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Educator Perceptions of Restorative Justice Practices That Provide Academic Support for Students With Adverse Childhood Experiences

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Abstract

Educator Perceptions of Restorative Justice Practices That Provide Academic Support for

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by

Brigid Sullivan Ripley

MA, University of Wisconsin, Superior, 2012

BA, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, 1977

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

The phenomenon of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) has been of interest to scholars since the late 1990s when their impact on life outcomes concerning physical and mental health was first acknowledged. Educators are challenged to support students who have experienced ACE, but many have implemented alternative practices such as restorative justice (RJ) to support students' academic needs. There is insufficient empirical evidence to determine how elements of RJ support high school students who have experienced ACE. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the RJ practices that teachers, administrators, and other school personnel have implemented to support the academic needs of students with ACE. Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism was used to inform how RJ can support students with ACE and to examine the practices that are most helpful. Data were collected using semistructured interviews with six teachers and administrators who worked closely with students with ACE in an RJ educational setting. Results indicated that building positive relationships is the foundation of restorative justice in schools; once students feel safe and respected and have positive relationships within the school, student outcomes improve. Students and educators may benefit as a result of the current study, which could contribute empirical evidence of RJ practices that could provide academic support to students with ACE. This evidence would have the potential to influence positive social change by informing educational strategies, professional development for educators, and educator training programs.

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Dedication

I wish to dedicate this work to my family, who have encouraged, advised, and counseled me. First and foremost, my four children: they have supported me, assisted me, believed in me, and have been accepting of the times when I had to put my studies ahead of all else. Writing this dedication has taken many hours of thought, and almost as many revisions as the study itself! My second daughter, in particular did many hours of proof-reading, editing and providing general academic assistance, during the coursework and throughout my study. However, in reflecting, I recognized that each member of my family contributed innumerable hours of support, each in their own way, as well as encouragement, emotional support and an unwavering belief in my ability to complete this degree. Without them this journey would have been impossible.

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My granddaughter brings such joy and laughter into my life. She is a constant reminder of what is truly important. After many days of laboring over the computer, spending a day running, jumping, and playing at the playground is so refreshing. I give deepest and heartfelt appreciation to my loving granddaughter.

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shrink the distance. She and her husband keep me in their prayers; her unwavering faith is an inspiration to me.

Finally, to my siblings who continually support and encourage me, and connect me with my own roots and background, and the emphasis that our parents placed on education. Education has remained, next to family and friends, at the center of my life. Each of us has our own family now, and many of us are separated by miles of geography, but our history together remains both a barometer and a compass.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Since the publication of the report "A Nation at Risk" in 1983, the U.S.

educational system has been under scrutiny and has typically been found wanting

(Moran, 2015). The report listed such problems as dropping scores on the American

College Testing and Scholastic Aptitude Test as well as standardized test scores in the K-

12 schools, and lowered standards in international educational assessments. Newspapers

and educational publications continue to outline issues with absenteeism, bullying,

dropouts, homelessness, and the school-to-prison pipeline. There is no shortage of

problems facing students in today's educational institutions. Students who have faced

adverse childhood experiences (ACE) are a part of school populations throughout the

country; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) reported that 61% of

adults who were surveyed in 25 states reported that they had been exposed to at least one

ACE and 17% had suffered four or more ACE.

Felitti et al. (1998) conducted a seminal study at Kaiser Permanente of California

that explored the effects of neglect and abuse on children; from that study came the term

ACE, as well as a survey with scores 0–7 that delineated those experiences. Surveys were

sent to over 13,000 adults, and responses were received from 9,508. The surveys

explored seven areas: psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, violence against

mother, substance abuse in the home, persons with mental illness, and persons who were

suicidal or who had persons who had ever been imprisoned living in the home. The study

indicated that as an individual's score increased, the likelihood that that individual would

suffer long-term adverse health effects and health risk behaviors (Felitti et al., 1998).

Studies in the field of education have indicated that students who experience ACE are less likely to experience academic success (Brunzell et al., 2016b; Garrido et al., 2018; Plumb et al., 2016; Shukla et al., 2016; Stempel et al., 2017).

Restorative justice (RJ) is an educational philosophy that may mitigate the effects of ACE (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). RJ has several different acronyms; in addition to RJ, some authors use RJE for restorative justice in education and others refer to RP (restorative practices). For the purposes of this study, I used the term RJ, which was widely used in the judicial system prior to its application in the educational setting (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). RJ relies on restorative practices such as peer consultation, peace-making circles, and family group consultation (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). RJ's philosophy requires a shift from punitive practices to restorative and healing practices, and the central structure is the talking circle that focuses on building and/or restoring relationships (Garnett et al., 2020).

A study of schools that have implemented RJ revealed that there is a continuum of practice associated with RJ; it is sometimes implemented as a response to negative behaviors, and in this capacity it has resulted in a reduction in the number of suspensions and expulsions (Song & Swearer, 2016). The ideal practice would be school-wide implementation, which according to experts in the field involves buy-in from all stakeholders, ongoing education and training for staff, implementation of new policies, and integration of theory and practice (Brown, 2018; Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Garnett et al., 2020).

The problem is that educators are challenged to support students who have experienced ACE but many have implemented alternative practices such as RJ to support students' academic needs (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Gage et al., 2018; Garrido et al., 2018). The purpose of the current study was to investigate the RJ practices teachers, administrators, and other school personnel have implemented to support the academic needs of students with ACE. This was an important consideration due to the problems facing U.S. education. In addition, Plumb et al. (2016) found that almost half of U.S. students reported experiencing trauma in their lives, such as domestic violence, sexual or psychological abuse, a suicide in the home, or other events or conditions that create stress. Students who have been traumatized often display academic and behavioral difficulties (Stempel et al., 2017), are at risk for school failure and entry into the justice system (Mallett, 2017), and often do not respond well to traditional disciplinary practices (Alnaim, 2018).

Implementation of RJ in schools has outpaced the research that can provide empirical evidence for successful implementation and understanding of what practices are the most beneficial (Brown, 2018; Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Garnett et al., 2020; Song & Swearer, 2016). Because I explored RJ practices that could address the academic needs of students with ACE, the study has the potential to effect positive social change. The positive social change implications include providing empirical evidence about RJ practices that may be implemented by educators to support the academic needs of students with ACE. This positive social implication has far-reaching potential due to the high number of students who have experienced ACE. The empirical evidence also has the

potential to influence educator practices, professional development, and teacher training programs.

This chapter highlights the problems facing the U.S. educational system, including those influenced by disciplinary practices, as well as the prevalence of challenges faced by students who have experienced trauma. The chapter also addresses the potential that RJ practices have for providing academic support for students with ACE. There is potential for systemic change to traditional disciplinary processes in U.S. schools, which may result in schools incorporating more practices that provide academic support for students with ACE. That could decrease the number of juveniles entering the justice system as a result of school failure. The first chapter of the current study, which addressed educators' perceptions of the educational practices aligned with RJ that may provide academic support for students with ACE, includes the following sections: background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

One response to the challenges facing the U.S. educational system, including lowered scores on standardized assessments, poor attendance and/or graduation rates, violence associated with schools, and large numbers of juveniles entering the justice system (Brunzell et al., 2016b; Moran, 2015; Nance, 2016; Stanley, 2018), is increasing school-issued punishment for negative behaviors. This type of punishment is known as punitive discipline (Mallett, 2016). Punitive discipline includes detention, in- and out-of-

school suspensions, and expulsions; although punitive discipline is intended to deter disciplinary issues, it has been shown to be ineffective (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018). The practice of punitive discipline also fails to teach children the strategies they need to regulate their behavior and takes away from important instructional times (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018).

Punitive practices in schools during the late 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s gained attention and have resulted in the introduction of police officers, security cameras, and metal detectors into schools (Mallett, 2016). The 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act in the United States was at least partially responsible for bringing zero-tolerance policies from the criminal justice system into the school system, and for encouraging more punitive disciplinary policies in schools (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Punitive practices are also intended to demonstrate punishments that become increasingly harsh as the level of offenses increases (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018). Many schools across the United States have adopted disciplinary responses that include suspension, expulsion, and changes of placement, which is typically homebound study, online schooling, or residential educational facilities (Gagnon et al., 2017).

The school shootings in Columbine, Colorado, and Taber, Alberta, Canada in 1999 were dramatic events that produced a surge in zero-tolerance policies as school personnel sought to keep their schools safe (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). The zero-tolerance policy expanded to include not only weapons-related offenses, but also a variety of behaviors defined as defiant behavior, such as tobacco use and dress code violations (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). This trend fueled the school-to-prison pipeline

(Evans & Vaandering, 2016). The term *school-to-prison pipeline* refers to a metaphorical pipeline that channels students who are suspended, expelled, or habitually truant into the juvenile justice system where they face punitive actions (Myers, 2017). As research began to show the ineffectiveness of punitive discipline and indicated that schools were not safer as a result of punitive practices, researchers began to explore alternative discipline (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018). In Canada and the United States, zero-tolerance policies were declared ineffective by educational and psychological agencies and were not found to be in keeping with best practices in educational philosophy and child development (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

Within student ranks are youths who have suffered ACE, which means they have experienced abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction (Chandler et al., 2015). These students are frequently struggling academically and socially while attempting to navigate the issues that plague schools, and are also faced with punitive disciplinary practices. Although all students face challenges to varying degrees, research showed that students who have suffered ACE are likely to be represented the most in school absenteeism, poor academic outcomes, and school failure (Mallett, 2016). Studies also indicated that these children also have poorer health outcomes such as skeletal fractures, chronic lung disease, heart disease, and cancer (Felitti et al., 1998; Garrido et al., 2018), which affects school attendance (Stempel et al., 2017). Studies showed that the more ACE students have suffered, the more academic and behavioral outcomes they have experienced, and those who had suffered at least three ACE had lowered outcomes in literacy, science, social studies, math, and classroom behavior measures (Jimenez et al., 2016). Students

who have suffered ACE may also exhibit a lack of hope, which translates to difficulty or inability to establish goals (Baxter et al., 2017). Schools have the personnel and the capacity to help vulnerable students overcome the adversities in their lives, but when vulnerabilities are unaddressed, students may feel isolated, alienated, and rejected during the school day (Sanders & Munford, 2016). When this happens, school becomes a place that reinforces vulnerable student differences rather than building resilience (Sanders & Munford, 2016). One of the reasons for focusing on students with high ACE scores in the current study was that these students face a greater likelihood that they will have adverse academic and/or behavioral outcomes (see Sacks & Murphey, 2018). Additionally, these students can be readily identified through voluntary participation in a survey, which calculates the number of ACEs a respondent has had in their lives (Felitti et al., 1998) and which has since been expanded to the field of education (Brunzell et al., 2016a; Garrido et al. 2018; Plumb et al., 2016; Shukla et al., 2016; Stempel et al., 2017).

Students who have been affected by trauma have been found in both general education classrooms and special education settings (Brunzell et al., 2016b). Since the seminal work done by Felitti et al. (1998), researchers have sought to deepen the understanding of how children respond to trauma and how those experiences vary across demographics (Plumb et al., 2016; Record-Lemon & Buchanan, 2017; Sacks & Murphey, 2018; Soleimanpour et al., 2017; Stempel et al., 2017). The parameters of the original ACE survey have been expanded, but there is no single list that addresses all types of trauma or differences between populations (Sacks & Murphey, 2018).

Marginalized, traumatized, or at-risk students" are likely to feel as if they do not belong in the traditional school setting because they are in some way different from their peers (Pendergast et al., 2018). They may be students of color; they may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ); they may be of an ethnic, religious, or racial minority; they may have disabilities; and they may live in poverty. Their marginalization makes them more likely to suffer long-term negative social, academic, and life outcomes (Scherr & Mayer, 2019). Although there are a variety of surveys and questionnaires designed to measure ACE (Felitti et al., 1998; Payne & Welch, 2015; Song & Swearer, 2016), not all schools administer a questionnaire that defines an ACE score. For the purpose of the current study, vulnerable students or students with ACE were students who were known to have a history of trauma or who appeared vulnerable to educators even if they had not completed a survey or questionnaire.

Most educators would likely agree that creating a school environment that addresses the needs of all learners is a top priority. However, it is a complicated process that cannot be completed unless educators first recognize where the inequities lie within their schools, and thoroughly understand what justice and equity look like (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Alternative discipline programs such as RJ focus on building positive, nurturing relationships that benefit all students, and are designed to create a positive school climate (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018). Equity and nurturing relationships are important components in meeting the needs of vulnerable youths (Brunzell et al., 2016b). These conditions are both met by RJ and are particularly beneficial for students with ACE (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

Despite the challenges that students with ACE face, some demonstrate resilience, which means they transcend the difficulties of their history and problems they face at school and they find success (Archdall & Kilderry, 2016). This phenomenon has been studied extensively, resulting in many definitions of the occurrence, but regardless of the specific verbiage used, it is generally understood that if children do not have the ability to overcome or manage the stress and adversity in their lives, their learning and development may suffer (Archdall & Kilderry, 2016). Research has shown that students with ACE may benefit from a network of support that includes family, community, and school (Soleimanpour et al., 2017). Teacher–student relationships that are positive and promote student empowerment are particularly effective in helping students develop resilience; however, as the level of adversity in the life of a student increases, the likelihood that that student will report a positive relationship with a teacher decreases (Sanders et al., 2016). As a result, teachers often find it more difficult to develop positive relationships with very challenging students (Sanders et al., 2016). Furthermore, although research showed that schools and the personnel who lead them can play an influential role in helping or stymying the development of students, schools do not consistently understand these concepts or employ the means to help students succeed (Sanders & Munford, 2016). There is a lack of empirical evidence about how the implementation of RJ practices may provide academic support for students with ACE.

The partner school where I conducted my study began implementing an RJ program in 2016 when parents, teachers, and administrators concluded that exclusionary practices such as in-school and out-of-school suspensions were not addressing the issues

that caused student misbehavior (see *Study School Restorative Practices, 2016)* and may lead to worse problems when students disengage from school or are sent home where they are frequently unsupervised (Brown, 2018). Demographics at the school (Minnesota Report Card) and data from the Minnesota Student ACE Report indicated that 15–18% of the Native American or Black students at the school had suffered three or more ACE. Approximately 25% of students in the alternative school suffered from mental health issues that are frequently associated with ACE (*Restorative practices at study school 18-19: Students,* 2019 c*; Study School Restorative Practices,* 2016) The school implemented a whole school approach, meaning it employed school-wide restorative practices that incorporated both preventive and reactive aspects of RJ (Brown, 2018) throughout the school environment (*Restorative practices at study school: Community,* 2019a; *Restorative practices at study school: Staff*, 2019b). School personnel received training regarding how to apply RJ in their work with students, and also in their work relationships (*Restorative practices at study school: Staff,* 2019b).

Problem Statement

Educational research indicated that public schools in the United States are facing dropping graduation rates, bullying, chronic absenteeism, and mental health issues (Alnaim, 2018; Baxter et al., 2017; Bellis et al., 2017; Black, 2015; Garrido et al., 2018; Mallett, 2016). Counts et al. (2018) discussed student arrests, which were not only high (over 290,000 in one academic year) but also included a disproportionately high number of students with disabilities. Poverty and its accompanying disadvantages, such as food insecurity and neglect, affect millions of children (Powell & Davis, 2019).

Understandably, these challenges do not disappear as children enter educational settings. The problem is that educators are challenged to support students who have experienced ACE although many have implemented alternative practices such as RJ to support students' academic needs (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Gage et al., 2018; Garrido et al., 2018). I explored the RJ practices educators have implemented to support the academic needs of students with ACE.

The school with which I partnered to do my study had been training staff to work with students with ACE for several years (School Superintendent, personal communication, 2018), including using surveys. A 2019 survey administered to high school students by a state education agency (Burton & Kinney, 2019) indicated that approximately one quarter of high school students in the state had experienced one ACE, and 4–8% of students in ninth through 12th grade had experienced four or more ACE. Data from the school where I conducted the study reflected slightly higher numbers because of the demographics of the district; 34% of the students at the partner school are African American, American Indian, or Hispanic (Minnesota Report Card, 2019), a population that according to the state survey (Baum & Peterson-Hickey, 2011) has been twice as likely as White students to have experienced three or more ACE.

The partner school has a whole school approach to RJ, meaning that RJ practices are integrated into all aspects of the school community. The school has a team that is dedicated to implementing and monitoring RJ and helping to ensure fidelity at all levels, which includes restorative circles, conferencing to repair harm, mediation, and other RJ practices that shift the focus of conflict resolution away from punitive responses (School

Superintendent, personal communication, 2019). These practices are designed to build and maintain positive relationships and treat all parties in a conflict (those causing harm and those being harmed) with respect (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; School Superintendent, personal communication, 2019).

Many children who face barriers inside and outside the school environment also have suffered trauma in their lives, including those who have suffered ACE, which can produce neurological changes that produce difficulty in academic growth and behavioral regulation (Powell & Davis, 2019). In the United States, 45% of children are exposed to ACE (Sacks & Murphey, 2018). These students are likely to experience difficulty learning, have behavioral issues, disengage from school, and have a higher incidence of maladaptive behaviors (Powell & Davis, 2019; Soleimanpour et al., 2017).

Students who have experienced trauma often find themselves in administrators' offices for behavioral or academic infractions (Mallett, 2016). The punitive disciplinary practices imposed by administrators have been found to be ineffective and inequitable (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018; Mansfield et al., 2018). Research indicates that traumatized student populations including juvenile offenders may experience better life outcomes when they develop strong school connections (Clements-Nolle & Waddington, 2019).

Perhaps because RJ is relatively recent in the educational world, there can be a difference in how it is implemented from school to school. Some schools fully integrate RJ into practices and curriculum, and others select components of RJ to use as a response to discipline (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). RJ had its roots in the criminal justice system;

in school settings, principles of RJ have been most commonly applied to disciplinary structures (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018) described a continuum of restorative practices that may be implemented in schools and that range from informal to formal. The practices employed within RJ models typically focus on improving communication skills, developing positive relationships, and building all-inclusive rapport (Ingraham et al., 2016). Although RJ practices have received some attention in the criminal justice field and in education, there was a lack of research about the practices in RJ models that provide academic support for students with ACE.

A better understanding of how RJ practices may provide academic support for students with ACE could provide administrators and teachers with the information and resources they need to create a comprehensive program for RJ in the school. RJ practices may offer a solution for equity and a strong positive climate, but the program calls for a commitment from the school and community and a willingness not only to adopt select practices and strategies but also to engage in district-wide transformation to become an institution that accepts and honors all its members (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). A substantive RJ program is one that supports students at all levels, so it does not become a decontextualized intervention that merely responds to misbehaviors (Evans & Vaandering, 2014). The current study addressed this gap in research and may provide an understanding of how school-wide RJ practices provide academic support for students with ACE.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the RJ practices teachers, administrators, and other school personnel have implemented to support the academic needs of students with ACE. I employed a case study design using semistructured interviews with educators to collect data in an RJ setting. I also collected data from archival documents pertaining to RJ practices in the school and documents specific to students with ACE. Traumatized youths in traditional school disciplinary settings face challenges such as suspension and expulsion, which interfere with academic progress (Mallett, 2016). I investigated the RJ practices educators have implemented to support the academic needs of students with ACE.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided my inquiry:

RQ1: How do educators implement RJ practices in the school to support the academic needs of students with ACE?

RQ2: How do educators perceive the academic supports that RJ practices provide?

Conceptual Framework

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism, which explains that social relationships are of primary importance to a child's educational progress, provided the conceptual framework for this study. Vygotsky's theory suggests that learning for children is initially a collective, social activity and later an individual activity.

Vygotsky's theory supports the importance of interpersonal communication and relationships in child development, which is central to RJ practices (Macready, 2009).

Vygotsky's (1978, as cited in Macready, 2009) theory correlates closely to what research indicated regarding the relationship between the individual and community, as well as how the individual learns. Each child functions within a particular environment, and they are affected by everything that occurs within that environment (Rogoff et al., 2018). Restorative practices may incorporate sensitivity to individual learning, but an intentional consideration of individual student needs may better support students' success (Pendergast et al., 2018).

Aocial constructivism informed the problem in the current study, which was educators are challenged to support students who have experienced ACE although many have implemented alternative practices such as RJ to support students' academic needs (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Gage et al., 2018; Garrido et al., 2018). Because traditional disciplinary processes are primarily punitive, they do not allow for positive relationships to be built and developed, which lead to individual learning, according to Vygotsky (as 1978, as cited in Macready, 2009). Because relationships are the foundation of RJ (Evans & Vaandering, 2016), I explored educator perceptions about the importance of building relationships and restoring trust and how that process may provide academic support for students with ACE.

Vygotsky (1978) stressed the importance of collaborations and social interactions in child development, including the learning process. I used the social constructivist framework to analyze and interpret data collected to determine how, through the

development of interpersonal relationships using RJ practices, students who have experienced ACE are equipped to navigate the public education system and are receiving the academic support they need. The results of the study were interpreted using the core principles of Vygotsky's framework, including how children develop and learn through the building of relationships. This study was grounded in Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism, as educational systems are social centers in which children develop; RJ practices may be what is necessary for students who have experienced trauma to begin to build trusting relationships with the adults around them.

A case study approach designed to explore educator perceptions of the phenomenon of RJ and the educational practices that provide academic support for students with ACE was aligned with the conceptual framework of social constructivism. Ravitch and Carl (2016) described the conceptual framework as that which shows how the various parts of a study are connected to one another and at times dependent upon one another. Vygotsky's social constructivist theory connects the problems that are experienced by students with ACE, such as being excluded from academics and social opportunities, to an RJ system that is focused on building relationships and restoring damages. This framework was suitable for this study because I, the setting, and the data collection process all exist within the world of education (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Nature of the Study

Data were collected at a public high school in a Central Midwest U.S. school district. I examined archival documents that pertained to RJ practices, including how and when they were implemented, and documents associated with students with ACE. These

archival documents provided background and definitions of the RJ practices that were implemented, how and why they were implemented, and how they provided academic support for students with ACE. All documents were de-identified. In addition, interviews were conducted with six school personnel including one administrator, one paraprofessional, and four teachers. The interview questions were designed to elicit information about participants' observations and experiences in working with students with ACE. In the interviews, participants described their perceptions of the RJ practices being used in the school that help provide academic support for students with ACE. During the study, there was one 60-minute interview with each participant, which included a debriefing session at the culmination of the interview. I also collected and examined archival documents that provided context and a deeper understanding of both the issues and the RJ practices that were implemented and how they provided support for students with ACE.

Collecting data this way allowed me to triangulate my data to develop an understanding of how and when educators applied RJ to provide academic support for students with ACE, and their perception of the influence of those supports. The data analysis process was done by employing description, process, and/or evaluation coding, as well as by using the NVivo program to assist with organization and publishing results.

I used semistructured interviews that are appropriate for a qualitative case study design (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). One principle of conducting quality case study research is to use two or more sources of data. I also conducted interviews with six educators who have distinct roles in the district, which would provide

a broad scope of perspectives. The goal of interviews was to explore a phenomenon by asking a series of interrelated questions that could guide the participants into generating a deeper understanding of the issue (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

I used a qualitative case study design. The strength of qualitative research lies in a design that allows the researcher to collect, analyze, and interpret data that are not easily expressed numerically (Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2018), case study research, in which a small number of cases is examined, allows the researcher to explore a phenomenon at a comprehensive level to gain understanding in a real-world context. Case study research provides the design best suited to delve deeply into the phenomenon within a real-life context; it also allows for the collection of different types of data to get an in-depth look at the fundamentals of the subject being studied (Yin, 2018). A case study design allowed for an in-depth examination of the perceptions of educators that could lead to an understanding of how RJ in the schools may play a role in helping educators provide academic support for students with ACE.

The key concepts explored in this study were the perceptions of educators, students with ACE, academic success, and RJ practices in the school. These concepts were viewed through the lens of the educators who work with students on a daily basis, including teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals. Participants for the study included six educational professionals from three distinct roles, with data collected through semi-structured interviews.

Definitions

ACE survey: The ACE survey is a survey designed by Felitti et al. (1998), which includes 10 questions that measure life-impacting trauma experienced by children from seven categories: psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, violence against mother, substance abuse in the home, persons with mental illness, and persons who were suicidal or who had persons who had ever been imprisoned living in the home

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE): ACE is defined as any of numerous negative experiences suffered by children, which include domestic violence, emotional or physical abuse or neglect, sexual abuse, mental health issues in the home, substance abuse in the home, separation or divorce, and incarceration of a family member (Soleimanpour et al., 2017). The school in my study recognizes this definition and administers the ACE survey to students to identify students who have suffered trauma.

Alternative schools: Alternative schools are schools that offer an alternative to traditional educational systems; they are schools that include students, teachers, and students in the establishment of academic expectations (Tierney, 2020). Alternative schools allow students who struggle in traditional schools to take ownership of their own education (Tierney, 2020). Alternative schools allow greater flexibility for students and staff to develop alternative parameters for success (Tierney, 2020).

At-risk students: Students identified as at risk are also referred to as marginalized and often lack engagement with school (Pendergast et al., 2018). These students have a higher likelihood of not finishing high school due to dropping out or being expelled.

Students can be labeled at risk due to behavioral and/or academic concerns and may share

traits with marginalized, traumatized, and/or vulnerable youth.

Circles (or talking circles): This is a descriptive term describing one of the key

forms of communication in the RJ model (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). The circle is a

process that is both literal and symbolic and which originated in indigenous cultures

(Evans & Vaandering, 2016). The circle is moderated by a facilitator or circle keeper who

is often the person who invites participants and whose presence is designed to ensure that

each person honors the core beliefs and values of RJ (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). A

preselected talking piece, which is meaningful to the group, is passed from person to

person. A person speaks only while holding the object; there is respectful silence as the

object is passed. The circle, which has no beginning or end, is a symbolic formation that

is designed to illustrate the significance and equality of each member.

Exclusionary discipline: The practice of suspending or expelling students as a

punishment for misbehavior in school (Payne & Welch, 2015) is known as exclusionary

discipline. Exclusionary discipline practices are commonly associated with traditional

school discipline structures (Payne & Welch, 2015). Although this practice became

commonplace with the advent of zero-tolerance policies, it has since been shown to be

applied with racial disparity, disproportionately affecting students of color, students with

disabilities, and students from lower socioeconomic groups; furthermore, it does not

improve school climate (Garnett et al., 2020)

Marginalized students: Marginalized students are those who are likely to

experience exclusion, rejection, and bullying because they are in some way different from

their peers. They may be students of color; they may be lesbian, gay, bisexual,

transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ); they may be of an ethnic, religious, or racial

minority; they may have disabilities; and they may live in poverty. Their marginalization

makes them more likely to suffer long-term negative social, academic, and life outcomes

(Scherr & Mayer, 2019).

Resilience: Resilience is defined as the ability to overcome rather than succumb to

challenges and obstacles to achieve success after experiencing adversity (Sanders et al.,

2016).

Restorative Justice (RJ): Restorative justice is a wide array of practices that

describe a commitment to restoring peace and harmony to those involved in a conflict,

and to the community as a whole (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). In the current study, RJ

referred to a school-wide, integrated RJ program that was adopted by the site under the

guidance of a nationally recognized RJ trainer. The terms restorative justice (RJ) and

restorative practices (RP) were used interchangeably in this study. When I began this

study, I referred primarily to RJ because that was the term I encountered most often in

my research. RP refers to the practices implemented within the RJ framework. My

partner school uses the term RP rather than RJ, so most of my references to interview

data include that term.

Restorative practices chat: This describes an informal process talk, usually

implemented spontaneously, designed to defuse potential conflict. It occurs most

frequently between an educator and a student when a disruption occurs.

RP conference: A restorative conference is a structured meeting facilitated by an educator, which is held in response to harm. At the partner school, the conference is typically attended by a person or person who has been harmed, a person or person who has caused harm, the principal, and often friends and/or family members of both parties. The objective is to assist both parties in coming to an understanding and determining how best to repair the harm.

Restorative circle or harm circle: This term is specific to the partner school in this study (and possibly within other organizations). The purpose of the harm circle is to address a specific harm or conflict. The harm circle can be requested by any member of the school and is implemented to address more serious issues than those that are dealt with in RP chats or conferences.

Students with ACE: Students with ACE, sometimes referred to as trauma affected, are those who have experienced trauma due to abuse, neglect, violence, poverty, or other events or scenarios that create adverse conditions for development (Brunzell et al., 2016a; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018; Moore & Ramirez, 2016; Sacks & Murphey, 2018). These students may have been identified through an ACE survey, but not all schools administer the survey.

Vulnerable students: Students who are identified as vulnerable come from marginalized, minority groups; some of these include homeless or low socioeconomic students, LGBTQ students, disabled students, and those from racial or ethnic minority groups (Watson & Christensen, 2017). Like traumatized, marginalized, and/or at-risk students, vulnerable students may struggle to develop positive relationships with others,

may lack confidence in their abilities, and may struggle academically (Brunzell et al., 2016a).

Assumptions

I assumed that participants in the study, after assurances that all information provided would be confidential, would provide honest and accurate responses. This assumption was necessary to collect honest, accurate, and credible data for the study with the understanding that information that was gathered would not be used against educators or students. I also assumed that all school personnel participating in the study would provide accurate certification and qualifications, and were therefore eligible to provide the information requested in the interviews. This assumption was necessary to ensure that the information collected was reliable and relevant.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study included administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals at one semirural school in the Midwest United States, and findings were not generalizable to other school populations. Because the study was done at only one site, the results were not necessarily transferable to other settings. These educational professionals were selected because their interactions with students with ACE gave them insights into what may bring about academic success for those students. Their training and experience gave them credibility when sharing their perceptions of what RJ practices led to academic success for students with ACE. The study was conducted at one school and is not, therefore, representative of a complete demographic cross-section of data that a larger study might produce.

Limitations

A limitation of the study was that data were collected from only one school site, a small rural school in a Midwest U.S. state. Results of this study may not be generalizable to other school settings, states, or the country as a whole. The participant sample was relatively small, and it was taken from a school that had an established RJ program in place. These findings may not necessarily transfer to other schools or other RJ programs. Because of the size and location of the school, participants were not representative of culturally or ethnically diverse populations, and their perceptions may reflect cultural predispositions. Furthermore, because the participants were invited on a volunteer basis, there was no guarantee that their perspectives represented all possible perspectives. Another limitation was the result of the complex nature of school systems; educators with equal years of experience may have vastly different amounts of training and experience working with students with ACE, and training in RJ. Responses could have been affected by the depth of knowledge that participants had about trauma and about RJ, and implicit biases held by participants about students with ACE and RJ itself.

Significance

Beri and Kumar (2018) conducted a literature review that linked student resilience to academic success, and which indicated that positive relationships influence the development of student resilience. Students with ACE are likely to engage in the behaviors that lead to lowered academic success (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). The significance of the current study was that I explored educator perceptions about the important concept of RJ, which is relatively new to the field of education (see Evans &

Vaandering, 2016). Results could be used to determine what conditions and/or strategies within an RJ framework might help provide academic support for students with ACE. The information regarding RJ's potential influence on academic supports for students with ACE may contribute to what is known about the effects of an RJ approach.

This study has the potential to contribute to positive social change. Some Florida schools have experienced positive outcomes as a result of implementing behavior supports rather than punitive practices (Thompson, 2016). Social relationships are a strong factor in promoting academic success (Beri & Kumar, 2018). The current study may contribute to a body of information about the positive influence of replacing the punitive practices that continue to dominate school disciplinary codes with the creation of a school culture that values positive relationships and resolves conflict in restorative rather than punitive methods (see Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

Summary

In Chapter 1, I introduced the topic ACE and provided evidence about the relationship between ACE and trauma and student outcomes, particularly concerning the effects of exclusionary and punitive practices. I also introduced the topic of RJ as an educational program or model and discussed the potential benefits of implementing restorative practices. I discussed Vygotsky's social constructivism as the conceptual framework, and presented the research questions and the design of the study. I also presented the problem and purpose of the study. The problem is that educators are challenged to support students who have experienced ACE although many have implemented alternative practices such as RJ to support students' academic needs (Evans

& Vaandering, 2016; Gage et al., 2018; Garrido et al., 2018). The purpose of this study

was to investigate the RJ practices teachers, administrators, and other school personnel

have implemented to support the academic needs of students with ACE. The problem and

purpose were based on the identified gap in the research: the lack of empirical evidence

that could provide an understanding of how school-wide RJ practices might provide

academic support for students with ACE. Chapter 2 presents a thorough review of the

literature regarding what is known about RJ practices related to students with ACE and

includes a more detailed description of the conceptual framework used in the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter includes the problem, which is that educators are challenged to support students who have experienced ACE although many have implemented alternative practices such as RJ to support students' academic needs (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Gage et al., 2018; Garrido et al., 2018). Included in the sections of this chapter is a discussion of peer-reviewed research on research topics that are relevant to the study. This includes a review of articles that addressed the negative educational outcomes that result when students suffer trauma, as well as what educational practices may either exacerbate those outcomes or fail to mitigate them (Lansford et al., 2016; McConnico et al., 2016; Moore & Ramirez, 2016; Soleimanpour et al., 2017).

Although research has indicated the negative outcomes for students who have suffered ACE, there remains a gap in the literature regarding an understanding of how school-wide RJ practices might provide academic support for students with ACE (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018; Brunzell et al., 2016b; Payne & Welch, 2015). RJ is a new social science being applied to the fields of education and criminal justice and offers the potential for improved student outcomes, including academic success (Wachtel, 2015). RJ's incorporation into the education system is difficult to pinpoint, but the International Institute for Restorative Practices has been working with schools for slightly more than a decade to introduce the restorative concept and provide training and resources for school personnel (Wachtel, 2015). RJ includes many different practices; its objective is to replace a disciplinary system that is based on rules, laws, and penalties with one that responds to harm by focusing on restoring relationships (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

This literature review chapter includes an introduction, literature search strategy, conceptual framework, and an exhaustive review of the current literature relating to educational practices and students who have experienced trauma. I examine the results of studies on ACE and the detrimental role they play in students' lives and outcomes. I also delve into the factors that contribute to negative school climates, such as punitive disciplinary procedures, disengagement from school, zero tolerance, and the school-to-prison pipeline. I concludes with a look at student resilience and restorative justice, and what relationship may exist between the two.

Literature Search Strategy

To conduct this literature review, Walden University Library resources and research databases were used to locate peer-reviewed articles and materials from the years 2015–2019. This comprehensive search included such databases as EBSCO Host Business and Management (Business Source Complete, JSTOR, ABI/INFORM Complete, Emerald Management, SAGE Premiere, and Science Direct), Communication databases (Academic Search Complete and ProQuest Central), Education (Education Research Complete, Education Source, and ERIC), the Multidisciplinary Database (Digital Commons), and the Dissertation and Theses Database. I also used the Thoreau database to search for articles that were relevant to my study, using the thesaurus and the subject option that helped me expand the original set of keywords. Also included were searches of websites of other learning institutions and searches of Google Scholar to find and cross-reference current, peer-reviewed journal articles outside of Walden's archives.

When searching, I used the Boolean search function in the library database, which allowed me to search for keywords in conjunction with the terms AND, NOT, and OR to get specific results. If I used education AND restorative justice, the search would produce only those documents with both terms present. Similarly, using education OR restorative justice gave me documents with either term, and education NOT restorative justice gave me documents that did not address RJ.

The following terms were included in all searches because those terms were central to my study: *adverse childhood experiences*, *restorative justice*, *restorative practices*, *trauma-sensitive practices in education*, and *trauma-informed practices in education*. Other key search terms entered into multiple databases included *students at risk*, *zero tolerance*, *school to prison pipeline*, *resilience*, *positive behavioral interventions and supports*, *marginalized students*, and *social-emotional learning.* In all of these databases I included only peer-reviewed journals, articles from the last 5 years, and seminal work that was relevant to my study.

Conceptual Framework

The theory that best formed the framework for this study was Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism, which describes the importance of social relationships to a child's learning. Vygotsky's theory suggests that learning for children is initially a collective, social activity and later an individual activity. Vygotsky's theory informed this study with its emphasis on positive relationships, which are foundational in restorative justice. Vygotsky's theory supports the importance of interpersonal communication and

relationships in child development, which is central to restorative justice practices (Macready, 2009).

Numerous researchers have investigated the connection between Vygotsky's belief in the importance of interpersonal communication and positive relationships and students' experience in the educational setting. Macready (2009), a seminal researcher on this concept, noted that constructivist theory is based on the idea that learning is a process involving interactions with others, rather than an individual endeavor. Sanders et al. (2016) stated that schools are the ideal setting to build resilience and that teachers who both understand this need and who have learned specific skills are key to imparting successful strategies to students. Other trauma-sensitive strategies such as providing a safe learning environment, implementing culturally sensitive practices, peer supports, and fostering strong positive adult relationships (Cavanaugh, 2016) are all practices that are supported by Vygotsky's theory, as well as Shvarts and Bakker's (2019) concept of scaffolding, which like zones of proximal development move learners into new areas of understanding (Macready, 2009), and which are an important part of the research that has gone into this study.

Constructivism, as relates to students' educational experiences, has been applied by other researchers. Louderback (2016) stated that students use the knowledge and experiences that they have as a base upon which to build new knowledge, and students are active participants in that process. Vygotsky (1978, as cited in Macready, 2009) coined the term *zone of proximal development* to describe the difference between what people already know and what they are capable of learning through interactions with

others. Vygotsky (1978, as cited in Macready, 2009) also determined that learning

primarily happens through language rather than senses and that it is through language that

people learn both concepts and problem-solving.

Davidson (2014) used Vygotsky's theory that learning happens as part of social

interaction, with language at the center of the process. The study revolved around using

RJ practices, including social interactions and communication between the offender, the

victim(s), family, case managers, and the community to reduce recidivism in juvenile

offenders. Armour (2012) described a study done on a graduate-level course that used

real life assignments that sought to help teachers use RJ practices to more effectively

teach their students. Armour used Vygotsky's theory that the individual learns within

experiences and relationships with others upon which to base these real-world

assignments; Armour determined that the process of learning based on social interactions

and restorative practices was fundamental to success.

Vygotsky's (1978, as cited in Macready, 2009) zone of proximal development

involves having a more knowledgeable person (such as a teacher, counselor, or

administrator) help guide a student through a problem using questions that could bring

that student deeper understanding. Students are much more likely to be engaged when

they are encouraged to build relationships with peers, to learn together, and to construct

their learning within the context of their world (Akpan & Beard, 2016). The

constructivist theory holds that the self is realized through relationships with others

(Macready, 2009). Restorative practices are based on the principles of building positive

or repairing damaged relationships (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). The idea that learning

happens through relationships with others and within a community (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Macready, 2009) informed the current study on restorative practices.

This study benefited from the key concepts of Vygotsky's framework and related findings regarding student learning. Vygotsky laid the framework for placing the emphasis on relationships and how they are instrumental in learning; RJ builds upon this concept, as shown through research related to the phenomena. This study benefited from the theory of constructivism; RJ has, as its foundation, the need for building relationships through social interactions, so Vygotsky's theory regarding the necessity of communication and relationships with others for learning to occur was a strong basis for the study. This underlying framework supported the exploration of RJ and its potential to provide academic support for students with ACE.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

I explored educator perceptions of the RJ practices that provide academic supports for students with ACE. Both RJ and students with ACE incorporate concepts and historical information specific to those terms.

Academic Support for Students With ACE

The learning outcomes for children who have suffered trauma may be improved by creating a school environment that supports not only academic learning but is also supportive of the social and emotional needs of vulnerable youth (Plumb et al., 2016). Vygotsky (1978) stressed the importance of understanding the complex psychology involved in human development, and that it was essential for all children, regardless of their age or stage of development, to be able to understand themselves and their world,

and to have the ability to affect themselves and their world. Vygotsky asserted that each child's development is unique, based on experiences and individual characteristics, rather than a more generalized level of development correlating to their age. Children's learning occurs from both external sources and internal sources; their social interactions influence how they interpret the events and people around them (Vygotsky, 1978). Through his observations and experimentations, Vygotsky determined that in general, children develop imagination by the age of 3 and that they can begin to engage their imagination in play. Vygotsky proposds that in play and school, there are similar zones of proximal development in which children internalze the knowledge and skills that they acquire in the process of these activities. It is through interaction with others that children develop an understanding of life and such concepts as social responsibility (Macready, 2009).

RJ encourages the discussion of different perspectives as new information is uncovered and differing viewpoints are discussed (Macready, 2009). Through this process, there is an opportunity for new understanding, and the development of new behaviors, which is also in keeping with Vygotsky's theories of learning through language and interactions with others (Macready, 2009).

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) is a term that refers to traumatic events in a child's life which can have lasting effects on their health and well-being (Powell & Davis, 2019). ACE scores are measured using a ten-question survey administered to individuals; the ACE survey is used to measure incidents of trauma students have experienced. ACE scores frequently negatively impact educational outcomes, resulting in

behavioral issues and emotional and developmental delays that disrupt learning (Ryan et al., 2017), chronic absenteeism (Stempel et al., 2017), higher rates of expulsion and suspension, and a greater likelihood of dropping out of school (Brunzell et al., 2016b). The ACE concept was first identified by Felitti et al. (1998) as a result of a study they conducted that involved over 9,000 adult participants. After examining data and analyzing the negative outcomes that participants described, researchers identified 10 items that measure levels of the adversity suffered (Felitti et al., 1998). Felitti et al. (1998) found that, with high ACE scores, students were more likely to exhibit negative behaviors. While some of these behaviors are not limited to the educational community, they have the potential to affect educational outcomes. When children experience ACE they are prone to such behaviors as violence, delinquency, and alcohol or substance abuse; negative outcomes such as bullying behaviors are also associated with ACE (Garrido et al., 2018).

This literature review included an examination of information and empirical evidence about ACE and the ten-item surveys used to score them. As the score of an individual's survey increases, the likelihood of negative outcomes for that individual also increases (Jimenez et al., 2016). Children who experienced three or more ACE demonstrated poor outcomes in the core academic area of literacy, science, social studies, and math (Jimenez et al., 2016).

Because ACE scores do not indicate all the negative factors in a child's life, researchers have explored the intensity of the effect of different types of trauma and have also explored ACE in conjunction with such environmental conditions as poverty. In

schools and districts where poverty is prevalent, it is important to know that poverty is a condition that magnifies the other negative impacts of ACE (Bellis et al., 2017); it is also more likely that children living in poverty have suffered a significant number of ACE (Powell & Davis, 2019). Homelessness is typically associated with poverty, and not surprisingly, it is another factor contributing to negative academic experiences. The number of homeless children attending schools has seen a dramatic increase in the past thirty years (Masten et al., 2015). Homeless children are at additional risks because of the tendency to have frequent changes in schools, often requiring repetition of grades; they also tend to score lower on standardized tests (Masten et al., 2015).

Impact of ACE on Education

A number of negative outcomes associated with high ACE scores have begun to receive academic attention. The empirical evidence about ACE and negative adult health outcomes is plentiful, but there are fewer studies involving youth (Garrido et al., 2018). A study conducted by Jimenez et al. (2016) using teacher observations confirmed that young children with ACE scores demonstrated poor fundamental skills in language and literacy and also struggled with a deficit in social skills and difficulty in maintaining attention. Individuals who reported four or more ACE were more likely to drop out of high school and to experience poverty (Metzler et al., 2017).

The lack of academic readiness at the end of kindergarten is a strong predictor of poor academic outcomes throughout a child's educational career, leading researchers to discuss the importance of providing the best frameworks to support traumatized children (Jimenez et al., 2016). In addition to early childhood, teenage years, with myriad

changes, bring their own challenges. Soleimanpour et al. (2017) looked at the special

needs that teens with ACE and those who are marginalized have and determined that

teens are frequently not receiving the assistance they need across the health, social and

educational sectors. When schools and communities are not prepared to meet the needs of

children with ACE, additional traumas can occur in those settings during the teen years,

increasing the likelihood that those students will not succeed (Soleimanpour et al., 2017).

When children suffer multiple ACE, it is much more likely that their education will

suffer, their career options will be limited, and that a life of poverty will ensue, thus

introducing their children to negative conditions which then continue the ACE cycle

(Metzler et al., 2017).

Since the recognition of ACE and the realization that ACE scores are related to

negative life outcomes for those who experience them, interventions via the welfare

system or the justice system are being implemented to offset these experiences (Ford,

2017). These methods are not sufficient to build resilience in those who have suffered the

effects of ACE (Ford, 2017). However, if professionals can intervene early in a child's

life and identify ACE and provide education, support, and interventions, there may be a

decreased risk of the negative behaviors continuing into adulthood (Garrido et al., 2018).

Student Outcomes

ACE have a proven negative effect on students' academic outcomes and

educational completion (Brunzell et al., 2016b). In a study of 13 students aged 15-17 at

three schools in the southeastern United States who were repeating the ninth grade,

results indicated that all of the students who had experienced at least one ACE also

indicated that they had experienced at least one school disengagement behavior (Iachini et al., 2016). Two of the 13 students reported experiencing no ACE, while the remaining students reported having experienced 1-5 ACE. All of the students who had suffered at least one ACE also reported a school-related behavior change; for all of the students whose data were analyzed, a behavior change that was noted either coincided with the negative experience or occurred directly afterward (Iachini et al., 2016). When children are exposed to ACE, they can experience negative changes in brain development and develop behavioral issues that result in inadequate academic success (Powell & Davis, 2019).

Because childhood trauma can disrupt the development of parts of the brain, affecting its regulatory capacity, many facets of education and school structure become difficult for the traumatized child (Brunzell et al., 2016a). Research shows that this is not coincidental; not only can ACE have a negative impact on teens' health and education, but ACE exposure can also negatively impact adult education, career, and income outcomes (Metzler et al., 2017). More research is needed about ACE and high school dropout rates. Growing awareness of the detrimental impact of ACE on student outcomes and the potential for achieving better outcomes through building positive relationships could be an important consideration when conducting the study on RJ and students with ACE (Crosby et al., 2018).

Role of the School

There is mounting evidence indicating that schools play a powerful role in the lives of children (Sanders & Munford, 2016; Shukla et al., 2016). Districts can address

ACE at the building level, the district level, and in a school-community context (Kataoka et al., 2018). Those schools with a positive climate and administrators, as well as teachers and support staff who are trained and culturally sensitive, help students to develop strength and resilience, and provide the framework for success. When those factors are lacking, students are likely to suffer additional trauma in the school (Sanders et al., 2016). Cavanaugh (2016) stressed the importance of safe environments in schools. Participants in the Pendergast et al. (2018) study agreed that the school should provide a safe environment for students and should have personnel available with whom students can talk openly about sensitive issues without fear of judgment. Schools have the potential to help traumatized youth develop positive relationships with both adults and peers. Current literature suggests that these positive relationships can become a protective factor for youth and highlight the importance of creating environments in schools that foster the development of positive relationships (Clements-Nolle & Waddington, 2019). Without the right combination of factors, however, schools can reinforce the existing injustices which prevent students with ACE who may not have positive relationships in school from succeeding (Sanders et al., 2016). Research has shown that there are situations and conditions at school which can further traumatize students, such as bullying, inequity, and social isolation (Ford, 2017).

Disengagement From School

Pendergast et al. (2018) pointed out that early adolescence is a period with an increased risk of students becoming disengaged at school, oftentimes because they are already feeling marginalized. Research shows that students who have suffered abuse or

neglect find it more difficult to move from elementary school to a middle school setting (Mallett, 2017). Pendergast et al. (2018) discussed the importance of recognizing that students who are struggling academically frequently face a wide variety of additional problems such as poverty, health issues, and social issues. Although students are given different labels in different school systems, students who are experiencing trauma or have experienced trauma are likely to exhibit many of the same behaviors that may now be associated with ACE (Dorado et al., 2016). Research indicated that exposure to violence is linked not only to anxiety and depression, but also to negative educational outcomes such as lowered grade point averages, and conditions that interfere with learning, such as attention deficit disorder and difficulties with abstract reasoning (Kataoka et al., 2018).

Children frequently need to rely on adults to help them stay engaged at school, as factors that cause them to disengage are beyond their control. Even in early childhood classes, students who have suffered trauma have difficulty maintaining positive relationships and are more likely to display aggressive behavior; these children are unlikely to engage at school (Jimenez, et al., 2016). A study done by Baxter et al. (2017) determined that children who have suffered ACE are less likely to find success because their experiences cause them to lack the belief that they can succeed. Strong adult relationships can help these vulnerable students to engage at school and become more successful (Pendergast et al., 2018). According to Abukari (2018) students who feel different because of their life circumstances, disabilities, or those who have suffered trauma are more likely to struggle with social relationships, and often feel as though they are not accepted.

Responding to Disengagement

When students become increasingly disengaged from school life and academics, the school has the capacity to intervene in this pattern of behavior (Clements-Nolle & Waddington, 2019). In the 2018 Pendergast et al. study, researchers reviewed 21 studies that shared the following common themes that make up a sense of belonging at school (SOBAS) for middle school students: school climate, positive social interactions, student attributes, and academic belonging (Pendergast et al., 2018). Sanders and Munford (2016) explored five orientations to practice that encourage marginalized youth to continue their education. Those orientations are perseverance, adaptability, relationships, time, and honesty, and all are associated with resilience (Sanders & Munford, 2016). Resilience, which can and does enable vulnerable youth to succeed despite their challenges, is not a fixed trait, but rather something that can be developed (Sanders & Munford, 2016). Some researchers maintain that the educational community has been too reticent in acknowledging the role of resilience and the role that educators can play in developing resilience (Sanders & Munford, 2016).

School Behavior Programs

As the pitfalls of zero tolerance, police involvement in schools, and generally punitive measures are recognized, schools and other organizations are turning toward more positive, systemic philosophies and programs such as Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Positive Behavioral Intervention System (PBIS) (Dorado et al., 2016). SEL programs support Restorative Practices (RP) by teaching students to develop the skills and attitudes that are needed to build strong and healthy relationships, such as

communication skills, kindness, empathy, and caring (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). Other programs and philosophies such as trauma-informed practices (TIP) and positive youth development (PYD) which stress a proactive, positive approach to school interactions are also producing positive student outcomes, including academic success (Dorado et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2017). These school programs and RJ have common components, such as the teaching of empathy, compassion, critical thinking, and responsibility (Komorosky & O'Neal, 2015).

There is increasing evidence that oftentimes behavior outcomes and academic outcomes mirror one another (Espelage et al., 2016). Research has indicated that an SEL curriculum can reduce school behavior problems and improve academic achievement (Top et al., 2016). Espelage et al. (2016) conducted a study that showed improved academic grades for students with disabilities who had participated in an SEL program which helped them develop the communication and social skills they needed to develop and strengthen relationships.

School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) was the subject of an extensive study done in the state of Kentucky; it involved 586 elementary schools, 216 middle schools, and 219 high schools (Houchens, et al., 2017). Results of the study showed that when SWPBIS was implemented with medium to high fidelity, students had higher overall achievement scores, and teachers indicated greater job satisfaction and gave a higher rating for the organizational health of their schools (Houchens, et al., 2017).

Research showed that this is important information for educators and school

leaders to understand as it is particularly important for children who have suffered trauma

to learn and practice new skills and strategies in a sequential fashion (Brunzell et al.,

2016a). As a result of the research, which has demonstrated the negative effects of ACE,

schools are implementing trauma-informed practices and/or programs, which are

designed to meet the needs of students with ACE (Powell & Davis, 2019).

Traditional Discipline

Traditional discipline has typically meant punitive practices, such as loss of recess

in elementary school, detention in high school, and escalating amounts of in-school and

out-of-school suspensions. Punitive discipline in schools is not limited to the United

States; for example, retributive discipline in South African schools includes such things

as additional schoolwork, removing privileges, detention, assigning menial tasks,

behavior contracts, humiliation, and even corporal punishment, although the last is illegal

(Reyneke, 2015). Increased problems in schools are proof that these methods do not work

(Reyneke, 2015).

The policies that introduced a more punitive disciplinary system were not

carefully planned, they have not been equitable, and they have not resulted in safer

schools (Mallett, 2017). Some disciplinary practices that are employed by schools to

manage behaviors exacerbate the poor behavior and affect not only the school but also

have an impact on the social and economic problems in the community (Reyneke, 2015).

Time out of the classroom due to suspensions and expulsion, for example, can and does

leave students feeling rejected and humiliated (Kirkman et al., 2016). The likelihood that

a child or adolescent will become involved with the juvenile justice system is typically

the result of multiple risk factors such as poverty, neglect, and others, not just one

incident (Mallett, 2017). Socio-economic problems, lack of strong family structure, and

poor school climate combine to create poor academic outcomes for children in South

Africa where schools do not necessarily provide a safe learning place for all children

(Reyneke, 2015).

  In the U.S., events such as school shootings have heightened fears which prompt

parents and school officials to seek safety in law enforcement, a route that may lead to

less safety, not more (Nance, 2016). Many schools have a police officer, called a school

resource officer (SRO) present during school hours (Nance, 2016). Across the country

and in all grades, there is an increase in SROs becoming involved in disciplinary issues in

K-12 public schools; while some school officials and community members believe this is

a route to maintaining safety, there is preliminary research that indicated that this does

not lead to safer schools, nor does it lead to a more positive school climate (Nance,

2016).

  Shukla et al. (2016) examined school climate in multiple areas including

disciplinary structure, academic expectations, the willingness of students to seek help,

student engagement, and prevalence and forms of bullying. The study showed that

although staff may perceive that disciplinary procedures and expectations are consistent

across grades and demographics, student perceptions may be quite different (Shukla et

al., 2016). The study also showed that different students would rate the school climate

very differently according to their own experiences and perceptions. Some social groups

within a school may experience no bullying, while other social groups may experience relatively high amounts of bullying (Shukla et al., 2016). Teens are especially vulnerable to rejection by peers and are likely to suffer negative effects as a result (Biglan et al., 2017). Researchers suggested that perhaps differentiation of instruction should also be applied to differentiation of interventions for students with unique needs and backgrounds (Shukla et al., 2016). Researchers indicated that a disciplinary structure that is tailored to meet the needs of students with ACE may be beneficial.

Zero Tolerance

In the 1980s and 1990s, concern about school violence in the United States led to the implementation of zero-tolerance policies which have since been shown to be ineffective and inequitable (Alnaim, 2018). Although the Zero Tolerance policy was established initially as an automatic, inflexible response to weapons in schools, in which the offender's suspension was required, schools began to expand the harsh, often exclusionary policy to alcohol, tobacco and even as a response to behavior which was deemed defiant (Alnaim, 2018). The Zero Tolerance policy became a "zero-tolerance policy" which was enforced at the discretion of school personnel (Alnaim, 2018). Not only were such policies implemented without consistency and inequity, but they did not address the root cause of the actions (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). Special education students and minority students are consistently overrepresented when looking at suspensions and expulsions; they are thus cut off from the educational practices and personnel which could help them develop the skills or strategies they need to address the behavior which got them suspended (Alnaim, 2018).

In a study of college students and college graduates who had been suspended in middle or high school but were able to overcome the odds and go on to college, at least one student reported that the suspension had had a very negative impact on her self-esteem (Kirkman et al., 2016). In addition to the federal statute which requires schools to report weapons in schools to law enforcement, more than half the states have statutes requiring that numerous lesser offenses not involving firearms be reported to law enforcement (Nance, 2016).

Considerable attention is being given to school violence, school shootings, school safety, and all the topics that surround those issues. Some support the presence of police offers in school and their involvement in discipline, but others question whether this is the appropriate route; Goss v Lopez (1975) was the Supreme Court's first major intervention in school discipline (Black, 2015). The court upheld students' right to due process. In retrospect, this question is not a question at all, but the finding at the time was not so obvious (Black, 2015), and law enforcement involvement in discipline can complicate the question of due process.

The presence of law enforcement officials in schools is a topic about which research is lacking; presently, it is not clear what effects this change will have. Some fear that these officials, called school resource officers (SRO's) have a negative influence on the educational atmosphere because they are not trained in pedagogy, child psychology, or other facets that strongly influence school climate, but rather they are only trained in law enforcement (Nance, 2016). In addition, they are not answerable to school boards. In the absence of explicit procedural expectations, SRO's can exceed their authority (Counts

et al., 2018). They oftentimes become involved in disciplinary issues that should remain under the purview of school administration (Black, 2015). Over half of the states utilizing SRO's have no guidelines governing their role in the schools (Counts et al., 2018). Research indicates that exclusionary disciplinary practices that are associated with punitive practices, rather than an approach aimed at resolution, unfairly affect minorities and vulnerable students (Counts et al., 2018).

School-to-Prison Pipeline

Zero tolerance policies that were designed to ensure school safety through tough disciplinary responses have created what many have called the school-to-prison pipeline (Thompson, 2016). School officials are prone to treating many disciplinary problems as issues with individual students, which means they do not recognize that the problem is a systemic one (Myers, 2017). Although the education system and the justice system were not designed as a partnership, over the past three decades, the level of collaboration between the two has increased as a result of the concern over school violence and a desire to provide protection using law enforcement personnel and procedures (Mallett, 2016). The term "school-to-prison pipeline" resulted because policies, such as the zero-tolerance policy, which seclude, suspend, or expel students frequently result in those students dropping out of school and entering the juvenile justice system (Myers, 2017). The adoption of zero-tolerance policies resulted in school officials applying predetermined consequences for a wide variety of offenses, from weapons to alcohol to disruptive behavior, not allowing for an examination of the circumstances which were responsible for the offense (Mallett, 2016).

There are common risk factors that play a role in the lives of the children and adolescents who are involved in school discipline and the juvenile justice system. They share similarities of family cultures, community settings, and peer relationships which makes them vulnerable, and which indicates that they will have difficulty navigating school challenges (Mallett, 2017). Because of this, the school-to-prison pipeline affects many marginalized groups who are dramatically overrepresented in the school-to-prison pipeline (Mallett, 2017).

Restorative Justice

RJ has been introduced into the justice system, the mental health world, the business world, and more recently, into the world of education. Practices aligned with RJ have a long history with connections to indigenous practice; in the Navajo tradition, harm and conflict signify disruption of interpersonal harmony or disruption of a more extensive nature (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Similarly, in New Zealand, the Maori peoples have a long history of employing family group conferencing, and including the community in the resolution of conflict (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). As implemented in the schools, RJ helps children not only understand the importance of positive relationships but also teaches the skills needed for children to settle their differences through relationship building, rather than punishing them when those relationships falter (Ogilvie & Fuller, 2016). There are many different restorative models, but the majority of the models are not designed to become behavior modification programs, but rather to bring about reconciliation (Payne & Welch, 2015).

Although much is being written about RJ in schools, the research behind this

practice in education lags behind the publicity describing implementation of RJ programs

in specific schools (Song & Swearer, 2016). There is a fundamental disagreement about

the concept of RJ: is it an art, a way of being, a philosophy, or is it a science that can be

taught with a manual (Song & Swearer, 2016)? Terminology can vary within the field; RJ

is also referred to as restorative practices, restorative approaches, restorative strategies,

restorative discipline, and restorative interventions (Song & Swearer, 2016).

Restorative Justice Practices

There are three basic categories of RJ: circles, conferences, and victim-offender

mediations (Song & Swearer, 2016). Exact strategies and programs may vary, but if they

do not bring together the victim, the offender, and the community, they are not

considered RJ strategies (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). When first adopted by the

educational system, RJ was used as a response to problem behaviors, but as time went on

and restorative circles were employed, it became apparent that strong positive

relationships are at the heart of RJ (Evans & Vaandering, 2016).

RJ, with its variety of practices, strategies, and levels of implementation, may be

affected by many different factors such as the level, size, location, and demographics of

schools (Payne & Welch, 2015). Smaller schools are not as likely to employ peer

mediation as are larger schools, but larger schools are not as likely to include restoration

as one of the RJ practices (Payne & Welch, 2015). A minority student population and

student socioeconomic status also play a role in RJ overall and specific practices. A

higher concentration of Black students coincides with less likelihood of requiring

restitution or community service but does not affect the incidence of peer mediation and student conferences (Payne & Welch, 2015). Schools with higher numbers of lower SES parents are not as likely to include peer mediation or student conferences but show little difference from other schools in restitution and community service (Payne & Welch, 2015). When schools have a predominance of Black, Hispanic, and lower SES students, those schools are less likely to implement RJ (Payne & Welch, 2015).

Restorative Justice and Students With ACE

Traumatized children bring their history of adverse experiences to the classroom, and that history is frequently the cause of misbehavior (Reyneke, 2015). Punishing such children merely adds more pain to the historical pain, causing the child to withdraw and disengage leading to more behavioral problems and truancy (Reyneke, 2015). Research and history have shown that punishment is not a deterrent (Moss et al., 2019), whereas restorative practices have the ability to strengthen relationships and develop emotional literacy (Reyneke, 2015). RJ has two goals: that of restoring a damaged relationship, and that of providing the perpetrator with an opportunity to redeem him/herself (Song & Swearer Restorative practices, 2016). When people have more knowledge about RJ they are more likely to embrace it (Moss et al., 2019). Based on findings from current literature and research, educators who recognize the deficits of punitive discipline may find a better alternative in RJ. may help strengthen teacher-student relationships and decrease the perceived need for punitive discipline by doing the following: fostering interpersonal support, ensuring fair process and framework, including student voice (Gregory et al., 2016).

With the implementation of RP grounded in RJ, Norwood School, a Science, Technology, Engineering & Music (STEM) school in Baltimore Co, MD, showed a significant reduction in office referrals, lost instructional time, and physical aggression (Goldys, 2016). Other research concluded that teachers who implemented RP with fidelity did indeed have more positive relationships with those students, as perceived by both teachers and students (Gregory et al., 2016). Proponents of RJ claim that implementation of RP is likely to result in more equitable discipline, and indeed, more implementation of RP did result in narrowing the gap that continues to plague disciplinary events (Gregory et al., 2016). A study that was done by Ingraham et al. (2016) at an ethnically diverse elementary school in San Diego showed drastic reductions in behavior referrals with the implementation of RPS.

Obstacles to Restorative Justice

Although RP is demonstrating a reduction in inequities within disciplinary policies, there is considerable resistance to adopting this concept (Mansfield et al., 2018). The Norwood School had difficulties to overcome in the implementation of RJ, as it dealt with a fixed mindset - those who believed in the traditional "reward or punish" method of managing behavior (Goldys, 2016). Contrarily, RJ and RP seek a support system that replaces those traditional practices, making the integration of RJ programs problematic for organizations(Goldys, 2016). Although prisons have shown for the past 400 years that punishment does not work, such forms of discipline continue to receive funding and support (Mansfield et al., 2018); many people are likely to feel more comfortable

continuing with a system they know than to risk attempting something new (Moss et al., 2019).

A non-experimental design study in Scotland examined the implementation of an RJ program in Scottish schools, and although data showed a predominantly positive result for the implementation of RJ, schools still faced challenges (Moir & MacLeod, 2018). The efficacy of school leadership had a strong influence on the successful implementation of RJ (Moir & MacLeod, 2018). Moss et al. (2019) made a correlation between growth mindset and the ability of an organization to develop the support of and belief in RJ. Challenges to implementation included data gathering, maintaining quality, lack of staff support among some personnel, and lack of support among some parents (Moir & MacLeod, 2018).

Role of Community and Family

The word "community" can describe the neighborhood in which we live, or, as in the case of schools, the educational community can refer to the people with whom we spend our days learning and growing together. Community culture and structure influence the lives of the children who live and develop in that community (Mallett, 2017). Payne and Welch (2015) asserted that interpersonal relationships and community relationships are at the heart of educational communities, and when those relationships are mishandled or damaged, even a minor incident can have far-reaching effects. A quantitative study conducted with 11th-grade students supported the findings of other studies which indicated that family and school support were beneficial in helping students to overcome adversity (Li, 2017).

Qualitative data indicated that after two years of implementation of an RP program parents were less worried that their children would not graduate (Ingraham et al., 2016). Goldys (2016) described a very proactive plan for engaging parents which included surveys to determine what parents most needed to learn about. In this plan, parents were invited to watch demonstrations of justice circles; they were able to visit classrooms to see RJ in practice and had access to educational materials that focused on RJ (Goldys, 2016).

Minority children are at a greater risk for suffering ACE and are also at a greater risk for living in communities of poverty, which are identified as communities with such issues as food insecurity, inferior educational systems and high unemployment (Ellis & Dietz, 2017). Building community resilience (BCR) can draw upon the strengths of organizations within the community and connect with the community itself in an effort to assist children in developing resilience (Ellis & Dietz, 2017).

The struggle for resilience continues from generation to generation, but there is evidence that resilient adults can help build resilience in children (Ellis & Dietz, 2017). This fact pointed out the importance of including family support and education when considering resilience in vulnerable students. As educators, it is important to be aware of the efforts being made in other fields and to learn from the research being conducted in those fields. Some health care providers now understand that the most sustainable changes which can provide positive behavior and emotional improvements must begin in the family (Biglan et al., 2017). Attempting to study the cause and effect of the issues affecting vulnerable children is difficult because risk factors and outcomes reverse roles

depending on individuals and situations which adds complexity to the issue (Mallett, 2017).

Resilience

Research indicated that it is possible to reduce negative symptoms in traumatized children through the development of resilience (Happer et al., 2017). Children from poor families and those from certain demographics can be automatically considered as vulnerable with no thought given to the strengths and supports they may have which could help them develop resilience (Abukari, 2018). The very nature of resilience, no matter its specific definition, is frequently considered within the context of risk (Abukari, 2018). Resilience helps students overcome many setbacks and achieve academic success, even for those students who have suffered exclusionary practices at school such as suspensions (Kirkman et al., 2016). It can be challenging to evaluate the results of different studies because although the link between trauma and resilience is currently being studied, it is difficult to find a consistent definition for resilience (Happer et al., 2017). Once thought to be a fixed trait, most modern researchers now agree that resilience is a trait that can be learned, and that resilience training has specific components: emotional regulation training, cognitive behavioral training, physical health information, social support, and a neurobiological component such as mindfulness (Chandler et al., 2015). Happer et al. (2017) incorporated three different models of resilience as a result of trauma in their study: resilience as an outcome, resilience as a mitigating factor of adversity, and resilience as the capacity to respond appropriately to trauma.

Multiple studies of resilience are producing evidence that there are strategies and practices which contribute to the development of resilience. The study conducted by Happer et al. (2017) confirmed that resilience can be developed in traumatized youth, which supports the definition of resilience as other than a fixed trait. Relationships, climate, and culture at schools are likely to contribute to student resilience; many researchers have shown that a sense of belonging, also known as connectedness, is one of the most influential factors in student success (Kirkman et al., 2016). A recent study including college students and recent college graduates found that most of the students reported that a sense of belonging played a significant role in their success; some felt very connected to an athletic team, others to a teacher or teachers, and others to supportive friends (Kirkman et al., 2016).

Resilience and academic success are not learned or achieved in a single experience or situation (Pitzer & Skinner, 2017). Research also suggested that a continual process may exist, whereby engaged students may be looped into increased resilience, whereas disengaged students may amplify motivational vulnerability (Pitzer & Skinner, 2017). Abukari (2018) suggested that understanding the causes behind negative actions can be important, as a lack of understanding about risk and resilience can lead to inaccurate predictions about vulnerable youth.

Motivational Resilience and Emotional Reactivity

Researchers examined longitudinal data from 1608 elementary and middle-school students using a cohort-sequential design (Pitzer & Skinner, 2017). In the study, motivational resilience and emotional reactivity both predicted changes in students'

personal and interpersonal resources from fall to spring (Pitzer & Skinner, 2017).

Students high in emotional reactivity showed decreases in personal and interpersonal

resources, but students high in resilience showed increases in both resources (Pitzer &

Skinner, 2017). Students who had high motivational resilience in the fall gradually

advanced academically during the year and showed improved relatedness, autonomy, and

competence, as well as experienced increased warmth and support from their teachers

(Pitzer & Skinner, 2017). Students who had high levels of motivational vulnerability

showed gradual academic declines, with teachers becoming increasingly withdrawn and

controlling (Pitzer & Skinner, 2017). Students who started with motivational

vulnerabilities but received high levels of teacher support were able to finish the year

with higher motivational resilience (Pitzer & Skinner, 2017).

Increasing Resilience

Other skills or strategies that are associated with resilience are emotional

regulation, conflict resolution, future orientation, and active listening (Wesely et al.,

2017). In the study which examined the outcomes of a mentoring program matching adult

mentors with at-risk students, the focus was to discover what stresses were creating

difficulty in students' lives. The primary difficulty named was family relationships and

the home environment; problems at home resulted in a loss of attention and issues at

school (Wesely et al., 2017). Of the skills required for resilience, active listening was of

particular importance to the mentees, and mentors reported that they could see the

resilience developing in real-time (Wesely et al., 2017). Active listening appeared to help

facilitate the other two coping strategies (Wesely et al., 2017), as it allowed a relationship to form between a mentor and mentee.

Research also showed that when students had developed problem-solving skills, asked for help, and demonstrated self-regulation, they found more academic success (Pitzer & Skinner, 2017). Pitzer and Skinner (2017) suggested that engagement, coping, and persistence should be considered together, not studied as separate entities. Bringing those constructs together could fill gaps in both engagement and coping. Motivational vulnerability is the opposite of motivational resilience; it is possible that when students are engaged in school they are more able to access and/or develop positive coping strategies (Pitzer & Skinner, 2017).

In addition to feelings of belonging, maintaining positive relationships, and developing skills related to resilience, home support can be very instrumental in student success (Kirkman et al., 2016). The stronger the relationships in the community, the more connected students felt. Some of the students spoke about the family expectation that they would attend college; this appears to have given them the ability to imagine attending (Kirkman et al., 2016). Family cultures vary greatly, but when families provided a supportive culture and encouraging words, the family input and structure helped students to develop an ability to transcend difficulties (Abukari, 2018). Research would indicate that it is important for schools to be intentional about fostering strong positive relationships and collaboration which meet the social and emotional needs of students (Kirkman et al., 2016). It is through building supportive school relationships that are academic and social that resilience can be developed (Pendergast et al., 2018).

Connection Between Resilience and School Engagement

Students are more successful in school when they are actively engaged in their studies and when they demonstrate persistence in dealing with problems (Pitzer & Skinner, 2017). Schools can provide a positive environment and trained personnel, both of which can help build resilience in vulnerable children (Sanders & Munford, 2016). It is this very resilience that helps vulnerable children overcome the difficulties which life has imposed upon them and helps them find success in education (Sanders & Munford, 2016).

Clements-Nolle and Waddington (2019) named both school connectedness and internal resilience as factors that lessen the likelihood of suffering psychological distress as a result of ACE. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs in schools are beginning to demonstrate some positive results in teaching skills that improve social interactions and problem-solving, both of which lead to greater school engagement (Biglan et al., 2017).

Current researchers have identified some issues inherent in traditional educational paradigms, particularly concerning disciplinary procedures. There is research that indicates that RJ may provide academic support, particularly for students with ACE. Macready (2009) noted that, as new information becomes available, and differing perspectives emerge, discussion on the potential benefit of RJ needs to continue. Researchers and academics have approached the issue of how RJ practices may impact the academic success of students with ACE in a variety of ways. Teacher observations have been used to gather data regarding students with ACE classroom behaviors (Jimenez

et al., 2016), as well as descriptive studies using students' responses on the ACE survey (Iachini et al., 2016). Surveys were also used to collect data regarding life outcomes for individuals who had experienced childhood trauma (Baxter et al., 2017; Houchens et al., 2017). In addition, interviews, focus groups, and literature reviews were tools used by researchers interested in studying academic success in students (Pendergast et al., 2018). While there were some researchers who used quantitative or mixed methods approaches, such as Top et al. (2016), who employed a quasi-experimental study utilizing both observations and a longitudinal growth model analysis, most studies utilized qualitative approaches; Ingraham et al. (2016) used a single-case study design and qualitative methods to evaluate the outcomes of RP on elementary students who had experienced trauma.

There are strengths and weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative approaches used by researchers in this discipline. Qualitative approaches are beneficial when variables are not known, as well as when "new" topics are being studied (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative studies heavily rely on data that can be described using numbers, but they are not as useful when attempting to study specific qualities, experiences, or phenomena; the potential for understanding how to provide academic supports for students with ACE by adopting an RJ model of education is more closely aligned with the practices used in qualitative research. According to Creswell (2014), it is this type of research that is most appropriate when testing theories or discerning the benefits of specific interventions; the literature review found that this approach was often used by researchers interested in the possible influence of RJ on students with ACE.

This literature review found many studies that relate to the life and academic outcomes of children who experience trauma. Many researchers discussed the long-lasting, negative effects of early trauma that students could face, including poor attendance and school behaviors, and often leading to dropping out of or being removed from school (Brunzell et al., 2016a; Felitti et al., 1998; Garrido et al., 2018; Metzler et al., 2017; Soleimanpour et al., 2017; Stempel et al., 2017), but those studies which focused on the potential for RJ to alleviate these issues were less common. The gap found through the literature review discovered that the majority of research focused on the problem that students with ACE struggle academically or had made preliminary findings but recommended further research into solutions that would provide academic support for those students (Archdall & Kilderry, 2016; Bethell et al., 2017; Gregory et al., 2017; Mallett, 2016; Mallett, 2017; Stempel et al., 2017).

This literature review found, however, some studies that pertained to the research questions regarding the potential academic supports provided by RJ for students with ACE. Plumb et al. (2016) described a logic model that would help administrators implement practices aligned with RJ; they found that students who had experienced childhood trauma were more likely to find academic success if such practices were integrated into the school setting. This approach is meaningful as it gives a concrete method of implementing systemic changes, as well as highlighting how students with ACE can benefit from practices in keeping with RJ. Ryan et al. (2017) studied the link between brain development and young children who have experienced trauma and found that both positive relationships and trauma-informed practices would be beneficial for

such students. This study was meaningful in that it showed a multidisciplinary, multifaceted approach to combating the effects of trauma in young children.

The literature review also found many studies that revolved around SEL, and how related practices may help students who have experienced trauma be successful in school (Dorado et al., 2016; Espelage et al., 2016; Komorosky & O'Neal, 2015). While not directly related to the research questions in my study, they are relevant and meaningful in that they show a possible correlation between practices implemented in school settings and the academic outcomes of students who have experienced trauma. Finally, there were a number of studies that showed a link between positive relationships and various measures of success (Clements-Nolle & Waddington, 2019; Crosby et al., 2018; Pendergast et al., 2018; Sanders & Munford, 2016). These studies are meaningful to my study, as RJ employs many relationship-building strategies and an emphasis on positive relationships and it demonstrates how those may provide academic support for students with ACE.

Summary

Traditional disciplinary practices, compounded by ACE scores and/or the existence of trauma in students' lives, have serious and lasting effects on students already at risk of school failure. Current research describes common pathways for these students, from dropping out of school to becoming trapped in the criminal justice system. There is little empirical evidence in the research, however, to suggest how to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, and to provide academic support for students with ACE. Many of these students, traumatized already, struggle to succeed in an educational setting that uses

traditional, punitive disciplinary procedures (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). The current study investigated the RJ practices educators have implemented to support the academic needs of students with ACE.

RJ is built on the premise that responding to negative behaviors in a way that damaged or nonexistant relationships can be repaired or made better will have more supportive and lasting influence than those ascribed to punishment alone. This review of current literature discussed the effects of trauma on students and academic outcomes, current popular disciplinary systems in the schools, the role of both school and the family, and how resilience, built in part through RJ and RP, may help students with ACE receive the academic supports they need. Despite rising interest in and studies pertaining to the effects of RJ, there is a gap in knowledge regarding how RJ programs could potentially provide academic support for students with ACE.

ACE, identified in 1998 (Felitti et al.) are traumatic events that have lasting, negative impacts on a child's well-being, socially, emotionally, and academically. Students who experienced multiple traumatic episodes (ACE scores are one indicator of such) while developing have a greater likelihood of poor academic outcomes, increased behavioral issues at school, and developmental delays that impede learning (Ryan et al., 2017). These students are also prone to having fewer positive social interactions and bring negative behaviors that are a result of trauma into the classroom (Reyneke, 2015). Punishment, the fallback for students who misbehave, can compound these students' pain, and encourage them to withdraw further from peers and school personnel (Reyneke, 2015).

Schools have, for some time, relied on traditional disciplinary practices that emphasize punishment, often using exclusionary methods to enforce rules. Contemporary research, however, found that students who are excluded from participating in school often feel rejected (Kirkman et al., 2016); this, combined with the effects of trauma, can result in student disengagement from school (Soleimanpour et al., 2017). Unfortunately, these students, who have been pushed away from the supports of school and are already at risk for negative outcomes due to ACE predictors, fuel the school-to-prison pipeline. Mallett (2017) found that probable incarceration in the juvenile justice system was predicated on multiple factors, rather than a single incident; Myers (2017) discussed the relationship between zero-tolerance discipline policies, leaving school, and entering the criminal justice system.

While traditional disciplinary practices exacerbate issues that traumatized youth need to combat, the school has the potential to have a positive influence through building resilience and implementing restorative justice practices. When schools foster a positive climate and staff the school with trained personnel, students have the ability to start building resilience; these factors have been shown to be paramount in helping students succeed academically (Cavanaugh, 2016; Pendergast et al., 2018). Current research has shown that resilience, a trait that can be learned, is invaluable in helping disengaged youth persevere despite trauma, and can be further developed through educational support (Sanders & Munford, 2016).

While it is becoming more widely accepted that punitive measures neither deter nor alleviate behavioral and academic problems, there is growing support for the idea that

fostering emotional literacy and positive relationships through restorative practices can do just that (Moss et al., 2019; Reyneke, 2015). Ogilvie and Fuller (2016) have shown that when RJ models replace retributive models, students tend to develop the skills of relationship building and conflict resolution, both of which have the capacity to lead to greater academic and social success. RJ encompasses myriad practices and models, but all models embrace reconciliation and building positive relationships, rather than exclusion and behavior modification (Payne & Welch, 2015).

This literature review found that there is considerable research into the negative effects of suspension, expulsion, disengagement from school, and punitive practices in general, but that research to show how to counteract these outcomes is lacking. There are few data that indicate what helps some students overcome trauma and punitive practices, while other students succumb to past experiences. The review of the literature suggested that resilience and RJ may, in part, address this gap and provide academic support for students with ACE.

Conclusion

Moore and Ramirez (2016) also reported positive outcomes for students based on specific factors and interventions but concluded that more research is needed to explore additional factors, such as the impact of school climate on vulnerable students. While RJ is being implemented in many schools and many forms, Song and Swearer (2016) referred to the promise of RJs but confirm that practice is preceding research and much more empirical evidence is needed to guide practice. Moss et al. (2019) explored attitudes of retribution versus restitution and concluded that further research is needed to examine

biases and human dispositions toward or against RJ as those attitudes will have a strong

impact on the success or failure of RJ programs. Hulvershorn and Mulholland (2018)

discussed the increase in empirical evidence supporting trauma-sensitive practices such

as RJ, but also noted that other researchers suggested further studies which could provide

data supporting innovative school disciplinary measures. A study done by Mansfield et

al. (2018) concluded that the use of RP produced more equitable disciplinary outcomes,

but also pointed to the need for further research to confirm cause and effect, to examine

the cause for teacher resistance to such practices, and to determine why disciplinary

equity has not been reached.

Attenuating the effects of ACE and building resilience are both important

considerations for research on vulnerable children, and both require further research.

Articles and studies on resilience concurred that the definition of resilience remains

unclear. Perhaps some clarity would be gained by further studies on the topic. Happer et

al. (2017) recommended that their study, which examined resilience as an outcome, a

trait, or a process, should be replicated, but with more diversity in demographics, trauma,

and mental health histories. This study was an in-depth exploration of educators'

perspectives of the practices within an RJ model which help support the academic needs

of students with ACE. The results are intended to help educators understand how to use

RP more supportively. As the literature review showed, there is considerable research

that points to the need for a greater understanding of how students with ACE are affected

by the practices that are found in RJ models of education and/or are associated with RJ

(Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Mansfield et al., 2018; Moore & Ramirez, 2016; Moss et al., 2019; Song & Swearer, 2016; Taylor et al., 2017).

Yin (2018) explained that case study research is best designed to develop an extensive and in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. The current qualitative case study, which used an examination of archival documents and interviews with educators, is best suited to provide an in-depth exploration of the educational experiences of students with ACE in an RJ model of education as perceived by the educators who work closely with those students. Chapter 3 discussed the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology including participant selection logic, instrumentation, the data analysis plan, and issues of trustworthiness including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as well as ethical concerns.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This qualitative case study addressed educators' perceptions of the practices within an RJ model that may help educators support the academic needs of students with ACE. This information was obtained through interviews with educators who shared their perceptions of students' academic experiences. Major sections of Chapter 3 include the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Questions

RQ1: How do educators implement RJ practices in the school to support the academic needs of students with ACE?

RQ2: How do educators perceive the academic supports that RJ practices provide?

The central concepts and phenomenon of this study were students with ACE in an RJ model of education and educator perceptions of the practices that provide academic support for students with ACE. Felitti et al. (1998) published a seminal study that led to the recognition of the issues that students with ACE face. Educational researchers have since examined the effects of ACE in academic settings (Brunzell et al., 2016b; Garrido et al., 2018; Plumb et al., 2016; Shukla et al., 2016; Stempel et al., 2017). I investigated the RJ practices educators have implemented to support the academic needs of students with ACE and explored educator perceptions of the educational practices aligned with RJ that may provide academic support for students with ACE.

Research Tradition

There are several research traditions associated with qualitative studies including phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) pointed out that the research method must align with the research questions so that the data needed to answer the questions are provided by the study. As I contemplated how to gain a deeper understanding of the educational experiences of students with ACE in an RJ model of education, as perceived by educators, I considered each of the following research traditions.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is founded in both philosophy and psychology and addresses the life experiences of individuals (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Phenomenology is focused on the experiences of the participants of the study, which may not apply on a larger scale (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I considered this design but determined that a case study was better suited to revealing the desired information because it allowed for a comprehensive examination of the perceptions of educators to gain an understanding of complex experiences (see Creswell, 2014).

Grounded Theory

I also considered a grounded theory design. The result of a grounded theory design must be a general theory that is substantiated by the data collected throughout the course of the study (Burkholder et al., 2016). Grounded theory is derived from the field of sociology and focuses on a process, action, or interaction that is based on the views of participants (Creswell, 2014). As a grounded theory progresses, the possible theory is

continually examined and refined, and the data collection methods may be continually

revised to meet the needs of the changing theory (Burkholder et al., 2016). Although

some aspects of the grounded theory design were appropriate, because this approach

required significant data collection and a lengthy amount of time, it was not a practical

selection for the current study (see Burkholder et al., 2016).

Ethnography

Ethnography is primarily concerned with various aspects of a culture and how

culture may have an effect on behavior (Burkholder et al., 2016). As I developed my

research questions, I considered focusing on culture as a determining factor. I determined

that this was not the best option for my study because culture was too limiting as the

focus of potential factors that may affect the academic achievements of students with

ACE, nor was it a primary factor that may influence educator perceptions.

Qualitative Case Study

Careful thought and evaluation of possible research designs went into the

selection of a qualitative case study design. Case study research involves a mode of

inquiry that encompasses all aspects of the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Many social science

researchers apply a case study design, and professions such as education, anthropology,

and psychology are likely to include a case study design due to its ability to answer

"how" and "why" (Yin, 2018). As data are collected, the aim is to develop a deep and

rich understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2018). After considerable

consideration, I determined that a qualitative case study was best suited to investigate the

RJ practices teachers have implemented to support the academic needs of students with ACE.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) recommended that the researcher keep memos and employ dialogic engagement as a means of testing the reliability of the research questions. I employed dialogic engagement and vetted my questions. In this study, I interviewed the education professionals who work with students with ACE to learn their perceptions of the RJ practices that resulted in academic progress for students with ACE. I conducted all interviews via email or video conferencing using interview questions (see Appendix C) that were designed and written to elicit deep, rich information to answer the research questions. The semistructured interview questions were carefully crafted and followed up with probes or follow-up questions that allowed me to expand understanding, provide context, or explore some aspect of the phenomenon that was unknown. I also examined archival documents that included narratives relating to students with ACE and background, definitions, and information about the implementation of RJ practices. Throughout the study, I maintained thorough and accurate memos. This study was conducted at a small, semirural public school district in the Midwest United States using primary data collection via personal interviews. The school district comprises one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. With an enrollment of approximately 400 students, 88.6% of students are White, 15.2% are students with disabilities and 45.3% are economically disadvantaged. The district employs about 70 certified and noncertified staff.

Role of the Researcher

At the outset of the study, I developed a researcher role; I worked to establish a respectful and trusting relationship with the study participants by maintaining professionalism at all times and by providing participants with a clear description of the study and its objectives. I was respectful of participants' time by selecting a location that was convenient, and by adhering to all guidelines of time and purpose. I also respected their confidentiality and right to privacy. Creswell (2014) explained that the researcher in qualitative studies is typically deeply involved with the participants and maintains that relationship throughout the study. Throughout my years as an educator, I have served as a teacher, assistant principal, and assistant special education director. I have never worked in or been affiliated with the district where my study took place. Prior to the commencement of this study, I had no relationships, including professional, with the participants. This was intentional to decrease potential bias and increase objectivity within the study.

My history as a single parent teaching in a small rural school gave me a firsthand glimpse of the obstacles that children and parents can encounter because of the complexities of school climate and culture and school hierarchy. Although this history has added to my compassion for vulnerable students, it has also given me potential biases that I assessed throughout the data collection and analysis process. In all of my professional roles, I have worked with students with ACE and have seen the ways in which trauma affects the educational experiences of students. A 2019 survey administered to high school students by a state education agency (Burton & Kinney,

2019) indicated that approximately one quarter of high school students in the state had experienced one ACE, and 4–8% of students in ninth through twelfth grade had experienced four or more ACE.

Creswell (2014) maintained that good qualitative researchers describe their backgrounds with comments about how they may influence their interpretation of data. My background as a White, middle-class female could have predisposed me to identify with those participants who had similar backgrounds or whose lives may have mirrored my life as a single parent. As described by Burkholder et al. (2016), bias can also refer to the introduction of unintentional influence or prejudice in the interview process.

I actively managed the potential for bias in the current study. I sought input from outside sources and engaged in critical self-reflection to ensure objectivity in the conclusions I reached at each step of the study (see Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010). I avoided this potential for bias by carefully examining my interview questions to ensure that I did not use any words or expressions that might convey my bias. I also maintained a journal that facilitated objective self-reflection. Finally, I engaged in dialogic collaboration, a process of dialogue and collaboration with my advisors and other trusted peers and colleagues who assisted in my process of reflection as a means of avoiding bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

In addition to potential bias, another ethical consideration was the fact that because my study involved teachers as participants, in my role as researcher I had to take special care so teachers or other school personnel did not feel pressured into agreeing to be participants. Hatch (2002) pointed out that teachers may feel vulnerable when asked to

participate in a study, especially if members of the administrative team have already agreed to do so. I was sensitive to that perceived vulnerability by treating teachers with respect and by giving them a genuine option of refusing to participate in the study and cautioning them to avoid talking about the study with one another or in the community.

Each participant was offered a $50 gift card. This incentive offered was in keeping with acceptable guidelines for participant incentives. An acceptable incentive is one that is not monetarily exorbitant and that does not exert other undue pressure or influence. Grant and Sugarman (2004) explained that undue influence exists when one or more of the following conditions applies: if there is a dependency relationship between researcher and participant, if the risks of the study are unusually high, or if the research is degrading. Through careful attention to accepted practices, these conditions were minimized in my study.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

I gave careful consideration to the number of participants I would need in my study because experts such as Yin (2018), Creswell (2014), and Ravitch and Carl (2016) agreed that there is not a specific number of people or formula for assigning a number of participants at the outset of the study that will guarantee saturation. There is consensus, however, that qualitative studies call for a small number of participants, particularly when using purposive selection (Creswell, 2014; Guest et al., 2006; Vasileiou et al., 2018), which I used in my study. Small numbers of participants are called for in qualitative research because in-depth information is required, and large numbers would inhibit the

process of in-depth inquiry (Morse, 1995). Vasileiou et al. (2018) published a comprehensive report about sample size and concluded that researchers should be supported in their judgment about the appropriate number of participants given the context of the study and the range of factors that may influence that decision.

Guest et al. (2006) posit that 6-12 interviews will provide saturation for most studies unless the participant pool is very heterogeneous. Creswell (2014) said that a sample size of 4-5 may be adequate for case studies, and Guest et al. (2006) indicate that in some instances a sample size of one may be adequate. Morse (1995) indicates that fewer participants are required when more data are collected from each participant. Based on my research and review of other case studies I decided to conduct my study with six participants using open-ended interview questions that were designed to collect comprehensive data from each participant.

The participants of the study included teachers, an administrator, and a paraprofessional employed by the district where the study was conducted. Hatch (2002) explains that the relationship between researcher and participant is an important component of the data collection process. Intentionally selecting participants who had the time and interest to be a part of the study, and developing a trusting and respectful relationship contributed to the success of the study (Hatch, 2002). As recommended in Creswell (2014), I have no connections with this school which minimizes the possibility of having preconceived opinions or conclusions.

Purposeful sampling was used when selecting participants for this study, as certain criteria need to be met for participants to have meaningful input (Ravitch & Carl,

2016). I selected these participants from the educational staff of the school because their

educational roles, training, and interactions with traumatized youth offer a variety of

perspectives concerning the students and their experiences within the school setting. The

study was conducted at the small semi-rural school in the Midwest which I selected. All

participants of the study were employees in good standing at that school, and with which

I executed a Letter of Cooperation from a Research Partner (Appendix B). I interviewed

six educational professionals in total: one administrator, one paraprofessional, and four

teachers. All participants had a working connection with the study school. In addition to

being properly certified, they had training in RJ strategies, training and experience

working with students with ACE, and their role in the school involved working directly

with the students with ACE whose academic outcomes are relevant to the study; they also

had access to the archival documents that were examined. They were chosen for their

knowledge and understanding of student progress and outcomes in the school, they had

been interacting with the students with ACE for at least five years and their educational

training included professional development in RJ. Participants were eligible to be

included in this study if they were properly certified and were employed by the school

board of education at the Midwestern school that was selected. Their certification,

experience, and training were verified by the Human Resources Department at the partner

school. Each participant signed a letter of consent. As participants were recruited and

screened, I worked with a gatekeeper within the school with which I already had informal

approval to collect data, who assisted in the identification of possible participants who

work closely with students with ACE (C. Hydei, personal communication, July 3, 2020).

This gatekeeper was cautioned about following the same protocol for confidentiality that the participants themselves follow.

Kozleski (2017) reminded researchers that when considering sampling, it is essential to consider the context of the entire population and to include a thorough representation of perspectives. Yin (2018) recommended that cases not be considered a sample, but as a means to gain understanding, and Ravitch and Carl (2016) explained that sample size is less important in qualitative studies than in quantitative studies. The goal of a qualitative study is to arrive at an in-depth, ethical answer to the research questions and add many perspectives to the understanding of the phenomenon. My purposeful sampling of interviewees thus included a cross-section of professionals in administration, teaching staff, and paraprofessional staff, each of whom provided a unique perspective.

I chose participants from the roles of teaching, administration, and paraprofessionals to ensure that I was not getting a single perspective. Saturation in any method is the point at which information is repeated and there is no new viewpoint added to the study (Creswell, 2014). I anticipated that conducting one interview with six individuals who work closely with students with ACE and who have different roles within the school will result in saturation.

The appropriate steps were taken to gain approval for this study from the Walden University institutional review board (IRB), which shows that I have followed the appropriate steps to both protect the privacy and the rights of the participants (Creswell, 2014) as well as adhere to ethical guidelines. I have developed a consent form and letter of cooperation which underwent the IRB approval process (Approval no. 10-25-20-

0731711). Hatch (2002) pointed out that the primary concern when selecting participants is to include individuals who have a key relationship with the phenomenon being studied. When selecting educational professionals as participants, I considered their training in RJ, years of experience working with traumatized youth, accessibility, credibility, diversity, roles, perspectives, and experiences.

I posted flyers in the school as an additional means of recruiting but relied primarily upon directly recruiting participants who meet the study criteria. I sent emails to potential participants who were recommended by the gatekeeper. After potential participants were identified, I individually contacted each one via email to briefly describe the study and invited them to be a part of it. I explained what each participant's role in the study would be if they choose to participate. I presented each participant with a consent form to sign before the first interview was conducted.

In preparation to begin the study, I completed the approval form which included signed permission from the district superintendent and the signed letter of cooperation from the district which granted me access to the research site. After I obtained district approval, I e-mailed the potential participants who met the criteria for the study, using the school e-mail addresses which were provided to me through the gatekeeper with whom I was working. My e-mail included my contact information, a summary of the study, and an outline of the consent form which described participant protections.

My initial e-mail outlined the time frame of 10 days for participant response. After 10 days I had not recruited the full number of participants for the study so I e-mailed the second round of invitations. After the second round of invitations, I received

the additional participants I needed. I did not at any point have an excess of participants, so I did not have to eliminate anyone.

Instrumentation

The data in this study were collected through the examination of archival documents and interviews. The archival documents I used were official data that were produced and/or collected and archived by school personnel. They included documents describing school and district RP programs as well as relevant documentation about their implementation and narratives describing how they were employed with students with ACE. I also examined ACE surveys and documents which provided a foundation of understanding of the students who have experienced ACE. These archival documents provided a clear description of the practices which are implemented, how and why they are implemented, and how they provide academic support. All documents were de-identified. The reputability of these sources was established because all documents came from official school records. They represent the best source of data because they provided insights about students with ACE and with the implementation of RJ practices. They were provided by the educators who had training in RJ and who work closely with students with ACE.

I interviewed six educators from three different educational perspectives, using a researcher-developed interview protocol. A researcher developed interview protocol was used (Appendix C) and helped guarantee that there were no inconsistencies within the interview process and included a place to record the names of the interviewer and interviewee, the date, time, and location of the interview, a script for the introductory and

closing remarks, and the interview questions themselves (Burkholder et al., 2016).

Interview protocols used for qualitative studies can follow pre-determined protocols,

checklists, or outlines; protocols are the most specific and are often too restrictive to

optimize the interview process (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

I used a semi-structured interview model, meaning I asked a set of open-ended

interview questions that I prepared and asked a series of probes when needed, to provide

additional information or provide a further context (Burkholder et al., 2016). Qualitative

interview questions are designed to explore the phenomenon through the eyes of the

participants and may elicit historical data, opinions, or perceptions (Creswell, 2014). The

participants responded to the qualitative questions by giving their perceptions of RP,

describing their experiences with RP, and explaining the processes integral to RP in this

setting.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) describe thick description in an interview-based study as

the narrative and description which allows the researcher to contextualize the data thus

allowing the reader to understand the context in which conversations and experiences

took place. According to Ponterotto (2006), thick description explores the thoughts and

feelings of participants and gives the reader an understanding of the complexity of the

relationships involved which allows for thick interpretation of the information.

The interview questions were designed to explore the understanding that

educators have about students with ACE, educator perceptions about RJ and its effect on

students, and questions that helped to establish the context; the researcher must employ

careful listening and accurate recording of responses and participant reactions in order to

provide thick rich description. Having valid questions allowed the interviewees to respond with their perceptions and experiences as they relate to RJ practices. In order to establish the validity of my research questions, I shared them with my team and with experts in the field of education including teachers, faculty, and administrators, a practice which Ravitch and Carl (2016) refer to as vetting. I also rehearsed the interview questions, first with a family member, then with a colleague in the field of education to test the clarity of the wording, to assess my own interview style and techniques, and to verify that the questions were accessing the information sought in the research questions. This practice is also recommended by Ravitch and Carl (2016).

After preparing the interview questions I vetted them by having them evaluated and edited by an experienced researcher and then conducted practice interviews with other educators to check for understandability. Finally, I reviewed them in order to detect any flaws in language or design and to consider additional possible questions. I included main questions and possible follow-up questions and probes to get depth, detail, and nuance, ask for elaboration, and keep the interview on track. Hatch (2002) recommended that essential questions include descriptive, structural, and contrast questions. I have included these question types to provide a comprehensive look at the phenomenon, ensuring that the questions will accurately address the research questions.

Recruitment, Participants, and Data Collection

As the sole researcher, I collected all the data via interviews via videoconference or e-mail. Each participant was interviewed one time at the beginning of the study. The interview process took approximately six weeks, which was longer than I had anticipated

due to the time of year the study took place and due to disruptions caused by Covid-19. After completing the interview process I received archival documents from the gatekeeper which I used as a second data point. These documents included data sets prepared by the county, which provided statistics regarding absenteeism, referrals, and suspensions prior to the implementation of the RJ program, and for the two years following implementation. Also included were documents that described the RJ program itself at the school, defined the goals and objectives of the program, and included feedback from staff and students regarding their perceptions of the effectiveness of RJ practices. They also included state report cards which provided demographic information about participants and general demographic information about the student population in my partner school. The documents could provide triangulation by exploring different components of the RJ program, and by adding additional insights into the phenomena of ACE and RJ.

Saldaña (2016) stressed the importance of thorough and accurate record-keeping through precise coding techniques and analytic memos. During the data collection process, I utilized analytic memos and field notes. I also recorded reflections, thoughts, and feelings in a field diary throughout the data collection phase. I prepared interview questions (Appendix C) which I evaluated with colleagues and professionals in the field of research, so I could be assured that these questions achieved the range and depth of knowledge and understanding that can address the complexity of the research topic. These are key elements of maintaining validity and rigor when using the interview tool (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Interviews were recorded, but with the appropriate permission obtained before the interview began. Participants were advised, in the consent form, that interviews would be recorded and transcribed. I prepared a transcription of each interview which was used when analyzing data (Creswell, 2014). For all data collected, I used the NVivo program for storing and organizing data. The connection of the collected data to a specific research question is demonstrated in the following way:

RQ 1: How do educators implement RJ practices in the school to support the academic needs of students with ACE?

RQ 2: How do educators perceive the academic supports that RJ practices provide?

These were addressed through semi-structured interview questions that explored the experience and training that educators have in using RJ and in working with students with ACE and through data collected from archival documents which provided deeper context and understanding of students with ACE as well as the RJ practices that provide academic support. They also examined the opinions that educators have about RJ and its influence in providing academic support for students with ACE. Participants of the study hold five separate and distinct roles within the school district, and their interactions with students reflect those different roles. Questions asked for a description of the specific practices used within the RJ framework, and how those practices provided academic support to students with ACE.

Participants exited the study at the conclusion of the interview and had the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview. Once they completed the interview

they received acknowledgment for their participation with a thank you and a gift card for $50.00, as approved by the IRB. They were given an opportunity to ask questions at that time and I emailed them a summary of my findings so they could review them for accuracy. With the summary, I included a final thank-you as an expression of gratitude for their participation.

Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative data analysis is built methodically from the most basic to increasingly complex units which help the researcher to establish patterns, categories, and themes, moving from concrete to abstract in the process (Creswell, 2014). Formative data analysis begins when data are collected; it will help the researcher begin to identify themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It is important for the researcher to be intentional, transparent, and systematic in all phases of research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers analyze data by following a process that involves both interpretation and description of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). When interviewing, it is crucial to maintain precise, accurate, and transparent notes during the interview process, so later analysis will be straightforward (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The archival data provided narratives describing what RJ practices are implemented to provide academic supports and when, and educator perceptions about the influence of those practices; these data were also coded.

Data analysis is a methodical process through which the researcher identifies or uncovers the meaning in the data and communicates findings to others (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The research questions and the goals of the study guided the researcher's quest and determined what exactly was examined (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The data analysis

process involved multiple readings of the data. Coding is a means to help organize the data; it can be done manually, electronically, or both (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For this study, I coded manually using Microsoft Word to help organize codes. The nature of the research questions determined the method of coding to be used, and in this study, the exploratory nature of the study indicated the use of descriptive, process, and/or evaluation coding (Saldaña, 2016).

Each type of coding assigns labels to data to help a researcher organize, summarize, and later analyze data collected during the research phase. I used three cycles of coding to complete this process. According to Saldaña (2016), descriptive coding summarizes passages of qualitative data into simple topics, usually nouns; this type of coding is applicable for most qualitative studies but is most useful for social environments and beginning researchers (Saldaña, 2016). Because descriptive coding is valuable for categorizing topics, for new researchers, and for social environments, I utilized it in the early phase of data analysis.

Although I did not set out to use a priori codes, I did make notations about the conceptual framework as I was coding my data. I considered the conceptual framework as I developed my themes, and after completing multiple rounds of coding, I coded the conceptual framework separately as I sought ways in which to present my findings. Ultimately, I included a table showing the relationship between social development and learning, which connects Vygotsky's theory and the results of this study (see Table 4). Ravitch & Carl (2016) indicate that inductive coding, also called in vivo coding, relies on participant language, whereas deductive coding, also called a priori coding looks for

something specific in the data; they may be strategically combined through multiple readings of the data.

As I collected data, I kept accurate field notes which I reviewed extensively to help me understand the phenomenon. I reviewed the transcriptions of recorded interview questions and responses, being careful to keep accurate and meticulous records. As I analyzed the data, I made a clear distinction between describing the data and interpreting the data and was transparent about this process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016); while both are important parts of the process, it is crucial that the researcher not use those two terms interchangeably (Record-Lemon et al., 2017). I treated the data analysis process as an iterative one, not a linear one, and revisited pieces of data when needed (Record-Lemon et al., 2017).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Validity and trustworthiness are not exactly interchangeable, although they both refer to the measure of quality and rigor of a particular study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In case studies, rigor can be ensured by maintaining a case study database by following a chain of evidence protocol and by exercising caution when introducing data from electronic sources (Yin, 2018). In a qualitative study, both credibility (internal validity) and transferability (external validity) need to be established.

I was careful neither to overgeneralize the findings in my study nor to go beyond the scope of what the data was describing – ie, a moment in time in the lives and experiences of the educator participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Triangulation was an important part of my data analysis. Triangulation in data analysis means that the

researcher looks at the data collected by different methods to discover possible discordant responses or ways in which the data support emerging theories (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I triangulated my data by examination of archival documents which provided a broader understanding of the programs and practices used. Archival documents also provided narratives that gave context regarding students with ACE, and how the RJ practices which are used provide academic support. I also triangulated my data analysis by interviewing participants with three different roles in education because each educational role offered a different perspective on student experiences. Each participant also offered different perspectives that reflected their personal interactions with students with ACE. Comparing and contrasting data from three sets of participants, recording interviews and having written transcripts of the interviews, writing thorough and accurate memos, and maintaining secure and accurate records ensured that my final report is credible.

Credibility

Triangulation, prolonged contact, saturation, reflexivity, and peer review are all ways in which credibility may be established (Shenton, 2004). Internal validity is ensured when the researcher assesses the accuracy of the results by employing specific strategies such as member checking; rich, thick description; clarifying bias; presenting discrepant information, and using peer debriefing (Creswell, 2014). I worked to establish credibility by providing a complex and contextualized expression of the perceptions of the participants as they described the academic supports they provide for students with ACE (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I was careful to create and maintain a database, maintain accurate written records, and use caution with all electronic data. I reviewed the final

study with participants at the end of the interview so they could ascertain that their responses were accurately reflected.

Transferability

Transferability pertains to the application of the findings of one study to a different setting or population (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher is responsible for generating 'thick, rich' description and a thorough, detailed, and understandable report of the study, but it is the reader's responsibility to determine if those findings are transferable to his or her case (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I worked to ensure that my study is transferrable to the greatest extent possible by being comprehensive in both my descriptions and my report.

Ponterotto (2006) describes thick description as the expression of participants' emotions and thoughts, the context of the setting, and the complex interactions that occur. I employed thick, rich description by providing details of the setting, which was a small rural public school in the Midwest, and I thoroughly explored the observations, the emotions, the thoughts and perspectives of participants, as well as the interactions of the individuals and groups relevant to the study.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) describe thick description in an interview-based study as the narrative and description which allows the researcher to contextualize the data thus allowing the reader to understand the context in which conversations and experiences took place. According to Ponterotto (2006), thick description explores the thoughts and feelings of participants and gives the reader an understanding of the complexity of the relationships involved which allows for thick interpretation of the information.

The interview questions were designed to explore the perceptions of educators about what RJ practices can help provide academic supports for students with ACE. The questions examined the context of the school environment because the context of environment is an inherent part of student academic success.

Dependability

Dependability in a study is an indicator that the study is consistent; it can best be demonstrated by maintaining an audit trail (Korstjens & Moser, 2018) as well as by establishing triangulation. I maintained a complete and accurate audit trail which consisted of a comprehensive set of notes including journals, memos, transcripts, records on data, reflective thoughts, and other materials that were produced during the course of the study. I demonstrated methodological triangulation by collecting data through multiple methods of data collection, including interviews and an examination of archival documents. At the conclusion of the study, I turned these materials over to another public school educator who conducted an external audit.

Dependability is established by maintaining fidelity to the standards of the process (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This is confirmed by means of triangulation which involves examining a variety of perspectives gained from participants (Creswell, 2014). Triangulation can be methodological triangulation, investigator triangulation, or data triangulation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I demonstrated methodological triangulation by interviewing education professionals from multiple levels within the K-12 public school.

Qualitative researchers, through their interaction with the participants, collection, and interpretation of data, have the potential to unintentionally influence the results of the

study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To provide transparency and maintain trustworthiness, I examined all interview questions to ensure that they did not reflect any of my own biases. I also maintained memos and a journal in conjunction with all interviews and data analysis. My memos and journal included an examination of my own motivations behind doing this study as well as an honest inventory of my educational and personal values. I was careful to avoid letting my own biases influence participant responses which could have influenced the outcome of the study (Yin, 2018).

I accomplished data triangulation by having audio recordings, transcripts, and codes for and associated with the interviews conducted. Fusch et al. (2018) note that data triangulation involves the interactions between people, space, and time in a study, and contend that data triangulation is an ongoing process. I was conscious of taking detailed notes regarding each of the components during each interview, as well as recording each session, in order to establish data triangulation.

Qualitative researchers can maintain objectivity by exhibiting self-awareness and developing the habit of reflecting on their role in all aspects of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This involves writing thorough reflections of each step of the study; these are the researcher's reflexive notes (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). These notes accompany all data collected and were used in conjunction with the data to produce conclusions.

In research, as in daily life, there may be information that presents a disagreement with the majority of the findings (Creswell, 2014). It is recommended that the researcher present this discrepant information because it will contribute to the credibility and validity of the study (Creswell, 2014). If I had encountered responses that presented a

different view or conclusion than I anticipated, I would have presented this result as a means of reliably following the research process and thereby maintaining validity.

Confirmability

Confirmability can be aided through my self-awareness as a researcher and saturation of data. Korstjens and Moser (2018) describe confirmability as providing confidence by grounding the study in the data and avoiding subjectivity and bias by the researcher. I was aware of the need to remain objective at all times because of the potential for reflexivity, which occurs when the researcher's views or opinions affect the responses given by the interviewee, and/or when the responses given by the participant influence the perceptions of the researcher, or affect the questions being posed (Yin, 2018). Prolonged contact with the participants helps the researcher gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and provides a richness of knowledge about the organization and the people within that organization; this knowledge lends greater validity to the study (Creswell, 2014). I triangulated data as described in the data analysis section by interviewing 6 participants from three different sectors of the organization which gave a variety of perspectives and by examining archival documents which added to the context and understanding of students with ACE and to the RJ practices that are implemented to provide academic support.

Saturation in data collection describes the point at which the continued collection of data produces no new information or viewpoint (Creswell, 2014). I conducted one interview with 6 participants and the outcome of these interviews resulted in saturation. However, I was prepared to conduct additional interviews if my interviews continued to

bring up new perspectives or uncover new information but that did not prove to be the case.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical research requires that the researcher avoids plagiarizing and falsifying information, is open, honest, and accurate about all aspects of the study, and is accountable at all times for his/her work (Yin, 2018). I have reviewed the Code of Ethics which is published by the American Educational Research Association (2011) and used this as my guide to evaluating my ethical conduct. Protecting human subjects includes getting informed consent from participants, protecting them from harm by following strict privacy and confidentiality procedures, and using an equitable process to select all participants (Yin, 2018). I maintained a rigorous adherence to these steps to proceed ethically with my study. Creswell (2014) stresses the importance of respecting the site and avoiding disruption to the participants and procedures as much as possible. I was clear in my plan when communicating with participants to maintain that respect. It is also important to keep raw data for a reasonable amount of time and to clarify authorship prior to publication of the study (Creswell, 2014). I have adhered to these ethical principles throughout the research process.

I gained approval for the study from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as from the site which was selected for the study. Each participant was informed using the protocols suggested by Yin (2018): obtaining informed consent by making sure each participant is a volunteer and fully understands the objectives of the study, protecting participants from harm, and applying total transparency to objectives

and methods of the study, adhering to strict protection of privacy and confidentiality for all participants, use equity in the selection of participants. The researcher contacted each participant via e-mail to recruit, and inform each participant of the study objectives and to guarantee privacy and confidentiality.

In any research venture, the confidentiality of participants is paramount; this is foundational for a qualitative study that relies on participants' open and honest responses to face-to-face interviews. Petrova et al. (2014) note that, in addition to being aware of the importance of confidentiality, a researcher has the responsibility of establishing trust with the participants of a study. To establish trust and protect the participants' confidentiality, I initially worked to establish myself as a trustworthy, honest researcher; to this end, I was forthcoming with all relevant information regarding the study, including the nature, purpose, and significance of the study. To further ensure that the participants are not put at risk and that all populations are respected, I proceeded with the following steps: I cautioned each participant to avoid discussing the study with other colleagues at their school to protect their identity and their role in the study. I provided each participant with a copy of the informed consent form which was signed prior to participants' involvement in the study. The informed consent form is a formal document that acknowledges the rights of each participant to be protected and respected. I also discussed how I will use the findings of the study, assuring participants that I did not need individual names to report the final results of the study.

Another aspect of maintaining participant confidentiality is the purposeful selection of the location for interviews. Dongre and Sankaran (2015) discussed the

importance of interviewing participants in a public location; Petrova et al. (2014) assert that it is the researcher's responsibility to choose a location that is comfortable, convenient, and appropriate for the individual participant. I discussed interview locations with participants; if they had an office, interviews were to be held there, but if not, we would secure a private location such as a conference room where identities may be protected. Because of Covid 19, I was unable to conduct on-site interviews, so instead participants e-mailed responses from a secure e-mail, or participated in a video conference from a secure location.

As noted, I recorded interview sessions both electronically and via note-taking. Participants were notified that audio recordings were ending immediately upon the conclusion of the formal interview and that as the researcher, I would not be sharing these recordings with anyone outside of the study (Petrova et al., 2014). Following each interview, I maintained strict confidentiality of all details, and audio recordings and transcripts. On interview transcripts, I de-identified the names of all participants, and the data collected was referred to using a code that maintained confidentiality of data as well.

A clear and thorough explanation of the purpose and process of the study helped ensure participant retention. Participants were advised that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Had a participant been unable or willing to begin the study, or withdrew before completion of the study, I would have replaced that individual by selecting an individual who originally volunteered for the study but was not selected. If that was not an option, I would have requested a recommendation from a current

participant or sought assistance from the gatekeeper to get a list of possible replacements and would have sent a recruitment e-mail to all individuals.

All study materials are treated with the utmost confidentiality. Recordings and transcripts along with all other study materials are kept in a secure location and will be destroyed after the requisite five years have passed. Digital material is password protected and documents are kept in a locked file at the researcher's home.

Summary

Chapter 3 described the purpose of the study and provided a rationale for doing a qualitative case study. It also included a description of the methodology including participant selection, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis plan. Also described were trustworthiness issues and ethical considerations to ensure that this study was in keeping with principles of integrity. This chapter summarized the methods that were employed to explore the perceptions of educators about the RJ practices that may help provide academic support for students with ACE. This was done through interviews with educators who work with this student population in a school where RJ practices are employed and through the examination of archival documents.

There is little question that students with ACE, indicating trauma, display more academic and behavioral concerns as a group than those with lower scores, which often translates to lowered academic outcomes (Jimenez et al., 2016). These students also exhibit less hope and resilience, and difficulty in creating and pursuing goals for themselves (Baxter et al., 2017). What is not known, however, is what educators perceive to be the educational practices within an RJ model that are most helpful in providing

academic support for students with ACE (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018; Brunzell et al., 2016b; Payne & Welch, 2015).

This chapter stated the research question and connected that question to research design and rationale and also reviewed the topics of trustworthiness and ethics. The results of this study could be provided to public schools and universities as a means of informing teachers and administrators about the effects of RJ on students with ACE. Chapter 4 provides detailed documentation of the setting and demographics of the research site, data collection and analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness. An analysis of the results is provided and answers to the research questions are presented.

Chapter 4 Results

In this study, I aimed to investigate the RJ practices teachers, administrators, and other school personnel have implemented to support the academic needs of students with ACE. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How do educators implement RJ practices in the school to support the academic needs of students with ACE?

RQ2: How do educators perceive the academic supports that RJ practices provide?

In this chapter, I include results of this qualitative case study, which was conducted by interviewing education personnel about their perceptions of RJ practices employed to support the academic needs of students with ACE using individual interviews and analyzing archival documents. I describe the setting and demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and a chapter summary.

Setting

The current study was conducted at a small, semirural alternative school located in the Midwest United States. The school, which consists of Grades 9–12, has approximately 70 students with 21 educational staff working at the school. This alternative school is closely associated with the larger K-12 public school and is under the jurisdiction of the same school board and superintendent, but it has a great deal of autonomy to provide accommodations for the students enrolled there. According to the school's principal, all students have been referred to this school because they have not

succeeded in the general public high school setting or they transitioned into the alternative school from middle school because their behaviors interfered with their ability to succeed. Alternative schools made an appearance in the 1970s and, according to Kelly (1993), are sometimes referred to as the "last chance" educational organization that is designed to accommodate students who had educational, medical, or behavioral issues that were interfering with their academics.

Although I did not interview students themselves, the goal of my study was to explore the supports that RJ practices have on students as implementing and reported by teachers. Therefore, I felt that it was important to include the demographics of the student population of the alternative school where I conducted my study. According to the Minnesota Report Card (2019), the following demographic information applies to the student population included in the study: Hispanic or Latino, 22.6%; American Indian or Alaska Native, 16.7%; Asian, 11.3%; Black or African American, 11.3%; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 00.0%; White, 64.1%; Two or more races, 14.1%. English learners, 00.0%; special education, 19.2%; free/reduced-price meals, 55.1%; homeless, 00.0%.

I collected data through semistructured interviews with six educational staff (three teachers, three administrators) at the school and examined archival data provided by the school principal. This process was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which was near its peak in the United States when I began the data collection process. The school did not allow external personnel into the building, and students were receiving instruction virtually by using a video conference platform. Because I was unable to conduct in-

person interviews as planned, I offered participants the option of interviewing via email, telephone, or video conference. I conducted three interviews via video conference and three interviews via email.

This school has implemented an RP program since 2016, which is described in documents that were drafted with the help of the county and a regional RJ specialist. Issues facing the school, including high absenteeism, high mental health needs of students, and low graduation rates, were the primary challenges according to the study school program. The mission statement, the key challenges, and the program goals linked to those challenges, which are enumerated in the same document, are as follows:

The mission statement of the study school taken from the unpublished report describes the program at the school: Restorative Practices at the Study School joins together the healing and elevating ideals of school and community, respect for the individual, and the concept of circle which unites everyone and encompasses all as we journey to teach accountability for, and peaceful resolution of student behavior.

The program description lists these practices as program components:

- Engaging all stakeholders, meaning all members of the school and community who have an interest in the well-being of the school community. It typically refers to staff, students, parents, school board members, and community members

- Using inclusive, collaborative processes such as circle, conferencing, and mediation. These practices are common to RJ and RP and are described in Chapter 1.

- Restorative language and chats, specific terminology and strategies that reflect the RJ philosophy and are taught to staff and students so they share a common language.

- Restorative conferences, which are common to RJ and RP, and are described in Chapter 1.

- Community building refers to the process of building positive relationships that result in a more cohesive community.

- Conflict coaching, which is the intentional teaching of mediating conflict through RP practices that teach listening skills, understanding perspectives, and building trust.

Key Terms for RP Program

RJ and RP have been used interchangeably in this study. They refer to the RJ philosophy in combination with the practices and strategies. These terms are described fully in Chapter 1, but the following list of abbreviated definitions is designed to facilitate the reading of the results of this study.

RP chat: This describes an informal process talk, usually implemented spontaneously, designed to defuse potential conflict.

RP conference: A restorative conference is a structured meeting facilitated by an educator, which is held in response to harm. The objective is to assist both parties in coming to an understanding and determine how best to repair the harm.

Circle: A formalized process that originated in indigenous cultures and is a foundational RP strategy. The facilitator(s) and participants are seated in a circle and use

a prescribed process of taking turns speaking and listening. The circle can be utilized for many purposes.

   Restorative circle or harm circle: The structure of the harm circle is the same as it is for all circles. The purpose of the harm circle is to address specific harm or conflict. It can be requested by any member of the school, and in general is implemented to address more serious issues than those that are dealt with in RP chats or conferences.

Demographics

   All participants had the appropriate educational certification, and all were employees of my partner school. They had varying amounts of training and experience working with students with ACE, and all had training and experience working in an RJ setting. Although I did not have access to racial or socioeconomic demographic information about staff at the school, Table 1 presents demographic information about the educators who were selected to be the participants of my study.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Educational role	Gender	Years of experience	Years in the current program
P1	RP room supervisor	F	18	5
P2	Principal	F	32	20
P3	RP leader/teacher	M	19	5
P4	Teacher/paraprofessional	F	14	12/2
P5	HS science teacher	F	8	7
P6	MS/HS English teacher	F	6	5

Data Collection

Once I had received Walden University IRB approval (Approval no. 10-25-20-0731711) and a signed letter of agreement with the school principal, I began recruiting participants. I asked the principal to post a flyer in the teacher's lounge describing the study and circulate my recruitment email to educational staff working with ACE students. I interviewed three administrators (the principal, the director of the RJ program, and the RP room supervisor) and three teachers, one of whom had previously worked as an aide at the school. I reviewed the school website, the state department of education, and data collected and presented by the RJ program in the county where the school is closely associated.

The school where I collected my data had switched from in-person instruction to virtual instruction, making it more challenging to get commitments from participants. Although I had originally planned to interview eight to 12 participants, I was only able to get commitments from six participants. Data collection information was affected by

COVID-19 and the difficulties that accompanied the uncertainty of instructional delivery and the changing restrictions and requirements that affected all aspects of daily life for students and teachers.

I interviewed each participant one time, with each interview lasting no more than 1 hour. I conducted the video conference interviews from a secure and private location, and each participant was also located in a secure and private location. I used a digital audio-only recording device to record each interview. After each interview, I immediately connected the recording device to the computer via a USB port and uploaded the interview into the NVivo program.

Data Analysis

I coded my data through an inductive process that I did not begin until all interviews had been completed. I transcribed the audio files from the three interviews that were done via videoconference and manually transcribed them. I created files to organize the audio files, transcriptions of recorded interviews, and transcriptions of the email interviews. All files were saved using participant pseudonyms (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2). After all interviews were completed and transcribed, I read through them several times, making annotations with each reading.

I began the coding process using open, descriptive coding, which I included as comments in the transcripts that were saved as Word documents. According to Saldaña (2016), descriptive coding summarizes passages of qualitative data into simple topics and is valuable for categorizing topics for new researchers and social environments (Saldaña, 2016); therefore, I utilized it in the early phase of data analysis. From the codes

generated, I looked for patterns and categories and also established the frequency of usage of words and phrases. I noted quotes that could later be used to highlight the relevance of a particular theme or subtheme. The frequency of usage and the narrative that expressed the importance of particular topics led to the development of themes and subthemes.

Using Microsoft Word, I created a chart with four columns – codes, themes, subthemes, and counts, which I used to gradually identify the themes which emerged from the codes, the subthemes within each theme, and how many participants had made mention of each theme or subtheme. Saldaña (2016) points out that coding is a cyclical process, not a linear one, and that the exact number of coding cycles the researcher will need will depend on the goals and the nature of the study. I completed several cycles of coding and reorganizing before I finalized the charts from which I developed the narrative describing how the themes and subthemes had emerged from the codes. Two themes emerged to answer RQ 1 and one theme emerged to answer RQ 2.

Theme #1 answers RQ1: RP Strategies. Within Theme #1 were five subthemes: 1. Behaviors that disrupt attendance; 2. Addressing disruptive behaviors; 3. Foundational RP strategy – circles; 4. Student ambassador program; 5. Students have the consistency of a homeroom teacher. Theme #1 and the associated subthemes described the practices that make up the RP program but also explored some of the student issues that necessitate the additional supports needed for students who have experienced ACE.

Theme #2 also answers RQ1: Developing positive relationships between teachers and students. Within Theme #2 were three subthemes: 1. Building trust; 2. Understanding

current vs past student issues; 3. Ongoing RP training for all is a priority/whole school culture. Many of the participants mentioned that once positive relationships are built between students and teachers, academic work can proceed uninterrupted. The subthemes include an explanation of why those positive relationships are not already in place as well as the process that contributes to improving them.

Theme #3 – RP Goals, answers RQ2. Within the theme are two subthemes: 1. Students attend school on a regular basis; 2. Graduation is the goal for all students/RP required for all students. As an examination of the RP Program document stating concerns and goals *(Study School Restorative Practices, 2016)* described, getting students to attend school is a priority of the program. If students are not in school, teachers cannot provide the necessary supports. Requiring all students to participate in the RP program ensures that all students will receive the training that teaches common language and strategies. During the interviews, participants stated their belief that all students can graduate if the program provides the flexibility and supports that each individual needs. There were no discrepant cases within the study.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

As I prepared to present evidence of trustworthiness in my study, I reviewed the plan outlined in Chapter Three. I stated that I would not overgeneralize my findings but would remain within the data's scope, as Ravitch and Carl (2016) recommended. When I prepared my interview questions, I was careful to remain within the confines of the research questions, and I used the same level of care when analyzing and coding

participant responses. I did not overgeneralize findings, nor did I exceed the scope of the data.

I also implemented triangulation, as I had outlined in my proposal. Ravitch and Carl (2016) describe "perspectival triangulation" as the process of selecting participants who have different roles, and thus different perspectives within the organization. I accomplished this by interviewing educators from different roles within the school, including three teachers, a principal, a program coordinator, and a behavior specialist. I had planned to interview participants from five different job categories. However, Covid 19 intervened and I had to adjust the number of participants downward, and with that, had only four categories rather than five.

I reviewed archival documents from the school and accessed information from the state education website which provided further statistical information and demographics within the school setting. The archival documents provided valuable numeric and narrative information about such relevant information as the percentage of students who have suffered ACEs, who in the documents are described as "at-risk". They also reported graduation rates and attendance rates before and after the implementation of RJ. In addition, they describe the specific challenges that were addressed by the implementation of RJ, and specific aspects of the RJ program that were developed to address those challenges. They include key terminology which is embedded in the RJ process.

Creswell (2014) indicates that one way of improving the trustworthiness of a study is to include discrepant information which can describe the natural occurrence of differing perspectives. As I sought to discover any discrepant information, I reviewed my

transcripts and went through an iterative process of coding my data. I reviewed all levels of coding and compared the charts that I had generated. These meticulous efforts did not yield any discrepant data.

Transferability

Korstjens and Moser (2018) define transferability as the degree to which the findings of a study apply to a different setting or population. My interview questions were designed to explore the thoughts and perceptions of educators about the context and the phenomenon being studied. Ponterotto (2006) explains that a thick description, which explores the thoughts and feelings of participants, also gives the reader an understanding of the complexity of the relationships, thus allowing the reader to make a thick interpretation of the information. Through the use of thick, rich descriptions and a thorough and understandable presentation of the data, I have demonstrated how the findings of my study may apply to other settings and populations.

Dependability

Through fidelity to the qualitative research process, dependability is established (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Triangulation involving various perspectives (Creswell, 2014) also helped to ensure dependability. Further evidence of dependability is demonstrated using triangulation (Creswell, 2014). Throughout my study, I adhered to the qualitative research process, and stored all documents and information in NVivo. And finally, I maintained objectivity by reflecting on my own role and maintaining self-awareness.

Confirmability

In Chapter 3, I discussed the importance of maintaining confirmability by remaining objective, triangulating data, and reaching saturation. I demonstrated confirmability by doing my best to remain objective at all times, thus avoiding the potential to inadvertently affect the responses given by interviewees (Yin, 2018). In my study, I reached data saturation - the point at which the continued collection of data produces no new information or viewpoint (Creswell, 2014). Although I had anticipated interviewing at least eight participants, I reached data saturation after interviewing six. Data saturation is another means of demonstrating the confirmability of a study (Creswell, 2014). I maintained confirmability through perspectival triangulation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), by interviewing participants from different roles within my partner school.

<div align="center">Results</div>

The results of my study are organized by both research questions and themes. I created a chart as I began to code the interviews, and through an iterative process, organized the following themes and subthemes as they emerged: Theme #1(RQ1): RP Strategies with five subthemes: 1. Behaviors that disrupt academics; 2. Addressing disruptive behaviors; 3. Foundational RP strategy – circles; 4. Student ambassador program; 5. Students have the consistency of a homeroom teacher. Theme # 2(RQ1): Developing positive relationships between teachers and students, which contained three subthemes: 1. Building trust; 2. Understanding and addressing current vs past student issues; 3. Training for all is a priority/whole school culture. Theme #3(RQ2): Program

Goals, with two subthemes: 1. Students attend school on a regular basis; 2. Graduation is the goal for all students/ RP required for all students.

The conceptual framework of Vygotsky's theory of Social Constructivism was used to inform these results. Although I did not use a priori coding, I did use the conceptual framework to inform the analysis of the results. The theory, which focuses on learning and social interactions, connects to RQ 1.

RQ1: How do educators implement RJ practices in the school to support the academic needs of students with ACE?

RQ 1 was addressed by interview questions 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, and 14 (see Appendix C).

Through the analysis of the interview data, two themes emerged to answer RQ 1. Those two themes are: Implementation of RP Strategies and Developing Positive Relationships Between Teachers and Students. Within Theme 1 were five subthemes: 1. student behaviors that disrupt academics; 2. addressing disruptive behaviors; 3. RP foundational strategy: restorative circles; 4. the student ambassador program; 5. students have consistency in homeroom teacher.

All six participants mentioned the codes found in Theme 1. Three of the subthemes were also mentioned by all six participants. The RP strategies employed by teachers include removing the student from the situation, giving them the safe haven of the RP room, having an RP chat, or planning a more formalized process such as an RP conference or RP circle. All RJ/RP terminology is included in the definitions section of Chapter 1.

Theme 1: RP Strategies

Subtheme 1: Student Behaviors That Disrupt Academics

The first subtheme was student behaviors that disrupt academics. Four participants mentioned this subtheme and described some of those issues. Some examples of these behaviors were the student refusing to respond to teachers' questions, a student challenging another student or the teacher, or other ways of not engaging in class, including not going to class. Participant 6 mentioned the importance of understanding the students and what they might be going through. They mentioned that a teacher can often recognize:

> [that attempts to engage the student in academics will likely fail]…if this kid is having a bad day because they're having a bad day, or if they're having a bad day because something bad is going on at home and whether or not I'm going to be able to get them to be academically successful that day.

Participant 4 described how behavioral issues can affect student education: "…when behavioral issues impact their academics when anxiety holds them from going to class; we talk about panic attacks and all these different elements that block them from reaching their full potential."

Subtheme 2: Addressing Disruptive Behaviors

In all six interviews, participants talked about the second subtheme, addressing disruptive behaviors. They recognized that through the implementation of RP strategies teachers had a very effective way of de-escalating potential conflicts. Teachers helped

students learn important skills, consider others' perspectives, and learn how to manage their own behavior.

Participant 5 mentioned that

> there was that ability to do preventative things so you could catch things *before* the harm took place; you know this kid well enough you see the triggers before they're triggered so you catch the behavior before it happens and you help them process through that thought process so they don't blow up.

Participant 2 told about one student who was having particular difficulty attending classes during the pandemic:

> One student, in particular, was living with her grandparents due to issues with mom's boyfriend …the bottom line is that with her depression, issues with mom and boyfriend and not having a quiet environment with which to do schoolwork, she just couldn't do the all seven classes at once.

Subtheme 3: RP Foundational Strategy- Restorative Circles

Subtheme 3, RP foundational strategy- restorative circles, was mentioned as a common strategy used and mentioned by all six participants. The circle, described fully in the definitions in chapter 1, is both a ubiquitous structure, used through the RP process as well as a specific procedure, designed to help all participants feel heard and safe to discuss the issue. New student circles and celebration circles are self-descriptive, but in much of the literature about RJ, "the circle" often refers to the "talking circle", which according to Evans and Vaandering (2016), has multiple purposes ranging from a short gathering for introductions, to a more formalized process to restore harm caused by

interpersonal conflict. At the partner school, the terms *restorative circle* or *harm circle* were used to describe those circles designed to process personal harm by bringing together the one harmed, the one who caused the harm, one or more mediators, and any others who may have been involved in the situation. The restorative circle is typically used to resolve larger issues such as an intense or long-term conflict between two or more individuals, which exceed the scope of the check-in, the chat, or a conference. Participant 4 explained:

> In our school, it [circle] is a part of the context. It is for relationship building. We use circle for everything, and especially for an in-person learning model, we use circle…in [a] circle, there are no [set roles of] teacher and student – so we are all equal in circle so it provides me to show myself as a human being, and for them to know me.

Participant 1 described the general circle formation:

> By utilizing the Circle procedure, relationships are more readily built between the students and staff. The students are all trained in the circle procedure, they know what to expect each time. This structure is a great benefit to both the student and the staff.

Subtheme 4: Student Ambassador Program

The six participants all mentioned Subtheme 4: Student Ambassador Program. The program is available primarily to students in grades 10 and 11 but occasionally is open to younger students as well. Student ambassadors apply to the program and work closely with the RP coordinator. They receive additional training in RP procedures and

conduct outreach activities within the community, with other schools, and even with county and state organizations. Within the school, they act as role models, and they lead harm circles, providing a peer perspective to students who are involved in the circle.

Participant 4 described the role of the Student Ambassador in a harm circle (described above):

We ask them which Student Ambassador they want; Student Ambassadors are the students who have been trained to lead circles, and have practiced and they can sit in to support that student within that circle, and that is a very beautiful thing.

Participant 5 explained how the program helps students engage in school: "[one student who was not succeeding before she came to us left] as a student ambassador, with leadership experience, learning mentoring, so the tools she's learned herself, she's now helping others learn as well."

Subtheme 5: Students Have Consistency in Homeroom Teacher

Five of the six participants mentioned Subtheme 5: Students have the same homeroom and homeroom teacher for their high school career. This structure provided continuity and stability for students from day to day and throughout their high school career. Because so much of the emphasis of RP is on building relationships, the ability to connect with one teacher is important. It is in this homeroom that teachers conduct the check-in practice, proactively identifying how each student was feeling on that day, and learning of bigger issues that might be interfering with learning. Participant 5 described how homeroom provides continuity: "so when you are in a homeroom you are in that

homeroom until you graduate. And so that homeroom teacher becomes that consistent person for them."

Participant 4 described how homeroom is important in general, but how it became more so during the pandemic:

I'll do daily check-ins in homeroom, which are huge, I always have the students check in - one of the specific practices. I could tell right away that when we went to distance learning [during the pandemic] that students were down, they missed being here, they were sad, so the practices in homeroom, is to connect with them and to lift spirits.

Participant 3 described how homerooms facilitate the understanding of both students and RP principles: "We meet in homeroom each day with our students using RP to facilitate understanding of these principles so that we can further our understanding of our students' beliefs/feelings."

Table 2 below shows the codes for Theme 1 and subthemes, as well as how many times they were mentioned by participants. It demonstrates the process used in the coding procedure

Table 2

Theme 1: Subthemes and Codes

Codes	SubThemes	Themes	Counts – All 6 participants
Anxiety keeps students from attending class; depression interferes with student engagement; issues at home cause disruption at school; having a bad day creates disengagement; misunderstandings lead to conflict	1.Behaviors that disrupt academics		4 participants: 25 comments
Codes: removing ss from the situation; a safe place to regroup; RP room w/adult; ss talk through an issue/Restorative Chat; T does active listening; restorative conferences; THINK sheets help students process, redirect; individualized programming; RP provides flexibility to be accommodating and gives Ts autonomy to implement strategies to help students succeed; the school has high expectations; RP strategies are not just reactive, T's think "outside the box" to help students.	2.Addressing disruptive behaviors		6 participants; 60 comments
Codes: Check-in circles are held in homerooms; Circles and homerooms provide continuity; circles help ss find their voice; circles allow students to listen and be heard; circles can help T find voice; circles used in all contexts; circles used to build community; staff has monthly circles to connect w/each other; circles provide equality and safe place; virtual staff meeting circle was successful	3.Foundational RP strategy: circles	# 1 – RP Strategies	6 participants 86 comments
Ss fill out an application for SA program; sometimes have homeroom; SA's are role models; SA's offer peer perspectives in all harm circles; sometimes SA's have had a TA hour; Ss hold each other accountable; ss listen to SA perspective; SA's build leadership, often carries into post-secondary education and careers	4.Student ambassador program		6 participants 20 comments
Homeroom provides continuity; Check-in circles happen in homeroom on MWF; supportive software, helping past nervousness about difficult content; no homework; RP is about relationship building which happens in homerooms, ss have same homeroom teacher throughout HS; homeroom t becomes a constant in ss life	5.Students have the consistency of a homeroom teacher		5 participants 41 comments

Theme 2: Developing Positive Relationships Between Students and Teachers

All 6 participants mentioned the importance of positive relationships in the RP program. Within Theme 2 were three subthemes – 1. building trust, 2. understanding and addressing current vs past issues; 3. ongoing RP training is provided for all school members. The whole-school approach to RP within the partner school is an important element of developing positive relationships. In order to build trust, teachers need to understand student issues, and they need to receive ongoing training in the techniques and strategies that help them develop that trust.

Subtheme 1: Building Trust

Four of the six participants made mention of the importance of building trust. These included one administrator and all the teachers. Most of the participants indicated that until there was a level of trust between teacher and student, it was difficult or impossible to provide the supports that students needed; building trust allowed students to ask for help. Participant 5 expressed the connection between relationships and academics: "I think that relationship was the important part – once the relationship was there I was able to provide the academic support, and then the academics were the easy part." Participant 2 explained: "We oft use the phrase, "No judgment here", so students can learn to trust us and work with us and [know] that we only have the best interests for each student at heart."

Subtheme 2: Understanding and Addressing Current vs Previous Student Issues

Many of the students at the school have experienced ACE. All six participants mentioned subtheme 2 and many participants commented on their (the students')

isolation and mistrust. The educators at the school begin first and foremost, to build

relationships through understanding; understanding the students and their background,

and how their past and current issues were interfering with their success. As the

relationships developed, the educators began to understand how to support each student.

Participant 1 described the school's recognition of the importance of understanding

students' personal issues and challenges:

> We understand that a student whose family has food insecurity is not going to
>
> perform well every day. We understand that a student whose family is facing
>
> eviction at the end of the month is going to have a hard time focusing on
>
> academics.

Participant 3 concisely articulated the commitment to building relationships and

providing supports: "We are committed to building relationships with students while

helping them to academic and behavioral success using RP/RJ principles."

Subtheme 3: Ongoing RP Training Is Provided for All Members of the School/Whole School Culture

The recurrent theme of ongoing RP training was mentioned by all six participants,

many of whom expressed appreciation for the skills and strategies they had learned

through these sessions, and attested to the positive changes that occur in students when

those strategies are implemented. All teachers and students as well as any interested

parents receive training. It is an important part of the whole-school culture of RP.

Participant 4 stated: "We were [initially] trained with the trainers who [continue to]

provide numerous trainings throughout the years; [they have] taught us strategies and

practices and led us not only how [understand them] but how to incorporate them into our classrooms." Participant 2 described annual RP training for staff, students, and interested parents, then went on to say: "Our core team does state and national trainings on the processes that we use and the success we have had along with some of the difficulties we face as time goes on (Covid!!)." See Table 3 below for an explanation of the codes and counts associated with Theme #2 and subthemes.

Table 3

Theme 2: Subthemes, Codes, and Counts

Codes	SubThemes	Themes	Counts – All 6 participants
Ss are drawn to staff they're comfortable with; T's create atmosphere of support so ss can thrive; once Ss got to know T trust was there; building trust allows ss to ask for help; lack of trust inhibits success; T support Ss path	1.Building trust		4 participants 19 comments
- Clear expectations; the importance of building ss up – giving them confidence; not all ss will respond to supports; understanding issues helps T find appropriate supports; T's build relationships through understanding, Ss w/ACEs have difficulty trusting; Ss w/ACE have had negative educational experiences; if T understands, can know when to push(or not); Ss w/ACEs need lots of support; in traditional schools, Ss w/ACE can hide/be "swallowed up"; understanding helps T hold Ss accountable so they can succeed	2.Understanding and addressing current vs past issues/	# 2 – Developing positive relationships between teachers and students	6 participants 80 comments
RJ Training was intense because it was a major shift for T's; Ts learn and use specific language such as "causing harm, having been caused harm"; T's learn specific questioning strategies; Training happens at intervals throughout the year; All teachers and students get RP training; interested parents and community are invited to training; multiple RP skills are taught through training; RP is "how we do things"; staff must fully embrace RP; the school has core leadership team to guide; training supports and guides the whole-school culture of RP	3.Ongoing RP training for Ts is a priority/Whole-school culture of RP		6 participants 76 comments

Theme 3: Program Goals

RQ 2: How do educators perceive the academic supports that RJ practices

provide?

RQ 2 was addressed through interview questions 3, 4, 7, 10, 12, and 13 (see

Appendix C)

Through the data analysis process, theme 3: RP Program Goals, emerged to

answer RQ2. All six participants described some or all of the program goals. Within this

theme are two subthemes: 1. Students attend school on a regular basis; 2.Graduation is

the goal for all students in the school/RP is required for all students.

Subtheme 1: Goal – Students Attend School on a Regular Basis

When the school began its RP program in 2106, according to the Study School

Restorative Practices (2016) one of the focused areas of concern was high absenteeism,

and one of the program goals was to improve attendance rates. All six participants talked

about students and attendance, and how RP can help to improve attendance rates. Most of

the participants mentioned not only the fact that if students are not present they cannot

learn, but also that having students present and feeling like a part of the community is

important to the relationship aspect of RP. Participant 3 talked about the importance of

attendance, and how the staff works to improve student attendance:

> Our main focus is to assist students in regular attendance. Students usually come
>
> to us with one or all of these challenges: non-attendance, lack of credits, or
>
> behavior issues. Number one of these is to get the student to attend school
>
> regularly… Thankfully, through the RP processes we use – especially circle and

restorative chats – we are much better equipped to assist students in understanding that they have to be here or be engaged online to pass their classes and graduate.

Participant 5 told about a student who struggled with attendance. When she first started in grade 10 at the school, she was only making it to school an hour or two a week. Through work with therapists and with the support of educators at the school: "..she ended up graduating last spring, and pre-pandemic, last March, she was making it to school 4 days out of the week…"

Subtheme 2: Graduation Is the Goal for All Students/ RP Is Required for All Students

All six interviewees mentioned that graduation is the ultimate goal of the program. Many of the students are credit deficient, meaning they must earn the credits they are lacking in order to graduate. The school has established, as one of its program goals, that all students can graduate, and staff members work with individuals to ensure that that happens. Participant 1 described the sense of success that educators experience when students graduate:

> Our biggest success comes on graduation day. I know when I watch our students walk across the stage and receive their diploma, we have succeeded. Many, many of our students over the years would not have received a diploma if it had not been for our program.

Participant 6 focused on the success element of graduation: "I guess our success stories are every year…all of our graduates are success stories. We are taking kids who are credit deficient and who probably wouldn't graduate without us so all of our graduates are success stories".

Five of the six participants mentioned that participation in RP is required for all students. Because the school is so committed to the RP process, it is a requirement that all students agree to follow the program. Upon enrollment, students and parents receive a handbook outlining the procedures, and they must sign their agreement to abide by the procedures. When new students enter the school, the RP coordinator holds a circle, welcoming the student and introducing the process. Participant 2 stated clearly and concisely: "Students who attend our school are required to participate in the RP process." Participant 1 explained: "Restorative Practice isn't a program we "use" in our school. It is who we are." See Table 4 below for a representation of the codes and counts associated with Theme # 3 and subthemes.

Table 4

Theme 3: Subthemes, Codes, and Counts

Codes	SubThemes	Themes	Counts – All 6 Participants
Attending school is at the heart of issues – it causes ss to fall behind academically; attendance is an issue for many SS; primary focus is attendance; Admin support T & ss; School connects ss w/mental healthy therapy; T's want ss safe and in school, even if not academically engaged; Shifting away from punishment to accountability; emotional skills woven into the curriculum	1. Students attend school on a regular basis		6 participants 57 comments
		# 3 – Program goals	
School may not be a priority for Ss w/ACEs; ss background/challenges at home such as homelessness, food insecurity, supporting their own children, previous negative school experiences, makes attending school challenging; poor attendance results in trouble w/academics; graduation restores ss trust in education	2. Graduation is the goal for all students/ RP required for all students		5 participants 28 comments

Summary

RQ1: How do educators RJ practices in the school to support the academic needs

of students with ACE?

RQ 1 was answered with Theme #1 – RP Strategies, and five subthemes.; 1.

Behaviors that disrupt academics; 2. Addressing disruptive behaviors; 3. Foundational RP

strategy – circles; 4. Student ambassador program; 5 – Students have the consistency of a

homeroom teacher. Theme #1 and the accompanying subthemes describe both the issues

that students face and the strategies which provide the necessary academic supports for

students. Subthemes 1 and 2 talk about the issues students face which can be internal

behavioral issues such as anxiety and depression that interfere with their attendance, or their ability to engage in academic work, or external issues such as homelessness, unsupportive home environments, or troubled relationships. Understanding students is very individualized; once educators understand the individual issues, they can select the appropriate RP strategy to support that student.

Subthemes 3, 4, and 5 delve into the strategies employed by educators to support student needs. The RP program is structured to provide consistency of language and practices which facilitate understanding and relationship building, including a consistent homeroom teacher for a student's high school career. Because that teacher develops a positive relationship with students, she/he is able to identify potential issues and address them or recognize the need for something more formal. Strategies are employed on a continuum beginning with the simple, informal RP chat, and ranging to the most formalized RP circle, which involves only the most intensive scenarios.

RQ 1 is also answered by Theme 2 – Developing positive relationships between teachers and students. Subthemes 1 and 2 – Building trust and Understanding and addressing current vs past issues, again address both the importance of understanding student issues on an individual basis and the strategies employed to support those students – ie, Building trust. Many of the participants mentioned the importance of building trust with students, stating that when students do not trust a teacher or the educational system in general, they do not feel comfortable asking for help and/or are unwilling to accept it.

Subtheme 3- Ongoing RP training for teachers is a priority/whole-school culture. It describes the framework that supports an all-inclusive education. This philosophy teaches the specific language and strategies used to build trust and understanding. All the participants mentioned the inclusive nature of the program and the training that is required to sustain long-term members and introduce new staff and students to the practices which define the context of the school.

Theme 3 – Program Goals and the two subthemes – Students attend school on a regular basis and Graduation is the goal for all students/RP is required - describe the goals that educators mentioned as being most important. Subtheme 1, which talks about improved attendance, was mentioned by all staff and is also listed on school documents as a primary goal for students. Subtheme 2 – Graduation is the goal for all students/RP is required - addressed the belief that many participants expressed – ie, all students can graduate, and the graduation of each student is experienced as "success" by educators. The fact that RP is required was touched upon by several participants. The principal explained that all students and parents receive a copy of the student handbook stating the RP requirement, and both parties must sign it. This structure is designed to elicit a commitment to RP by all parties involved. Chapter 5 includes an Introduction, Interpretation of Findings, Limitations of the Study, Recommendations, Implications, and Conclusion.

RJ practices are implemented in myriad ways and on many levels at my partner school. One of the foundational tools of the RJ program is the Circle. This practice can be a tool for communication and relationship building, or a way to introduce newcomers into

the school and RJ practices, but it can also be held as a response to harm. To answer the

research question, I organized the RJ practices into two categories: first, the proactive

practices which are embedded in the school programming, and second, the RJ practices

which are implemented as a response to harm that has occurred, or as a proactive

response to impending or potential harm.

In Chapter 5 I connect the results of my study to that of other studies and the

practices applied by teachers and administrators in education today. I examine how my

study supports and/or further develops some of the findings of existing research. I also

look at the limitations of my study, implications, and recommendations for future

research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This qualitative case study addressed the RJ practices educators have implemented to support the academic needs of students with ACE and to discuss educator perceptions about the support that RJ practices provide. I interviewed six educators from an alternative school using a series of semistructured interview questions. Archival documents in the form of unpublished reports from the school provided information about the practices that are employed by the school and what kinds of supports those practices have provided. This study was conducted to address the identified gap in research: the lack of empirical evidence that can help explain how school-wide RJ practices might provide academic support for students with ACE. Results of the study indicated that educators have a positive perception of the effects of RJ practices on the development of relationships within the school community. Participants also perceive that improved relationships and other RJ practices provide the supports that are needed by students who have experienced ACE, which contributes to students' improved engagement in academics.

Interpretation of Findings

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the interpretation of qualitative research includes how a researcher explains, understands, and/or presents the findings of the study; the interpretation may reflect the process and researcher insights. In Chapter 5, I include my interpretations of findings and compare those results to findings that were discussed in Chapter 2. In addition, I examine the findings through the lens of the conceptual framework.

The findings of my study coincided with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism, which is the conceptual framework around which my study was built. Vygotsky stressed the importance of social interaction as children develop cognition. Vygotsky used the term *making meaning* to describe the role that community plays as children learn and develop. RJ promotes positive relationships and community building as foundations for student learning. The importance of positive relationships was a key finding of my study.

Vygotsky (1978) noted that through language children develop thought; RJ stresses that students who have been marginalized or have been overlooked in large school settings need to talk about stressors, triggers, and struggles; students need to have the communication skills and a trusted person with whom to communicate. Most RJ practices are centered around discussing harm (or potential harm) and restoring harmony. Due to the close alignment of Vygotsky's focus on language as a construct for thinking and development and the importance of social relationships for learning, the theory of social constructivism was chosen as the conceptual structure for my study. The findings of my study confirmed that, through social relationships and the use of communication skills, students can develop into engaged and contributing members of the school community, and engage in academic learning.

Relationships

The participants in this study shared perceptions that were similar despite their different backgrounds and different roles in the school. The importance of relationships and building trust with students were recurring themes. All six participants reported

positive responses to the relationship-building practices they use, such as using check-in circles to get to know students and understand their issues, building trust through active listening, open and nonjudgmental communication, and hearing student perspectives. This finding confirmed what empirical evidence from the literature review showed (Ogilvie & Fuller, 2016; Wesely et al., 2017)—that RP helps students to realize how important positive relationships are, and it teaches students effective ways to resolve conflict rather than punishing them when conflict arises. This outcome occurs because RP includes a variety of practices that, in the partner school, have become incorporated into the context of the school paradigm. These practices are implemented to build positive relationships among students and between students and staff. This study found that these relationships provided significant academic supports to students. As positive relationships were developed, students were more likely to trust staff and ask for help processing problems and developing solutions that led to academic engagement. Other studies showed that as students develop communication skills, empathy, responsibility, and perspective, they are able to be proactive in building relationships (Alnaim, 2018; Brunzell et al., 2016a; Dorado et al., 2016; Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018; Kirkman et al., 2016; Pendergast et al., 2018).

Attendance

One of the primary goals of the RP program at the school is attendance, which is listed as one of the program goals and was also mentioned by several participants. When talking about attendance, participants stated that student presence at school meant that they were in a safe place and were part of the community-building process; they were

learning important skills and building relationships even if academic engagement wasn't possible because of issues students may be experiencing. To improve attendance by students, it is important for educators to understand what issues may be interfering with daily attendance.

Participants cited a number of contributing issues such as anxiety, depression, challenging home settings, and negative experiences at former schools. Participants reported that students who arrived from traditional schools were "not making it" because they were dealing with mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Participants also reported that incoming students had expressed negative self-concept as a result of conversations and/or conflicts with previous educators who had told them they were "bad kids" and would never graduate. Participants also observed that behaviors that interfered with attendance were exacerbated in traditional schools that rely on punitive responses. These findings corroborated literature cited in Chapter 2, which indicated that exclusionary or punitive educational practices may either contribute to negative academic outcomes or fail to address them (Lansford et al., 2016; McConnico et al., 2016; Moore & Ramirez, 2016; Ryan et al., 2017; Soleimanpour et al., 2017).

The RP program in the school supports a more individualized plan for students than that in traditional school settings, which has been highly successful in improving attendance rates. These finding expanded the results from previous studies. Although Mallett (2016) and Stempel et al. (2017) reported on high levels of absenteeism associated with students with ACE, my findings indicated improved attendance with RJ, but did not indicate how RJ/RP strategies are a pathway to improving attendance.

Research has shown that schools with RJ programs have a reduction in office referrals, have better student–teacher relationships, and have more equitable discipline (Goldys, 2016; Gregory et al., 2016; Ingraham et al., 2016). It is likely that these would lead to better attendance, but my literature search did not show any connection.

RP Strategies/Whole School Culture

These topics emerged as key findings because RP includes a variety of practices that, in the partner school, have become incorporated into the context of the school culture. According to participant perceptions, after being engaged in the RP processes, students feel safe and connected. The check-in, check-out is an important way for teachers to stay connected to the students because the dialog and closeness help educators recognize any trouble as it begins to surface. Teachers can intervene before escalation occurs. They typically initiate a restorative chat but advance to more formalized processes such as the restorative conference or harm circle if needed. There may be times when a formal process is not needed because students know they can talk to anyone at the school, though they tend to bond with certain individuals and often seek guidance from caring adults.

Participants maintained that having an RP room staffed with an educator trained in RP, where students can go to de-escalate and fill out a THINK sheet, helps them identify what has led to the current conflict. Participants reported that these options result in the development of conflict resolution skills because they lead the students through the self-reflection process. The students remain in school and have access to a caring adult with whom they have a positive relationship, an important element suggested by other

research (Clements-Nolle & Waddington, 2019; Goldys, 2016; Kirkman et al., 2016; Pendergast, et al., 2018; Reyneke, 2015; Wesely et al., 2017). Ortega et al. (2016) stated that RJ helps students learn to own the process and helps them learn how to avoid destructive methods to engage in conflict.

Circles

My literature search included studies that described the circle process and the types of circles used in RJ programs. There are three basic categories of RJ: circles, conferences, and victim–offender mediations (Song & Swearer, 2016). There is even mention of a connection between restorative circles and positive relationships (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). My study expanded the findings of related research by indicating the effectiveness of circles and the many positives influences they provide. All six participants mentioned circles and cited the following benefits: because equality is built into the circle structure, they are a safe place to talk and listen. Circles, therefore, help students find their voice, and one educator who described herself as being very quiet and reserved said that the circle process even helped her to find her voice. Participants also stated that circles not only allow but actively teach students to listen and hear others' perspectives.

Circles are used in all contexts. They are used to build community within classrooms. Because circles are used to welcome new students, introduce them to RP procedures, and help them learn the circle process through participation, circles effectively build community in a broader setting. Circles are not implemented only for students. The staff have monthly circles that allow them to connect with each other. One

participant described a successful virtual staff meeting that was called after the pandemic required virtual teaching and learning. Finally, community circles are held to celebrated special occasions, extending community-building beyond students and staff.

Belief in the RP Program

Participants expressed their belief in the effectiveness of the RP program; they consistently maintained that RP is responsible for improved relationships, improved behavior, higher levels of accountability by students, and an expanded sense of community. These perceptions substantiated the findings by Evans and Vaandering (2016) that punitive practices such as suspension and expulsion channel students into the criminal justice system; reversing those approaches is a valid way to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline and to create trusting, supportive relationships that support all students. The level of belief expressed by current participants corroborated findings of Moir and MacLeod (2018) and Moss et al. (2019), which indicated that RJ programs are more likely to be implemented successfully with effective school leadership and the ability of a school to develop RJ and sustain a belief in the program. Moir and MacLeod (2018) also cited lack of support among personnel and lack of support among parents as barriers to the successful implementation of RJ in an organization.

Participants reported a belief in the importance of extending the RJ program aim to include all stakeholders in the school and to extend outreach beyond the school. This supports the findings of studies on this topic; that children are influenced by the culture of the community in which they live and study; strong community support can provide important support to children (Ellis & Dietz, 2017; Li, 2017; Mallett, 2017; Payne &

Welch, 2015). Participant 3 expressed unequivocal belief in the school's program: "If a school will buy into RP, commit to working through the training process, and continually evolve using RP process, it will transform your school, and only augment how you reach and educate kids".

Limitations of the Study

One of the primary limitations of the study was the size of the school. The school in which I conducted my study is an alternative school with only about 90 students. Another limitation is the relative newness of the school to the process of RP. This school began implementing RP about five years ago. When I conducted my study, the principal and staff were very enthusiastic, as they experienced the results of the transition from a traditional school disciplinary structure that was punitive in nature to the current model. One participant indicated that she was very resistant to the idea of RP. She anticipated that there was no accountability, since the old handbook, with its established set of minor and major infractions with accompanying consequences, from detentions to suspensions and ultimately expulsions, was no longer in effect. Gradually, however, as the new guidelines developed, and students learned how the restorative chats, restorative conferences, and harm circles replaced the previous punitive practices, this teacher realized that the level of accountability had actually increased. The current study may not be generalizable to larger schools or to schools in which RJ has been the model for a longer period of time.

Recommendations

My recommendation is that more qualitative studies be done to explore the full effects of RJ on schools, particularly when schools implement a Whole-School RJ program. My literature review uncovered many studies which described the negative results of punitive discipline in school, and the disparities inherent in how the punitive consequences are applied. (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018; Mallett, 2017). Because RJ is relatively new to schools, (Evans & Vaandering, 2016), there is less research that points to RJ's benefits. Some notable studies (Sandwick et al., 2019), have demonstrated drastic reductions in the number of suspensions and expulsions, but this is only one facet of the benefits of RJ.

Brunzell et al. (2016)b, Evans and Vaandering (2016), and Jean-Pierre and Parris-Drummond (2018) have described the increased level of equity that RJ brings about in the schools, and that was a component that my study did not explore. I would recommend future studies focused on how equity in the schools may positively impact students' academic outcomes. It would add considerably to the body of literature if studies in larger settings were conducted; participants reported that students stated that it is far easier for them to "hide" in large schools. Ascertaining if RJ can be effectively implemented in large schools and communities would help support related knowledge on the potential impact on RJ in school settings.

Finally, I would recommend that mixed-method studies be conducted to examine the effects of RJ practices on academic outcomes for students with ACEs. In addition to looking at numerical data such as attendance rates and graduation rates, exploring

academic information such as test scores and grades could provide additional information about how students fare in an RJ setting. Particularly if done over a period of time, this could help to determine whether RJ practices influence academics as well as less concrete outcomes such as relationships and school climate. Using both qualitative and quantitative data could add depth to the findings.

Implications

Implications for Social Change

The current study may add to the small but growing body of evidence that indicates that RJ decreases the number of behavioral issues and suspensions, and improves the overall school climate (Sandwick et al., 2019). Evans and Vaandering (2016) report that replacing punitive practices with restorative ones establishes in schools a culture that values relationships and encourages the resolution of conflicts in a restorative manner. One of the school's stated goals where I conducted my study was that of disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline. Although their use of RJ is relatively new, archival documents (*Study School Restorative Practices, Students,* 2019c; *RP at Study School,* 2016) indicate that outcomes contribute to the successful attainment of that goal.

Building resilience in children, especially children who have experienced ACE is closely connected to my literature review and my study. High ACE scores are more prevalent among minority children and children living in communities of poverty (Ellis & Dietz, 2017). The same authors reported that building community resilience (BCR) can strengthen ties between organizations and build connections within the community itself. I see this research as being strongly supported by the results of my study, which indicated

the benefits of the whole-school, community approach, and the general importance of relationships when supporting students with ACE.

RP approaches have the potential to mitigate the negative effects of trauma on students in a variety of social arenas. Expanding awareness in educational institutions at all stages could allow school faculty to begin the process of reimagining traditional discipline practices. Developing networks for education and awareness about ACE within public and social institutions such as criminal justice systems, social service systems, and medical health organizations could provide the impetus for greater coordination of efforts and strengthened programs for training staff in methods to support children with ACE.

Implications for Educational Practice

The implications for educational practice are extensive, potentially affecting not only the daily operations of schools themselves but also calling for a redefinition of teacher and administrator training programs and the curriculum that guides them. Sandwick et al. (2019) describe the "breadth and depth" of an RJ program and point out that it does much more than simply implement a program, which oftentimes is perceived as a means of responding to behaviors. An RJ program focuses on community building, re-thinking, and restructuring school hierarchies, developing comprehensive systems of accountability, developing student leadership, and building a more positive and equitable school culture (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Sandwick et al., 2019). González et al. (2019) report that their study demonstrates RJ's effect on improving relationships, increasing social-emotional learning, reducing suspensions, increasing graduation rates, and improving the development of leadership and professional skills. These reflect the need

for reconsidering policy decisions, curriculum and pedagogy, and professional development. There is a very close connection between the current study and the field of educational leadership, policy, and management. My literature review cites many resources pointing to the transition of American education programs toward punitive measures (Alnaim, 2018; Black, 2015; Crosby et al., 2018; Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Mallet, 2016; Mallet, 2017; Myers, 2017; Nance, 2016) and the negative repercussions of that trend. Because RJ is a relatively recent trend in education (Evans & Vaandering, 2016), it is important for teachers and administrators to access the research regarding the benefits that may result as a school moves away from punitive practices and toward restorative justice practices.

Conclusion

The current study adds to the existing body of evidence that indicates that RJ in schools promotes a better learning environment for all students, and builds relationships between staff and students and the student body. It also demonstrates that once strong positive relationships are formed, academic learning follows suit. Participants repeatedly described students who were isolated and withdrawn when they began at the school, but after gradually developing caring relationships with at least one adult, that trusting relationship expanded, and positively affected peer relationships as well. RJ supports a more individualized plan for students, which has been highly successful in improving attendance rates, reducing behavioral referrals, and has improved graduation rates. These benefits will inevitably result in more equitable treatment of students. One of the

participants enthusiastically commented that s/he would happily be a spokesperson for RJ in the schools after having experienced the positive outcomes of the program.

RJ, which first made gains in the criminal justice program in the US, has more recently been introduced to the field of education. Based on the findings of studies in schools, it is clear that RJ can and does produce positive outcomes. It is my hope that teacher and administrator training programs may begin to adopt a concerted approach to RJ. The potential benefits of large-scale implementation of RJ programs in school settings could conceivably transfer to having positively impacting our society. Jails and prisons are often holding tanks for offenders, many of whom fuel the school-to-prison pipeline. RJ programs that decrease punitive practices and increase harm reduction have the capacity to lower the number of offenders that become "wards of the state" after being unsuccessful in traditional school settings.

Having large portions of a country's youth incarcerated creates myriad problems, from a lack of an available, productive workforce to considerable funding being allocated for their room and board. Reducing the number of those in institutions has its own benefits, but RJ programming in schools has the potential for even more benefits to our society. As Vygotsky (1978) points out, learning is a social behavior that happens in a community, including that within a school setting. With its focus on increasing relationships and community, within the school and with programs and people outside the school, RJ programs align closely with increased learning, an innate benefit for our society.

Throughout history, various societies have been plagued by unrest, turmoil, dissension, and ours is not an exception. RJ practices could mitigate negative social environments, as students learn to empathize with others and learn skills that lead to positive relationships, academic success, and how to be a part of a productive community.

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PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON
Restorative Justice Practices

I am looking for volunteers to take part in a study for my Walden Dissertation:

Educator Perceptions of Restorative Justice Practices That Provide Academic Support for Students with ACE

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to: **interview one-on-one** in a confidential setting. Your personal data and responses will also be kept strictly confidential.
Your participation would involve **1** session, which is approximately 60 minutes.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:
Brigid Ripley
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation from a Research Partner

Educator Perceptions of Restorative Justice Practices That Provide Academic Support for
Students with ACE
Community Research Partner Name – to be provided when the school district has agreed
to participate in the study

Contact Information

Date

Dear Brigid Ripley

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the
study entitled Educator Perceptions of Restorative Justice Practices That Provide Academic
Support for Students with ACE within the (School District Name provided when an official
agreement has occurred). As part of this study, I authorize you to visit the school website and
contact the administrative offices or meet in person with school personnel. The researcher will
demonstrate respect for participants and will avoid the use of coercive language or persuasive
efforts to gain cooperation throughout the screening and recruitment process, and throughout the
study. Participant identity shall be kept confidential and anonymous during recruitment,
screening, and throughout the study. After the researcher has obtained IRB approval from
Walden University, and official approval from your district, she will use e-mails and will post a
flyer to invite participants to the study until she has selected 8-12 participants. The participants
of the study will include one to 1-2 administrators, 2-5 teachers or interventionists, 1-2
counselors, and 1-2 school psychologists. Participant identities will be kept confidential
throughout all phases of recruitment and all phases of the study itself.

The researcher will also collect and examine archival documents including school and
district RP programs and any relevant documentation about their implementation or narratives
describing how they were employed with students with ACE. The researcher will also examine
ACE surveys and documents which will provide a foundation of understanding of the students
who have experienced ACE. These archival documents will provide a clear description of the
practices which are implemented, how and why they are implemented, and how they provide
academic support. All documents will be de-identified.

This will allow the researcher to develop an understanding of how and when educators
apply RJ to provide academic support for students with ACE, and their perception of the
usefulness of those supports. Information from these documents will add context and a depth of
understanding to the study.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include the following:

The school district will make a room or rooms in the school available for the purpose of
examining archival documents and for holding one interview with each participant which will be
conducted in person by the researcher from August 2020 through January 2021. These sessions
will be recorded and transcribed, and each session will last for no more than 60 minutes. The 8-

12 participants including administrator(s), teachers, counselor(s), and school psychologist(s)will be employees of the school district and will have a mutually agreed-upon understanding that they may participate in the study during school hours if that is necessary. If one or more participants cannot complete the study, the researcher will invite alternate participants based on recommendations of the participating individuals and school officials. No other resources will be needed for the purpose of this study. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I understand that the student will not be naming our organization in the doctoral project report that is published in Proquest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies. I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,
Authorization Official
Contact Information

Appendix C: Interview Protocol and Interview Questions

Objectives: To determine how restorative justice (RJ) practices may affect the educational experiences of students who have suffered trauma.

Educator Perceptions of Restorative Justice Practices That Provide Academic Support for Students with ACE

Name of District

Place

Name of District	
Room or location	
Date	
Time of Interview	
Interviewer	
Participant	

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview; I appreciate your time and your expertise on this subject. My name is Brigid Ripley, I've been an educator since 1990 and am currently a doctoral student at Walden University. I'd like to review with you this consent form which must be signed prior to the start of the interview. You will not be identified in the study and will be referred to as Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.

I will be asking you ten questions about restorative justice and your observations and perceptions about how those practices may affect students who have experienced trauma. This interview will be recorded

and will last no more than 60 minutes. I may pause to write reflections that help me better understand your responses. Please let me know if you feel uncomfortable at any time, or if you need me to report a question or provide clarification.

Interview questions

Conclusion: Do you have thoughts or reflections that you would like me to include which were not covered in the interview questions?

Again, thank you so much for participating in this study.

Interview Questions for Educators

1.   How long and in what capacity have you worked with students who have ACE in an educational setting?

2.   Please describe the training and professional development you've had to learn about how ACE affect students' academic outcomes?

3.   Please describe the educator-student relationship you have with students who have ACE?

4.   Without sharing names, please think about students you've worked with and tell me about those interactions and what the implications were for providing academic support?

5.   What explicit structures, rules, or norms govern your work with students with ACE?

6.   What are educators' perspectives of the struggles that students who have ACE have that require additional academic supports in traditional educational systems?

7.   Tell me about your journey working with students with ACE: without disclosing identities, please describe some success stories.

8.   Describe what RJ means to you as an educator.

How long and in what capacity have you worked using nontraditional practices such as RJ in an educational setting?

Think of a time when you employed RJ practices with a student who has ACE and tell me about how it went.

How do you perceive your role in RJ models which help support the academic needs of students who have ACE?

What are some of the specific RJ practices used by you, and how do you decide which practices will be employed in any given situation?

Of the many practices that make up the RJ model, which one(s) are most likely to be employed by you or other educators when dealing with students who have ACE and why?

Please tell me what RJ looks like in your school.

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