague, of causing harm to someone and then dealing with it in a way you felt good about? How did you let go of the anger or resentment?
5. How do you think the use of peacemaking Circles in your classroom/school can address discipline concerns and help raise achievement in students? If you don’t feel it will help the school, please explain why.
6. Do you feel you will use the information learned on peacemaking Circles after this study? Why or why not?
Appendix F

Resources for Study

Articles for Reading

1. Restorative Justice: A Different Approach to Disciple -
   https://www.weareteachers.com/restorative-justice-a-different-approach-to-discipline/

2. Restorative Justice – What it is and is not -
   https://www.rethinkingschools.org/articles/restorative-justice

3. Discipline: Restorative justice expands in Oakland -
   https://www.districtadministration.com/article/discipline-restorative-justice-expands-oakland

4. Implementing restorative justice – A guide for schools -

5. Teaching Restorative Practice with Classroom Circles -

Websites


Videos to View


2. Dr. Maisha Winn speaks on “Justice on Both Sides: Toward a Restorative Justice Discourse in Schools” - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9nqmINvyss

3. Restorative Practice’s to Resolve Conflict/Build Relationships - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcLuVeHlrSs


Information Packet


Update article and video links with date used

January 22, 2018 Group Meeting

- What is restorative justice - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sE8TDzlR2tg
- Restorative Justice: Why Do We Need It? - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8N3LihLvfa0
- Restorative Justice (TED Talk) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSv-qOiYjrA
- Article for Reading - https://www.rethinkingschools.org/articles/restorative-justice

January 29, 2018 Group Meeting

- What is restorative justice? - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfQhfN6PxP1
• A Restorative Approach to Discipline -
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5r1yvyP141U

• Implementing restorative justice – A guide for schools (p.6-11) -

• What is restorative justice – PowerPoint created by researcher

February 5, 2018 Group Meeting

• Restorative Justice in Everyday Life: Beyond the Formal Ritual (p. 1-4) -
  http://www.iirp.edu/pdf/RJInEverydayLife.pdf

• Implementing restorative justice – A guide for schools (p.13-14) -

February 8, 2018 Group Meeting

• Restorative Practice in Action at San Francisco Unified School District –
  https://youtu.be/bOi6ZLOwWM

• Healing Circle at Shaw Middle School - http://www.spokaneschools.org/Page/32515

• Provided folder with restorative justice resources
  
  o -PowerPoint
  
  o -an overview of Peacemaking Circles
  
  o -the "Five Magic" RJ Questions
  
  o -sample prompt questions/topics for Circles
  
  o -a card with the set RJ Questions [thank you Mrs. Participant A for laminating these]
February 14, 2018 Group Meeting

- What is restorative justice 2 – PowerPoint created by researcher
- The Continuum of Restorative Practices –
  file:///C:/Users/moneaj01/Downloads/The%20Continuum%20of%20Restorative%20Practices.pdf

February 15, 2018 – Resource sharing Examples of Impromptu Meetings / Student Led Circles (non-group meeting)

- Restorative Practices: Impromptu Meeting –
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1io7YH2yTU
- Justice Committee: Using Restorative Practices to Resolve Conflict
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgw7gY9fbz8

February 20, 2018 – Professional Development Sessions led by outside professionals

- Revamping Affective Statements
- Restorative Practices: Fostering Positive Relationships

February 27, 2018 – Group Meeting

- Sample Circle Script
- Types of Circles by Tiers
- Using Dialogue Circles to Support Classroom Management -
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTr4v0eYigM

March 6, 2018 – Group Meeting

- Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools: A Research review (p. 18-23) -
• Restorative Justice in Oakland Schools Implementation and Impacts 2014 -

• To curb conflict, a Colorado high school replaces punishment with conversation -
  https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/colorado-high-school-replaces-punishment-talking-Circles

• UMOJA – Equipping Students through Restorative Justice -
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imdNDfaFKEU
Appendix G

Visual Example – Notecard Activity
Appendix H

Participant Comparison of What is Restorative Justice

The information presented below shows the participants initial thoughts about what restorative justice was based on taking an educated guess. The second response, highlighted in grey, you see what each participant shared in their individual exit interview.

Participant A - When I hear Restorative Justice I think of the criminal justice system. The idea of restoring justice to a group or social setting by "restoring" or rectifying the wrong.

Participant A - What I have learned from it is that it is basically taking harm, when a child or someone has been harmed, and making peace with it. And I think it’s the, it’s putting the human in human kind. Its letting those kids realize that, “Wow, how their impacting, their actions, their words, how it is impacting other people.”

Participant B - I'm not sure, but I think it's when one person offends another and they work together to come up with a solution.

Participant B - I think RJ is not just focusing on the negative. I think we take both people or parties, how many every people are involved. Then we take everyone’s side and we come up with a happy or not even happy, but a positive way to address that situation so it doesn’t happen again and there’s a resolution and whether or not those people become friends, at least they can be tolerant of each other until they can learn each other a little bit better.

Participant C - I think Restorative Justice has something to do with restoring student’s behavior in a just or fair way.

Participant C - It is the process of hearing voices. Hearing the kids. Hearing what they have to say and why things happen and what actually happened and how they are responsible for it. So it is a lot of open communication. Still has a consequence. The consequences don’t go away but it
is not as punitive. So I think it is basically open communication, see what they need, let them know how you feel. And hopefully come down with a solution.

Participant D - I have no previous knowledge of restorative justice. If I were to guess, I would say it similar in context to the concept of "You break it; you fix it." When a consequence is provided for the behavior its true purpose is to repair the damage done, whether emotional or physical. Consequences are not automatic but logically fit the behavior.

Participant D - RJ is a program that allows both offenders and victims to come together and have a reflective discussion about what happened, what people were thinking, what they are thinking about now that it has occurred, and maybe ways to repair the relationship and move forward in a more productive manner that just saying you did this, here your consequence, let’s move on with our lives. It is about conversations. Between kids and adults, adults and adults.

Participant E - My understanding of Restorative Justice is viewing our students without the prejudices and bias contained in society toward any social group.

Participant E - RJ to me is responsibility. Each and every one of us is responsible for how we act and what we do and what we say. And RJ is a way for us to discuss, for the person that’s offended.

Participant F - I would think that restorative justice is a way to bring a person who has had a history behavioral problem back into the fold of a classroom or society.

Participant F - I view it as an ongoing conversation. To me it is an opportunity to talk to the kids and have that conversation about what they’re doing and why they are doing it. And it is also a moral code. If we can get the behavior under control, the academic will automatically kick in.

Participant G - Restorative Justice to me could be when a student is teased, bullied or has unacceptable behavior. Justice implies that a child feels fairly treated listened to and able to feel
that the end result provides results of a "punishment" to the wrongdoer or consequences that are fair to them if they break the rules.

Participant G - to me RJ is the whole concept that you don’t have a set standard for every infraction. The point isn’t to punish but to reteach, relearn, have the child see what they did wrong, what they could have done differently, how their behavior affected themselves and others.

Participant H - To me, Restorative Justice means trying to repair or "restore" behavior rather than punish students for misbehavior.

Participant H - RJ is working individually with a child to figure out why they did what they did and how they can repair that, as opposed to saying you did this and here is your punishment. Trying to figure out why they did that and how to repair that damage and how to move forward.

Participant I - It's difficult to answer at this point, however I will assume that it refers to putting into place a discipline system that is fair or just to all individuals involved.

Participant I - RJ in my opinion is when an issue occurs that you are able to take the perpetrator and the victim and have them sit together and have the person who committed the problem be able to listen to the victim, understand, hopefully, how his or her action may have affected that person. It does not prevent them from receiving an actually consequence but it could help mend the relationship or help to create a bond or more of a relationship than what was there.

Participant J - Restoring rules and management styles for authorities to take control.

Participant J - RJ is a collaborative effort where is there is an issues or even if there is not an issue, just getting everybody on the same page to understand what’s important and try to avoid issues.
Participant K - Restoring students dignity by allowing students involved to get together and discuss the problems in hopes of coming up with a solution to their problems. It lets the students take responsibility for what is happening within the school.

Participant K - To me it is bringing the parties together to talk over what happened and to come to some sort of solution to handle the problem so everyone can move forward and not dwell on what happened.
Appendix I

Visual Example – Parties of RJ

Restorative Justice involves three parties:

1. the victim
   or the individual harmed

2. the offender
   or the individual who caused the harm

3. the community
   the place where the harm was committed
Appendix J

Focus Group Political Cartoon
Appendix K

February 21 PD Agenda

Agenda
Establish Group Norms
Check-In
Admit Ticket
Restorative Techniques
- affective statements
- affective questions
- impromptu conferences
- restorative circles

Q + A
check out
Appendix L

February 21 PD Meeting Norms

Group Norms

Engaged
Respectful
Active Listening
Professional
Thoughtful Responses
Active Participation
Appendix M

February 21 PD T-Chart Responses
Appendix N

February 21 PD Peace Circle Documents

Circle Scenario Template

Circle Topic: Mathematics

Type of Circle: Proactive

Circle Goal: Activate Prior Knowledge

Circle Question(s):

To begin our circle, I would like you to share one of your favorite order of operations. One of my favorites is addition. I will go to my left.

Next, in order to review our multiplication facts, we will play a game called I have, who has. The directions are as follows:

I will begin by reading my card aloud. The person who has the card with the correct answer to my question reads his or her card aloud. And so on. Please listen for your turn to avoid breaking the chain. I am setting the timer for 3 minutes. Let’s finish the game before the timer sounds.

To end our circle, I would like you to share one of your favorite multiplication strategies. One of my favorites is lattice multiplication. I will go to my right.

Thank you for your participation.

Note(s):
Appendix O

February 21 PD Peace Circle Scenario Sheet

1. Opening Circle:
   Have staff stand in a circle to model how students could stand in a classroom. Review Circle Guidelines and use talking piece.
   "Please say one word to describe your day"
   "I like this circle because it gives me a quick feel of how everyone is doing."

2. Have staff take a seat.

   Today we are going to talk about Affective Statements, which is just another way of saying, "expressing your feelings." We are going to discuss how to use an emotional response to a behavior. This is a way of humanizing yourself to students, who often perceive teachers as distinct from themselves. Students can begin to view you as a person, rather than as a distant authority figure. When you express your feelings, children become more, not less, empathetic.

   Who are our students more likely to follow directions from: Someone who they have a strong relationship with or a stranger who they see as an authority figure?

   Affective Statements help us separate the deed from the doer. They allow us to be authentic and real with students. When addressing a student’s behavior, the more specific and emotive you can be the better. We can use affective statements with positive and negative behavior. For example:

   "Lisa, I’m frustrated that you keep disrupting class today" is more powerful than "I'm upset."

   "Sam, I was really happy that you worked for the entire class period today."

   Most times affective statements show student in a demeaning manner, it un relationship with the student.

   Sentence starters:
   "I am frustrated..."
   "It makes me uncomfortable..."
   "I feel sad when..."
   "I feel happy when..."
   "I'm so proud of you..."

   We are going to work through several scenarios in pairs:

   Affective statements can be offered when you see a student doing something that makes you uncomfortable as a teacher. They offer an alternative to saying, "Don’t do that," or "Stop that."

   Please practice using affective statements with your partner and try to be as specific as possible. Discuss with your partner and then we will pop corn afterwards.

   a. You see Damian push another student out of the way so that he can get into his locker.

   b. Jasmine is teasing Sandy in your classroom.

   c. Shawn is talking while you are giving the class directions on an important assignment.

   d. Cindy is on task in your classroom.

   e. Lee turns in a homework assignment for the first time this grading period.

   f. You witness another staff member yelling at Juan in the hall during passing period.

3. "What affect do you think using affective statements will have on our community?"

4. Closing Circle
   Popcorn to save time: "Tell something fun or funny that happened to you today."
Appendix P

February 22 PD Restorative Practice Handout

The Five Questions

The five questions is an important tool for managing conflict and addressing harm. Hopefully you’ll become familiar enough with them that you can pull them from memory when you need them if you don’t have a handy-dandy card.

Of course you can rephrase the questions a bit and you can read from a card if that helps, but try not to stray too far from these basic questions. They work! Depending on the situation you may choose to ask the person who did the harm all the questions first, the person harmed all the questions first, or go back and forth.

To respond to challenging behavior

1. WHAT HAPPENED?

2. WHAT WERE YOU THINKING OF AT THE TIME?

3. WHAT HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT SINCE?

4. WHO HAS BEEN AFFECTED BY WHAT YOU HAVE DONE AND IN WHAT WAY?

5. WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU NEED TO DO TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT?

To help those harmed by other’s actions (4 questions)

1. WHAT DID YOU THINK WHEN YOU REALIZED WHAT HAD HAPPENED?

2. WHAT IMPACT HAS THIS INCIDENT HAD ON YOU AND OTHERS?

3. WHAT HAS BEEN THE HARDEST THING FOR YOU?

4. WHAT DO YOU THINK NEEDS TO HAPPEN TO MAKE THINGS RIGHT?

The Agreement Form follows on the next two pages.

HINT: There’s no #6 that says, “Now give them a lecture.” It’s tempting to insert your wisdom into the process but it’s not your conversation. As long as you speak from your heart — “I think, I feel, I need” — you’ll stay on track! As needed, summarize the conversation and invite the students to reflect on what they’ve learned.

A Tale of Two Schools

Carlos had a heated argument with his parents before leaving for school, so he’s running late. Let’s see the difference that restorative policies and practices can make.

Zero-tolerance education system

He is greeted by metal detectors and a police search.

His teacher scolds him in front of the class. Carlos talks back, and is given a detention.

A school police officer detains and arrests both students.

Carlos is held in a juvenile detention facility all afternoon, missing school. He now has an arrest record and is facing suspension.

Restorative practices-based education system

Teachers and administrators welcome him and his fellow students as they enter.

His teacher waits until after class to speak with Carlos to learn more, and sets up a meeting with his school counselor.

Student peer mediators and support staff intervene, have the students sit down together, and de-escalate the situation.

Carlos and the other student agree to help clean the cafeteria during a free period. Carlos meets with his counselor and parents after school to help resolve the conflict at home.
Appendix Q

Participant Response to Biggest Learning on RJ

Below, each participant gave their biggest learning about restorative practices.

Participant A – Asking questions after a misbehavior/incident rather than reacting to the situation.

Participant B – I have learned to take a pause before reacting or asking questions, not to immediately jump on a situation.

Participant C – I have learned that I have a lot to learn to manage my class in a more empathetic and caring manner.

Participant D – Informal conferences that last only minutes can often meet the needs of smaller issues that greatly impact a student’s day.

Participant E – It’s not easy. Restorative justice in practice allows you to accept certain events in a person’s life and help to develop ways to not let those negative events rule future events.

Participant F – My biggest learning is that restorative practices will take time, effort, and support.

Participant G – That simply taking the time to calmly question students so they express what their problem is, what motivated their behavior or actions, making them think about the why instead of telling them.

Participant H – Restorative practices has been changing my mindset to handle misbehavior differently.

Participant I – The decision process with getting all involved.

Participant J – How to address students and knowing what questions to ask.