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College of Education and Human Sciences

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Kelly Erin Jenkins

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the review committee have been made.

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Abstract

Educators' Perspectives on Implementing Restorative Practices With Fidelity in the Primary Classroom

by

Kelly Erin Jenkins

MA, Western Governors University, 2020

BS, Millersville University, 2018

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Leadership

Abstract

Punitive disciplinary approaches have been used for decades in primary grades with little improvement in behavior and negative impacts on classroom climate. This qualitative case study explored the perspectives of administrators and educators implementing restorative practice (RP) with fidelity in the primary grades of urban public elementary schools. The study addressed the restorative principles of norm setting, community-building circles, restorative chats, and restorative conferences for implementing restorative justice with fidelity. Guided by the conceptual framework of RP, interviews with five administrators (principals, deans, climate managers, and guidance counselors) and five teachers (Grades K–3) revealed common themes in the successes and challenges of instituting RP with fidelity, as identified through coding and thematic analysis. Participants reported that all four pillars are needed for implementing restorative justice with fidelity, and professional development is needed to support teachers implementing restorative justice with fidelity. Nine participants reported that implementing RP led to an improved schoolwide climate and culture while also revealing that none had the opportunity to include all four pillars when implementing RP with fidelity. Findings may be used to promote positive social change through nonpunitive approaches to discipline that contribute to building relationships and nurturing classroom culture.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Iris, Molly, Connor, and Emerson. I have learned so much from you, and I am truly fortunate to be your mother. Everything I do is always for you.

And to the children of the School District of Philadelphia, you motivate me every day to learn more and be worthy of you. You will do amazing things, and I cannot wait to see your success!

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Lastly, I am eternally grateful to my colleagues at the School District of Philadelphia for being the best cheerleaders ever!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Establishing the Need for Positive, Proactive Discipline Measures

Daniel is a second-grade student in a public school in Philadelphia. Though he has been attending school for only 2 years, Daniel has already been suspended six times. His mother receives calls from the school about his problematic behavior so often that she frequently blocks the number, and Daniel's teachers have taken to calling her from their personal cell phones in hopes that she will be fooled into answering the calls. The intensity of Daniel's behaviors has prompted many calls to child protective services and many conferences with the school's principal with no change in behavioral outcomes. In fact, after each meeting and its subsequent out-of-school suspension, Daniel appears to be even more uncooperative and alienated from his peers and teachers. With no cogent plan in place to effectively manage Daniel's behavior and no family cooperation in planning for his care, administrators and teachers alike are frustrated and unsure how to proceed in managing this student.

In response to cases like Daniel's, many administrators have adopted a zero tolerance policy for serious behavioral challenges (Lustick, 2021) and, as a result, have seen an increase in out-of-school suspensions, often among the same students, with little improvement in the student's behavior or classroom climate. In fact, with increased suspensions, behavior has often worsened as has the quality of relationships between students and educators (Welsh, 2022). Relying on punitive discipline measures that exclude students from the classroom environment has not effectively addressed

behavioral challenges and threatens the delicate balance of a positive classroom climate (Savage, 2020).

The difficulty for many students and their families is not limited to a poor reflection of conduct on their academic records. If these students are not in school, they not only fail to participate in instructional activities but often miss out on having their basic human needs met because many families in urban settings rely on public schooling to provide meals and basic health care for their children (Basile et al., 2022). For primary grade students in Philadelphia, this pattern of rule infraction to punitive disciplinary measure in the form of out-of-school suspension is solidified early, with many students having two to three out-of-school suspensions on their record before entering the second grade (Dyson et al., 2021).

Background: Restorative Practices: A Proactive Approach

To address the disproportionate number of urban students who serve out-of-school suspensions, many schools have implemented restorative practices (RPs) as a positive and proactive approach to discipline (Basile et al., 2022). RPs focus on relationship building and making amends to injured parties while allowing the student with the infraction to take part in the conflict's resolution (Hollands et al., 2018. The philosophy behind RP is that no student is isolated from the daily workings of the classroom. Instead, students work collaboratively to resolve conflicts and create a positive classroom climate (Kulkarni & Chong, 2021). Implementing RPs is part of comprehensive classroom management for schools that have adopted the program. Even

when no conflict or rule infraction needs to be addressed, daily exercise of RPs promotes social skill building and healthy self-esteem development (Boulden, 2021).

Integrating RPs into curricula for proactive approaches to improve classroom climate and lessen the need for punitive discipline was received positively among administrators, teachers, and students in an urban elementary school after only 1 year of the practice's adoption (Kervick et al., 2020). Although many urban schools have adopted RPs in the classroom, measures of punitive discipline have not always declined. In institutions where RPs are not integrated with fidelity, little or no change in exclusionary practices has occurred (Garnett et al., 2022). The research problem that was addressed in the current study was that little is known about primary school teacher and administrator perspectives of the challenges or successes to implementing RPs with fidelity in primary classrooms.

Problem

Although researchers have investigated RPs (D. Smith et al., ,2022; Gee, 2022), the topic has not been explored from the dual perspectives of teachers and administrators with a focus on implementation with fidelity. Educators' perspectives, including classroom teachers and administrators (principals, vice principals, counselors, and deans of students) regarding the implementation of RPs with fidelity, have not been explored, including successes and impediments. This knowledge is crucial to the successful implementation of RPs in the future.

To implement RPs with fidelity, practitioners must include the four pillars that compose RP: norm setting, restorative circles, restorative chats, and restorative

conferences (D. Smith et al., 2022). To ensure fidelity, schools adopting the use of RPs should provide adequate training in implementing the four pillars so that practitioners adhere to the prescribed frequency and duration of program implementation with ongoing attention to building restorative skill sets (D.Smith et al., 2022).The importance of applying the principles of RP with fidelity is lived every day by families of students who miss countless hours of instructional time, socialization, and (in the case of many Title 1 students) meals and health care to out-of-school suspensions or expulsions. The problem of punitive-only discipline measures affects every aspect of students' lives and does little to address the behavior problems, and in fact exacerbates them (Ezzani, 2021). The research problem that was addressed in the current study was that little is known about primary school teachers' and administrators' perspectives about the challenges and successes of implementing RPs with fidelity in the primary classroom.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore teachers' and administrators' perspectives about the challenges and successes of integrating RPs with fidelity in the primary classroom. Two perspectives (classroom teachers' and administrators') were analyzed to create an account of RPs' implementation with fidelity. Although families are often asked to take part in restorative conferences, parent perspectives were not included in this study because it was solely an exploration of educator perspectives regarding the challenges and successes of implementing the program.

Teachers' perspectives were sought to reveal the daily workings of RPs in the classroom along with any impediments and/or successes to their implementation. Administrators provided a different perspective informed by their observation of individual classroom implementation and a decrease or increase of disciplinary challenges based on whether practices were implemented with fidelity. To address deficiencies in the implementation of RPs in the elementary classroom, there was a need for increased understanding of educators' and administrators' perceptions of the impediments to successful integration of RPs in the classroom. Implementing RPs with fidelity is defined as the inclusion of the four major pillars of the program: norm setting, community building circles, restorative chats, and restorative conferences (D. Smith et al., 2022). These items implemented at predictable intervals are part of the comprehensive program of RPs that seek to repair breaches of conduct and restore relationships and positive climate.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are primary school teachers' and administrators' perspectives about using the RP principle of norm setting for implementing restorative justice with fidelity?

RQ2: What are primary school teachers' and administrators' perspectives about using the RP principle of community-building circles for implementing restorative justice with fidelity?

RQ3: What are primary school teachers' and administrators' perspectives about using the RP principle of restorative chats for content for implementing restorative justice with fidelity?

RQ4: What are primary school teachers' and administrators' perspectives about using the RP principle of restorative conferences for implementing restorative justice with fidelity?

Conceptual Framework

The restorative justice theory as outlined in the *Restorative Practices Playbook* (D. Smith et al., 2022) was the seminal text and conceptual framework that guided this study and ensured that interview questions were aligned with the four pillars of successful RP implementation: norm setting, community circles, restorative chats, and restorative conferences. The framework informed not only the requisite components of RPs but also the frequency and duration of each component to ensure that implementation is happening with fidelity. The guiding principle of implementing RPs in the classroom is that the emphasis is placed on relationship building and developing empathy and self-regulating coping skills. A more thorough explanation of the conceptual framework is provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

Based on the research problem and purpose of this study, the rationale for selecting the qualitative case study design was the need to understand a phenomenon: the successes and challenges of implementing RPs with fidelity to achieve proactive discipline solutions (see Gladney et al., 2021) in primary school classrooms in a single school district where RPs had been adopted. In generic qualitative studies, the researcher does not claim a single established approach (Kahlke,2014). I chose the case study approach and collected data from two separate groups of school professionals to explore

teachers' and administrators' perspectives in primary schools where RPs had been implemented (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The case study design is selected when researchers desire "to optimize understanding of the case rather than generalize beyond it" (Stake, 2005, p. 443). Following my interview plan (see Appendix B)I collected interview data from two groups of primary school professionals. Once the recorded interviews were transcribed, I used hand color coding to identify codes, categories, and themes. I followed the suggested analysis protocol of Saldana (2015) to code and thematically analyze the transcripts.

Definitions of Terms

Community-building circles: The RP relationship-building exercise of coming together in a circle to share equity of voice and perspective in an open and trusting forum at predictable intervals throughout the day and week (L. C. Smith et al., 2021).

Fidelity: The complete implementation of all four pillars of RP with consistency at the prescribed intervals and frequency (Gladney et al., 2021). This current study was concerned with the challenges and successes of complete implementation with fidelity as outlined in *The Restorative Practices Playbook* (see L. C. Smith et al., 2022).

Norm setting: The modeling and practicing of classroom procedures and rules, usually occurring at the beginning of the school year with frequent refreshers (Wong, 2018). Learning classroom norms provides students with a structured expectation of the routines and procedures they are expected to exhibit throughout the school day. When expectations are communicated, modeled, and practiced clearly, students can rely on a consistent and predictable routine that encourages adherence to the norms. This practice

is especially important in classrooms where students have been influenced by trauma or instability in their homelife (Kelly, 2020). Norms provide students experiencing instability at home with some predictability at school, which helps relationship building with their teacher and building trust within the community of learners (Vehkakoski, 2020).

Positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS): A schoolwide system of positive rewards for students who consistently exhibit schoolwide norms and contribute productively to a positive classroom climate. The philosophy behind PBIS is the promotion of students making good choices in the hopes that all students take note of the reward and change their behavior accordingly so that they too can participate in the rewards for positive class climate (McIntosh et al., 2021). For example, a class that struggles with attendance might plan a field trip reward to the zoo to celebrate students with 90% or better attendance for the month. PBIS rewards positive and desirable behavior in the hopes that it will inspire more students to exhibit class norms and positive behavior (McIntosh et al., 2021).

Restorative practice (RP): A positive, proactive approach to discipline aimed at restoring damaged relationships and ensuring that all parties experience an equity of voice and opportunity to restore and repair (Hulvershorn & Mulholland, 2018). The current study explored the four main pillars of RPs: community-building circles, norm setting, restorative chats, and restorative conferences.

Social-emotional learning: Curricula and activities that address students' ability to self-regulate, resolve conflict, and function productively in the social construct of

public schools (Davison et al., 2022). Deficiencies in social-emotional development are often what leads to behavioral challenges and peer conflict (Cohen et al., 2023).

Assumptions

During this study, I made two main assumptions. First, I assumed that participants would be honest and candid about their experience with RPs and their feelings regarding its implementation in primary grades. More importantly, I worked under the assumption that participants had experience with implementing RPs because it is a district-wide initiative. The initiative was mandated 2 years ago, and educators have had professional development sessions and frequent checks to ensure its implementation. However, in a district of over 3,000 educators, complete verification of experience and candor cannot be vetted at 100% accuracy.

Scope and Delimitations

I focused on gathering perspectives from teachers and administrators in primary grades only (K–3) because that is my personal area of interest within my specialty of educational leadership. I did not include parents in this study due to the varied degrees of involvement and possible lack of knowledge of the RP initiative.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included the focus on teachers and administrators in the primary grades of K–3 and that all participants were from the same urban school district. I limited participants to the same district based on this district's adoption of RPs in the hopes that administrators and educators I included in my study would have at least a foundational understanding of RPs and exposure to the principles of RPs through district-

wide professional development. Although I was as objective as possible in my data collection and coding, I had experience with RPs, and my beliefs and experiences in the classroom may have informed my treatment of the data. I endeavored to set aside any bias so I could analyze the data and report the findings objectively.

Significance of the Study in the Urban Classroom

This study is significant in that effective management of classroom environments and school climate is critical to address challenging behaviors with positive, proactive solutions rather than exclusionary punitive practices. Behavioral challenges are the greatest challenge to delivering quality instruction and maintaining a positive classroom culture. Educators forced to address disruptions to instruction lose momentum in student engagement and the cohesion of delivering instruction according to predeveloped lesson plans. Daily interruptions lead to less time for small group instruction and the differentiated learning that is vital in urban school districts where, in some classrooms, over 50% of students are performing below grade level. Positive social change ensues when educators create climates that result in positive school cultures and improved behavior without relying on exclusionary punitive practices.

Summary

In 2019, there were over 16,000 out-of-school suspensions in the School District of Philadelphia, resulting in over 44,00 hours of lost instruction. Students absent from school miss critical instruction as well as having their basic needs met because many students in the School District of Philadelphia rely on their home schools for meals and basic health care. Loss of these critical services negatively impacts these students

academically, physically, and mentally. Integrating RPs to reduce out-of-school suspensions limits or eliminates loss of instructional time and does not interrupt basic services families rely on to meet the needs of their children.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Daniel's teacher has tried many punitive approaches to deal with Daniel's behavior, and none have been effective. Each attempt at punishment has resulted in further rift between the teacher and Daniel and between Daniel and the rest of the class. With limited collaboration from Daniel's family, behavioral challenges have gotten worse as the year has progressed. Daniel's teacher finds hope in the form of a new district initiative to implement RPs in her classroom management plan.

Daniel's teacher uses the four main pillars of RPs to reset classroom procedures and climate so that all students are aware of the expectations for behavior and engagement. Going forward, Daniel's class will begin each day with a morning meeting created to ensure equity of student voice and a forum for discussing personal and class issues. When conflicts arise, Daniel's teacher will use the principles of restorative chats to hear and consider student perspectives and take a collaborative approach with the class to improve the climate. Finally, teachers and administrators at Daniel's school will hold restorative conferences when warranted, including the guidance department, the students involved in the conflict and their families, and teacher stakeholders to establish a collaborative plan of action to prevent further conflict and restore a positive classroom climate. RPs focus on building relationships and repairing harm caused by conflict and deficiencies in self-regulation to create a positive culture in which students work through conflict together and restore order and peace to the classroom family. Through RP and its four-pillared approach, Daniel's teacher is encouraged that a positive, proactive approach is in place to mend her relationship with Daniel and to restore harmony in her classroom.

Literature Search Strategy

I used the search terms *restorative practices, restorative justice in schools, elementary school behavior challenges, community circles, morning meeting circles, norm setting, student engagement, positive behavior intervention and supports, restorative chats, restorative conferences, formal conferences, parental involvement,* and *self-regulation* in the EBSCO, Sage, Thoreau, and Google Scholar databases. I also consulted several seminal texts to understand the four pillars of RP implementation and implementation with fidelity: *The Restorative Practices Playbook*.

Conceptual Framework: The Four Pillars of RPs

This literature review examined the four pillars of RPs and the subdivisions within the pillars that address implementing the program with fidelity. The review begins with the importance of norm setting (Pillar 1) and its relationship to classroom expectations and student engagement. Pillar 2 examines community circles and provides examples of their implementation in the form of the morning meeting circle and how it relates to daily social emotional learning. Restorative chats as a form of positive behavior intervention and as a vehicle to ensure equity of student voice comprise Pillar 3, and the restorative conferences section (Pillar 4) addresses formal conferences with parental involvement for continued and significant behavior challenges.

I refer to RPs in my own public school classroom to provide the reader with some context as to the mechanics of each pillar and how these practices can be implemented with fidelity according to the seminal text, *The Restorative Practices Playbook* (L. C. Smith et al., 2022). The recommended practice of implementation is that all four pillars

are incorporated into student routines at predictable intervals with the prescribed frequency. For example, the morning community-building circle should be a daily meeting in which equity of student voice and social emotional learning are at the forefront of shared activities. Throughout the literature review, each pillar is described along with the facilitator's responsibility that accompanies each component, namely which items classroom teachers are responsible for executing and which components are dependent on administrator oversight and collaboration. The program's implementation with fidelity is contingent upon teachers and administrators working together to ensure that each pillar is incorporated into classroom management routines and procedures.

Importance of Implementing RPs With Fidelity

Fidelity in implementation of RPs is based on researcher or developer design with attention to detail regarding elements of training, procedures, practices, frequency, and duration (D.Smith et al., 2022). To ensure fidelity, practitioners must delve deeper than traditional professional development to participate in workshop-style sessions over time with access to feedback from other practitioners proficient in RPs who can provide support and modeling of the four pillars specific to school climate and contextual factors of student population (Owens et al., 2020). Impediments to implementation with fidelity include limited understanding of the program by participants, unclear training with little or no modeling or feedback, and inadequate staff buy-in of the program (Owens et al., 2020).

Norm Setting

Norm setting includes frequent communication of classroom expectations and ensures student engagement in a proactive approach to sustain desired behavior and limit the use of punitive discipline measures (Kelly, 2020). Students learn the rules and procedures for success in their classroom environment, and this knowledge provides the structure necessary for children to thrive in a predictable and safe environment (Wong, 2019). Often, norm setting is the primary focus of the first few weeks of school to ensure students understand procedures and processes necessary for smooth transitions and orderly routines (Shikerkar & Vajaratkar, 2022).

In my Philadelphia classroom, these early weeks are spent teaching, modeling, and practicing routines such as lining up properly to move throughout the building, turning in homework, using the restrooms, participating in whole-group instruction, and managing classroom supplies. Although these procedures are a major focus during the first month of school, I have discovered that the modeling and practice of these norms need to take place year-round in smaller bursts to ensure procedures and routine are maintained. The most successful teachers learn to present frequent routine refreshment as a classroom game or contest in which students are rewarded for their continued participation and compliance (Wiskow et al., 2021). Administrators committed to ensuring a positive school-wide culture make routine visits to classrooms to observe norm setting in practice and provide necessary feedback to educators and reinforce the importance of norms to students and staff alike (Shikerkar & Vajaratkar, 2022). Norms are often developed by administrators and shared for school-wide implementation.

Classroom Expectations

Establishing expectations for behavior in a classroom setting is critical in developing the positive classroom climate and rigorous learning environment necessary to motivate student engagement and create collaborative working environments that minimize conflict and maximize a sense of community and belonging (Fisher & Frey, 2022). Educators who have established well-communicated norms and expectations enjoy a more favorable perception of their classes and their own self-efficacy as capable educators (Gee, 2022). Students who experience chromic trauma rely on explicit modeling of classroom expectations to establish their sense of safety and routine (Lynch et al., 2020). Without the necessary structure that norm setting provides, these students become discipline challenges and are at risk for time lost in the classroom. Effective norm setting and the communication of classroom expectations works best when teachers use optimism as part of their instructional delivery (Vehkakoski, 2020). Setting a positive tone and praising students who are following expectations often motivates students who previously struggled to comply (Kelly, 2020).

Norm setting and establishing classroom expectations are a critical component of implementing RPs with fidelity and are part of a proactive approach to behavioral management that builds classroom relationships (L. C. Smith et al., 2021). Schools that maintain several hallmarks of relationship building through the establishment of school-wide norms experience lower suspension rates and a positive classroom climate (Anyon et al.., 2018). In the most successful schools, classroom expectations are communicated and modeled continually by teachers and evaluated at varying intervals throughout the

school year by administrators to ensure that students are receiving consistent messaging about their engagement and behavior (Wong, 2020).

Student Engagement

Although classroom expectations inform students of what is expected of them, creating unique learning opportunities and incorporating instructional strategies designed to grab and keep students' attention is what motivates them to want to meet those expectations. Students can be informed regarding which behaviors indicate they are engaged; like many skills in the primary classroom, these behaviors can be modeled and practiced (i.e., listening ears, eyes on the speaker, still body, and attention focused; Wong, 2020). When students are not engaged in learning and constructive activities, they are far more likely to misbehave (Nemar et al., 2019).

Off-task behaviors occur when students are unsure of their responsibility or when they feel ill-equipped to handle the task at hand (Farr et al., 2020). Lack of engagement increases undesirable behaviors and puts students at increased risk for underachievement (Olivier et al., 2020). Moreover, educators' responses to negative behavior can be as detrimental to student learning as the behaviors themselves. Without uniformity in professionally developing teachers to respond constructively and to redirect/deescalate undesirable behaviors, teacher reactions can be as disruptive as the offending behavior (Davis, 2019). Administrators have a responsibility to ensure that teachers receive varied and multiple professional development opportunities to acquire classroom skills to manage student behavior and cultivate engaging learning opportunities (Gregory et al., 2021). Like so much of RP implementation, administrators and teachers who can work

together while developing their own practice have the advantage in implementing practices with fidelity (Gregory et al., 2019).

Community-Building Circles

Community-building circles are the heart of RP implementation (L. C. Smith et al., 2021). During community circle time, students and educators gather with the intent to explore perspectives and build community, often to share an equal voice and participate as collaborators of a shared gathering experience. In my practice in Philadelphia, I use community-building circles when I want to encourage equity of student voice and loosen the formality of the teacher–student dynamic as it usually exists in the primary classroom. These circles can also serve to reinforce class norms while making a collaborative space for community discourse and conflict resolution (Kervick et al., 2020). Community circles are designed to address students in Tier 1 of the three-tiered system of positive behavior intervention and supports. Tier 1 interventions service all students and are used as a proactive approach to address at-risk students with undesirable behaviors prior to the behavior's onset (Cook, 2022).

Although the implementation of community-building circles usually rests on the classroom teacher to orchestrate, effective administrators ensure daily implementation and participate occasionally to build relationships with students and demonstrate their commitment to students' and staff's social emotional well-being (Huguley et al., 2022). Successful incorporation of circles includes a predictable frequency of their implementation (e.g., every morning, every Monday) and a consistent pattern of behaviors that students can expect from the circle's administrator as well as a pattern of

participation they can expect from the circle in the form of norms previously shared and modeled repeatedly (L. C. Smith et al., 2021). The key players in ensuring these norms are taught and observed are the classroom teacher in creating and modeling the norms, and the administrator in frequent check-ins to ensure that community-building circles are happening at the prescribed intervals and in a manner that ensures equity of student voice and restorative language (Joseph-McCatty & Hnilica, 2023). Teachers' and administrators' investment is critical in developing predictable standards of circle implementation to convey the message to students that their voice matters (Sedillo-Harmann, 2022). Full participation from teachers and administrators lends to the enhanced fidelity requisite for community-building circles to be effective and proactive discipline measures that foster a positive classroom climate (Furjanic et al., 2022).

Morning Meeting

Morning meeting is an integral part of community-building circles and the restorative process and accomplishes many goals in the primary classroom (L. C. Smith et al., 2021). Morning meeting is a time for continued establishment and maintenance of classroom norm setting and is an opportunity for students to participate in a daily check-in of their social and emotional well-being (Shields-Lysiak et al., 2020). These frequent wellness checks provide the classroom teacher with critical information about students and how they interact with one another, while also providing a glimpse into the ability of students to regulate their emotions (Rademacher et al., 2022).

In my practice, I use the morning meeting to start each day and include three main components in each meeting. We open by reading the class greeting, which is usually

something I prepare on chart paper that outlines any news of the day (e.g., special events, early dismissals) and serves as a general warm welcome. Because I work with emergent readers, reading this message as a group also serves an academic purpose. Next is the most important part of the meeting: the "share." Students take turns responding to an informal prompt while adhering to the circle norms of only one voice at a time and active listening by all participants. The prompt often takes the shape of what is happening in the classroom. The day after a long winter break, the prompt may focus on how children spent their time away from school. The day after a neighborhood shooting tragedy, the prompt may focus on what we are feeling after such a horrible event so close to home and sharing strategies on how to feel safe in our classrooms and homes. The share gives students an opportunity to unpack what is on their mind and compare coping strategies before we prepare for the day (Nemar et al., 2019). Morning meeting ends with an activity, which in my classroom is usually a game or a song. I often incorporate music into the meeting as a transitional tool to inspire joy, especially if the sharing part of the meeting has been challenging for students. The activity serves to close out the meeting and end it on a high note. Teachers facilitate the morning meeting, but the hope is that students will take turns acting as facilitators (L. C. Smith et al., 2021). Administrators adopting RPs should make frequent visits to classrooms during morning meeting to participate and ensure that meetings are being conducted with fidelity (Mas-Exposito et al., 2022).

Social Emotional Learning

A practical and critical skill students learn through their participation in morning meetings is the ability to regulate their behavior and negotiate peer relationships (Rademacher, 2022). Behavioral challenges often appear in the primary school years because of poor self-regulation skills and can impact a child's ability to participate in meeting classroom norms and developing relationships (Rademacher et al., 2022). Lack of self-regulation can manifest itself into 4 subcategories of challenging behaviors: disruptive academic behaviors, aggressive behavior, noncompliant behavior, and unclear opposite behavior (Bronstein et al., 2021). These behaviors create nuanced challenges to a positive classroom climate and prompt the need for more intensive behavioral interventions (Rademacher et al., 2022).

Most school districts have incorporated some social-emotional learning curriculum into their daily routines to address gaps in socialization caused by the pandemic (Green et al., 2019). However, for children in urban settings, deficiencies in social-emotional learning have been growing for years, leaving learners at a disadvantage for negotiating self-regulation and peer relationships (Ingraham et al., 2016). My school has a unique population of learners that includes "newcomer" English learners, refugees, and students temporarily residing in homeless shelters or foster homes. The needs of these learners are varied and contingent upon building relationships among the adults in the family and community.

Restorative Chats

Restorative chats enable students, alongside their peers and teachers, to address conflicts, concerns, fears, and many other situations that threaten the tranquility of the classroom (Hall et al., 2021). Participating in frequent restorative chats give students a voice in times of conflict or uncertainty and create another opportunity to build relationships among peers and between students and teachers (Hemphill et al., 2022). Restorative chats can be another form of community building circle, in that each student participates and can have their voice heard but differs from circles like the morning meeting circle in its focus on one topic or event (Junco & Camacho, 2022).

Often, after a national tragedy or news of another instance of gun violence in our city, I will initiate a restorative chat to discuss feelings about the event and give students an opportunity to share their thoughts and fears in a space where they know they are heard (Joseph et al., 2020). The protocol of facilitating a restorative chat is designed to give students a sense of control in sharing their thoughts and responding to group members within the circle (Lusse et al., 2019). To maintain equity within the circle and to ensure order, each chat circle will include a "talking piece" that serves as the symbol of which speaker has the floor (Smith et al., 2021). Only the student holding the talking piece may speak and all others are encouraged to listen without thoughts of their own response until they are holding the piece. While the talking piece is a nod to traditional Native American community circles (Lustick et al., 2020) it can be an object of any sort. In my classroom, we use a plush sunflower as our talking piece and I notice that in times of difficulty, some students snuggle and hold the flower tightly when they speak. In

younger grades, the talking piece often becomes a symbol of security. This phenomenon speaks to the power of the restorative chat and ideally, the sense of security and belonging its implementation has on classroom relationships (Joseph et al., 2021).

Equity of Student Voice

The importance of regular restorative chats lies in the security and predictability of the procedures associated with participating in the chat. Students can predict chat protocols because they remain constant and as such these procedures become a source of security and trust among classmates and their chat facilitators (Lustick et al., 2020). Cultivating the feeling that students have a safe space to share their feelings and concerns goes a long way in building the kind of relationships restorative practices rely on to ensure trust and communication among students and teachers. Students who enjoy close relationships with their teachers have fewer occurrences of "severe" behaviors (Lustick et al., 2021). These relationships serve as a proactive approach to discipline in the hopes that punitive discipline measures will not be required. When students feel that their voice is heard, they are motivated to continue to participate in perspective sharing and conflict resolution (Niishioka et al., 2021). By sharing the talking piece, students recognize the importance of giving everyone a chance to "share the floor" and reinforces the importance of remaining silent while others share their thoughts.

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports

Positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) is a 3-tiered system designed to address behavior concerns proactively and teach students how to regulate their own behavior and manage peer conflict (Scaletta & Hughes, 2022) Arrangement of the 3 tiers

is often depicted using a triangular model where the base of the triangle (the broadest tier) represents tier 1, the portion of PBIS that applies to all students (Scaletta & Hughes, 2022). Interventions in this tier includes all the proactive approaches that seek to develop students' ability to regulate their behavior and relate to peers and adults in the classroom setting (McIntosh, 2021). Tier 1 approaches usually include incentive-based rewards like schoolwide trips or prizes that students can earn exhibiting desired behaviors and observing schoolwide norms. At my school, we often hold quarterly field trips for students who earn a designated number of points exhibiting desired behaviors. These points are calculated daily, and students are encouraged to be active participants in their point management. Tier 2 approaches start to address students with undesirable behaviors to reinforce social and emotional learning and their participation in school and classrooms norms. At the tier 2 stage of intervention, the focus is still on student participation in learning how to regulate their own emotions and navigate peer conflicts, but some mild punitive measures are introduced as deterrents to future undesired behaviors (Elrod et al., 2021). In my classroom, a tier 2 intervention would be continued modeling and practice for a student who repeatedly left the restroom in disarray, but it would also include taking a PBIS point away from their running total for future trips and rewards. In this way, positive behavior is modeled practiced and rewarded, going against the positive behavior or norms would result in a consequence that is undesirable to the student but still within his/her control to change.

Tier 3 of PBIS concerns the top 1/3 of the triangle and is targeted support for the smallest population of students, those students who repeatedly violate classroom norms

and whose behavior has not been altered by interventions in tiers 1 and 2. These are students who without PBIS in place would be met with punitive only responses to negative behaviors. Tier 3 supports include reinforcement of norms and expectations, social emotional learning experiences, and data management of negative behavior incidents. The data management component is significant because for many cases, students in tier 3 will need additional supports like a behavior plan, counseling, peer mediation, or crisis intervention (Scaletta & Hughes, 2022). Tier 3 students need consistent documentation of academic or behavioral challenges for the ongoing management of their cases as well as consistent planning of support services (Vincent et al., 2021). In tier 3 interventions, students will receive punitive applications of consequences because of negative behaviors, but the focus is still on creating a supportive environment in which the student can acquire the necessary social and emotional support they need to be successful (Elrod et al., 2021). While PBIS programs alone do not diminish instances of negative behavior (Foust, 2021), the use of PBIS in schools leads to a positive school climate and sets realistic and consistent expectations schoolwide. Schools that adopt restorative practices often use PBIS to set norms and reward positive behavior in the hopes that the proactive approach to discipline challenges will minimize the need for punitive approaches (Oliver et al., 2020).

Restorative Conferences

The use of restorative conferences signals the need for increased communication with students and their families to either resolve a conflict and restore relationships or create a plan for behavioral management for the future (Lustick, 2021). The formal

conference typically includes the students involved in the conflict or continued behavioral challenge, their family members, the classroom teacher, guidance counselor and/or member(s) of the administration. The conference is often documented in the students' online student management system to create a record of behavioral interventions and their outcomes (Sandomierski et al., 2019). Following the principles of restorative justice theory, the purpose of these conference is to ensure equity of voice to all stakeholders (parents, educators, and students) and ultimately to restore positive relationships among the parties to repair any damage that has occurred because of the incident (Stephens, 2021).

The conference is usually organized by administration, but all parties involved will have the opportunity to speak and offer their unique perspectives. Participation in the conference for students is always elective but they are made aware that in lieu of the participation a consequence will be determined by the parties meeting (Huguley et al., 2022). Participation in the conference is encouraged to allow all parties an equal voice and opportunity to share how they were harmed (victims) and what they were thinking during the event (responsible parties). Families are also encouraged to share their own perspectives and their participation often provides insight into students' homelife and ability/challenges in self-regulation (McIntosh et al., 2021). The responsibility of teachers and administration facilitating the meeting is two-fold: initially administration and teaching staff provide specific information about which of the schoolwide norms were not observed appropriately and what the consequences were to the rest of the students in the class (Sedillo-Hamann, 2022). Most importantly, administration is engaged as

mediator and facilitator to ensure that all parties have am equal voice and opportunity to share and that the proceedings run smoothly, ensuring everyone's safety and comfort (Smith et al., 2021).

One of the most important elements of the formal conferences is the ability for offenders to communicate their apologies to the victim in a setting where everyone feels their voice is being heard and respected (Silverman & Mee, 2019). Just as significantly, the process of receiving an apology and collaborating in a formal conference with the offender often lessens the impact of the offense on the victim and can even lessen long-term effects of post-traumatic stress (Lloyd & Borrill, 2018). Restorative practices as they are applied to conflict in a formal conference is the most useful tool administrators have in resolving conflict among students and managing family support sin regulating student behavior and social and emotional well-being (Lodi et al., 2022).

Formal conferences not only give the victim an opportunity to make their voice heard, during the proceedings the student having difficulty with following school norms is also given an opportunity to provide his account of the incident now that the situation is de-escalated and the parties involved are focused on resolution and understanding (Graves et al., 2017). In many conferences, this is the most impactful part of the restoration as students often discover that the conflict was born of either misunderstanding or significant trauma carried by one or both parties (Graves et al., 2017). Administration facilitates this exchange with the assurance that students and their families can share with no fear of repercussions (Webb, 2021). After both parties have been heard and any other stakeholder that may have been affected by the conflict, the

assembled group works collaboratively on a plan to restore relationships and return the class to established norms. Families are included in this process to provide support to students affected but also to encourage their continued involvement and support in any future conflicts and in the case of repeat offences, families will also be involved in the creation of a behavior plan that will inform other teachers and specialists how best to support the restorative efforts made in concert with the student (Anyon et al., 2018).

Traditional Methods of Discipline

In response to increases in the need for discipline approaches in primary grades, many administrators have adopted punitive approaches to address problems with student behavior (Welsh, 2022). Traditional punitive approaches include detention, removal of privileges, or in-school/out-of-school suspensions. These approaches, while utilized over decades, all have the undesirable consequence of removing students from their learning environments and harming classroom relationships (Welsh, 2022). Not only do students punished using these approaches miss instructional time, routine predictability like lunch and recess, and positive classroom exchanges; the punitive-only approaches are not even effective (Welsh, 2022).

Most traditional methods of discipline exclude the student struggling with self-regulation which does little to communicate desired classroom behavior (Smith et al., 2021). Additionally, the exclusionary practices of traditional discipline are not even effective (Foust, 2020). In the short-term, these punitive approaches to discipline do little to squelch distracting and negative behaviors and in the long term the results can be catastrophic (Sedillo-Hamann, 2022). Students who habitually serve in-school or out-of-

school suspensions alike are more likely to grow up to have negative outcomes like dropping out of high school, substance abuse, and even experience with the criminal justice system, all before their 18th birthday (Cohen et al., 2023). Not only are punitive-only approaches not productive, but they are also debilitating to students struggling with social-emotional problems and can affect their future long after they leave the public school system (Davis, 2019).

Challenges of Implementing New Programs and Curricula

Another area of concern is the reality that public school educators often struggle to learn and incorporate new material as school districts adopt, change, and repurpose initiatives focused on improving school climate and the efficacy of instructional strategies. When teacher "buy-in" to new procedures or curriculum exist, implementation can run smoothly with teachers' positive attitudes ensuring good faith efforts to fully integrate new programs (Thae, 2022). Unfortunately, teachers do not always receive new curriculum positively and where dissention exists in adopting a new program, success and program efficacy may suffer.

Roger's (1962) diffusion of innovation theory identifies variables at play when any innovation is adopted. These variables affect the efficacy of the new innovation's implementation and provides a glimpse into why mindset and motivation are so critical to the success of new programs. Potential users of the new innovation are motivated by the perceived attributes of a new program, how the decision to adopt the new innovation was made, whether the new innovation is compatible with the style of the user, how complex the changes to existing systems will be, whether they are supported in the trial and

development of the new program, and finally, whether users will be observed in its implementation. Roger's theory is focused on not only how the new user receives the innovation, but also how the innovation is presented by administration in the case of public schools and changes to new curriculum and initiatives (Menzli et al., 2022). Should motivations for change and a commitment to adopt a new innovation not occur in tandem between teachers and administrators, the efficacy of the innovation suffers, These potential impediments to implementation alone could jeopardize an educator's ability to implement restorative practices in a way that is rooted in the conceptual framework with fidelity and could compromise the efficacy of restorative practices as part of a proactive and positive approach to discipline (Sandwick et al., 2019).

Summary

Current research on restorative practices provides promising insight on integrating proactive and positive discipline alternatives to traditional punitive consequences in a classroom setting. Each of the four pillars of restorative practices (norm setting, community building circles, restorative chats, and formal restorative conferences) provide educators with relationship and community building opportunities in the face of conflict in the classroom and ensure students' equity of voice and inclusion into a positive school climate. This study explored the varied educators' perspectives on implementing restorative practices in the primary grades of urban public schools.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore teachers' and administrators' perspectives about the impediments and challenges to integrating RPs with fidelity in an urban elementary school. Chapter 3 includes methodology, research design and rationale, data analysis planning, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical considerations for the participants. To explore the implementation of RPs from the perspectives of teachers and administrators, I interviewed 10 volunteers who agreed to discuss the challenges and successes they experienced when implementing RPs in their primary schools and classrooms.

Research Design and Rationale

I chose a qualitative case study approach to explore the perspectives of teachers and administrators in an urban primary school environment regarding the implementation of the four pillars of RPs with fidelity. Implementation with fidelity includes the integration of all four pillars of RP: norm setting, community circles, restorative chats, and restorative conferences. The case study approach provided an opportunity to compare two data sets: administrators and primary grade teachers. Participants were selected from the same urban school district in central Pennsylvania because that district had voted to adopt RPs over the last 2 years to improve classroom climate and reduce punitive disciplinary action for problem behaviors.

Role of the Researcher

In my role as the researcher conducting this study, I served as the data collection instrument focusing on the perspectives of K–3 educators and administrators. Because I

am also a third-grade teacher in a district that uses RPs, I was an observer-participant in the study. I had implemented all four pillars of RPs in my classroom, and I acknowledged that this experience may have contributed to bias regarding how I think RPs should be implemented. It was important for me to come into the interview process with this awareness and use it to monitor potential bias so that my judgments or expectations would not influence participants' responses. I used field notes to monitor my thoughts and feelings and included those notes in my data analysis to further control for the influence of bias. I collected and reviewed data with no expectation based on my experience with RPs in the district. I had no supervisory position over participants in the study, and I did not interview any teachers or administrators with whom I had previously worked in any capacity.

Methodology

To explore RP implementation with fidelity, I used a qualitative case study model (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016) composed of two groups of educators: teachers and administrators. These two groups of educators had unique understandings, responsibilities, and perspectives of RP that provided a comprehensive description of challenges or successes in implementing RPs in Grades K–3 of an urban school district. Participants worked in Grades K–3 and had experience with implementing RPs. l interviewed five classroom teachers and five administrators and followed the interview guide in the data collection plan (see Appendix C). My recruitment strategy included a social media group with over 700 members who work in a public school district that implements RPs. These members were actively engaged in teaching and mentoring were

able to describe their experience instituting RPs in the classroom and in their mentoring of other educators. I selected five members from each group to compare participants' experience with RPs. The sample was limited to 10 participants to ensure that ample time would be available for each interview and that variations of participants' experiences would be explored.

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for collecting data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To ensure relevant data were collected, I used open-ended interview questions that were crafted to address each research question in the study. Following my interview plan (see Appendix C) increased the reliability of the collected data and enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings (see Saldana, 2015).

Procedures for Recruitment of Participants

Participants were recruited using a social media educators' group with members who were employed in the school district. The group has 785 members who work as teachers and administrators in a district that adopted an initiative to implement RPs. Administrators of the social media group use questionnaires to confirm participants' employment within the district. Once participants responded to the social media invitation (see Appendix A), they received the IRB consent form to review for consideration in the study. Participants took part in online Zoom interviews limited to 60 minutes, and audio recordings were reviewed to ensure accurate transcription for the NVivo data analysis.

Data Analysis Plan

To explore RP implementation with fidelity, I conducted on a qualitative case study of two groups of educators: teachers and administrators. I was hopeful these two groups of educators with their unique understandings, responsibilities, and perspectives of RP would provide a comprehensive representation of the challenges and successes of implementing RPs in Grades K–3 of an urban school district. Questions in the interview guide (see Appendix C) were aligned with the four pillars of RP implementation: class norms, community circles, restorative chats, and restorative conferencing. Using the interview transcripts from NVivo, I hand color-coded participants' responses to identify common themes and experiences. Discrepant cases are addressed in Chapters 4 and 5.

Issues of Trustworthiness

When investigating educators' perspectives pertaining to RPs, I met the credibility requirement for internal validity through research best practices and peer review (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Data were verified to ensure internal validity by performing transcript reviews in which participants had the opportunity to review their interview transcripts to ensure accuracy. Transferability and external validity were maintained by providing thick descriptions of participants' interview responses. Dependability was addressed by providing audit trails throughout the study to ensure consistency and duplication of research methods for further research (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Confirmability was ensured through rigorous and robust data checks throughout the data collection and analysis stage.

Ethical Procedures

Participation in this study was voluntary and confidential, and interviews took place after school hours without the presence of students. Where applicable, student names were changed to protect the identity of minors and their home schools. Participants were encouraged to share their experiences candidly while having the ability to skip questions at their request. I did not have a supervisory position over participants, and I did not have a professional or personal relationship with any of the participants.

Participants were asked questions related to their work, which included strategies they used to effectively implement RPs. Participants were assured that they could end the interview at any time, and they reserved the right to pass on any questions they were not comfortable answering. I recruited individuals who served in the same role as I did (K–3 teachers). However, the participants were recruited from outside of my school. I did know any of the participants directly. Because the interview questions addressed the challenges of implementing a system that is a required part of participants' jobs, participants may have disclosed a lack of fidelity as implementers. This lack of fidelity could have impacted the participant professionally if confidentiality had not been enforced. For this reason and following standard qualitative research protocol, participants' identities were concealed, and participants' code names were used in reports. Risk of confidentiality breach was minimal and reasonable, and participants were comfortable contributing new knowledge that could lead to improvements in classroom management and climate. Findings from the study may guide future implementation and inform RP policy.

Code names were used for all participants during data collection. The codes will be stored separately from the collected data so that confidentiality will be maintained. I assured participants that they could skip questions as needed, and I provided them with the interview questions up front to minimize psychological risks. Further, I was the only person to know the participants' names, which was a requirement to complete the coding procedure. I did not recruit individuals I knew directly, a precaution to minimize relationship risks, and I ensured that participants' identities were kept confidential on a password-protected personal computer in my home office to minimize professional risks**.** Interviews were conducted using Zoom. Participants' identities were confidential, as were the locations of their home schools. Transcriptions are available upon request. Data were analyzed using the NVivo coding application to identify common categories and themes.

Summary

This qualitative case study explored the perspectives of two groups of educators (administrators and teachers) serving Grades K–3 in urban public Title I schools. Teachers and administrators were recruited through social media invitation on a voluntary basis. Participant selection was contingent upon educator experience (at least 2 years) and their participation in implementing RPs in the classroom or school population. Additionally, this study focused on participants serving Grades K-3 in public elementary education. Through semistructured interviews, each group shared their experience and perspectives regarding the implementation of RPs with fidelity.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore educators' perspectives of implementing RPs with fidelity in the primary classroom. The four research questions for this study were the following:

RQ1: What are primary school teachers' and administrators' perspectives about using the RP principle of norm setting for implementing restorative justice with fidelity?

RQ2: What are primary school teachers' and administrators' perspectives about using the RP principle of community-building circles for implementing restorative justice with fidelity?

RQ3: What are primary school teachers' and administrators' perspectives about using the RP principle of restorative chats for content for implementing restorative justice with fidelity?

RQ4: What are primary school teachers' and administrators' perspectives about using the RP principle of restorative conferences for implementing restorative justice with fidelity?

Interview questions were crafted to reflect the research questions, which were grounded in the four pillars of RPs. I used NVivo to code participants' interview data and to assist in identifying common categories and themes. In this chapter, I identify participants' contextual factors and provide a summary of their experiences and perceptions with implementing RPs in the primary classroom. I also summarize the data coding for each interview. In addition, I review the study setting, participant

demographics, data collection process, data analysis process, and results. Chapter 4 concludes with a summary.

Setting

Interviews were conducted in private workspaces using the Zoom application for one-on-one meetings to ensure privacy and confidentiality for participants. All subjects joined using a personal Zoom meeting invite created for the interview, and audio-only recordings were made of each interview to ensure accurate data. Interviews took place during the months of February and March with data analysis continuing until June of 2024. Transcripts of the interviews created by the Zoom meeting software were stored on my personal password-protected computer and will be kept for a minimum of 5 years.

Demographics

Out of 10 participants who participated in the study, five were classroom teachers and five were part of the administration serving as deans of students, climate managers, or school-based teacher leaders. Three were men, and seven were women. All participants were employed by urban public school districts and worked in Grades K–3. Levels of teaching experience varied from 4 years with the newest teacher to over 15 years with an administrator who started her career in the classroom. All educators were taking part in some iteration of RPs because of a school district mandate that required the integration of RPs into daily classroom management routines.

The purposive sample of teachers and administrators provided a broad mix of educators with varying roles in the school district from classroom teachers of varying primary grades to a dean of students, climate managers, and a school-based teacher

leader. I was encouraged to receive perspectives from these different members of the administration. Data saturation with recurring themes and subthemes was achieved after I completed my data analysis of the first seven participant transcripts; however, I sought to be thorough in my analysis and commitment to providing the perspectives of five classroom teachers and five members of the administration. Therefore, I continued my data collection to include all 10 participants (see Table 1).

Table 1

Contextual Factors Among Participants

Participant	Number of Years	Grade level	Role	Gender
1	12+	3–5	Teacher	Female
2	8	K–5	Teacher	Male
3	5+	K–8	Teacher	Female
4	4–6	K–4	Teacher	Female
5	10	3–5	Administration	Male
6	5	K–5	Teacher	Female
7	15	K–4	Administration	Female
8	6	K–4	Administration	Male
9	12+	K–2	Administration	Female
10	5	K–5	Administration	Female

Data Collection

Using semistructured interviews, I spoke to five administrators and five classroom teachers, each of whom had implemented RPs in their classrooms and schools. The interviews were conducted over 8 weeks in February and March 2024. Each interview session was limited to 60 minutes, and a single session was conducted with each educator using the Zoom meeting application. Audio recordings were saved to my password-protected personal computer to provide Zoom transcript information for NVivo software

application for in-depth qualitative data analysis. The data collection process proceeded as planned and described in Chapter 3 without exception. I experienced no unusual circumstances during data collection that had not been anticipated.

Data Analysis

Transcripts from each of the 10 interviews were analyzed individually using NVivo software to identify common codes, categories, and themes. I started with the smallest and most succinct units of meaning (codes), then moved on to analyze the more in-depth categories that developed through my analysis of data, and finally recognized the themes among the categories (see Saldana, 2020). I conducted first cycle coding and then applied concept coding for the second cycle (see Saldana, 2020). I derived meaning and identified common themes from interviewees' transcripts. The seven themes included (a) norm setting as a cornerstone for restorative justice implementation with fidelity, (b) community-building circles as a cornerstone for implementation of restorative justice with fidelity, (c) professional development is a needed support for implementing restorative justice with fidelity, (d) restorative chats are powerful when utilized, (e) administrative support is needed for increasing the utilization of restorative chats by teachers, (f) affirmation of restorative conferences for implementing restorative justice with fidelity, and (g) all four pillars are needed to implement restorative justice with fidelity.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Questions from the interview guide were developed using the four pillars of restorative practices as outlined by the conceptual framework of the *Restorative Practices Playbook* (see L. C. Smith et al., 2021). I selected five classroom teachers and five members of administration who work with student populations in Grades K–3. My inclusion criteria were a minimum of 2 years teaching experience and implementation of RPs in daily interactions with students. Dual perspectives aided in triangulation, and transcript reviews ensured that transcripts were accurate and corroborated by participants (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Transferability

I used purposeful sampling to ensure that I obtained varied perspectives of experienced educators who implemented RPs in Grades K–3. To ensure the transferability of results, I maintained a detailed log with thick descriptions of contexts, settings, contextual factors of participants, and detailed demographic information about the school district sampled (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Interviews with five administrators and five classroom teachers provided a well-rounded exploration of implementing RPs with fidelity. Of the 10 schools sampled, all were in urban environments and identified as Title I schools receiving support for the intervention with students 1 or more years behind grade level. In the district sampled, 69.5% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and 9% are English language learners. The ethnic

makeup is 47% African American, 24.1% Latino, 14.4% White, and 13% two or more races.

Dependability

An audit trail ensures the "stability of findings over time" (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. X) and supported recommendations made in Chapter 5 for further research. Using a qualitative case study design afforded me the opportunity to explore the varied perspectives of experienced educators who had firsthand knowledge of implementing RPs. I followed traditional standards for the case study design (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020) and considered two groups of educators: classroom teachers and administrators. All educators served students in grades K–3 and worked in urban public school settings.

Confirmability

Establishing confirmability in a qualitative study is critical to ensuring the findings of the research "can be confirmed by other researchers and the interpretation of findings are clearly derived from data" (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 9-18. To develop and maintain neutrality, I used a reflexive journal to limit biases and identify contextual factors during interviews. To ensure further confirmability, I reviewed notes and journal entries often to limit my bias and keep the details of the interviews in alignment with the conceptual framework and the study's four research questions.

Results

In this section, I discuss categories and themes that emerged from analysis of the participants' transcript data. I share results based on the four pillars of RPs as outlined in *The Restorative Practices Playbook* (see L. C. Smith et al., 2021) and the four research

questions. Administrative support was a theme identified through lack of support as described by some educators and the presence of support and encouragement that some educators reported in their RP implementation. Another theme that emerged was the lack of professional development that respondents cited as an impediment to implementation with fidelity. Finally, fidelity was a common theme because many participants reported not being able to implement all four pillars.

Results by Research Question

According to *The Restorative Practices Playbook* (L. C. Smith et al., 2021), practitioners should include all four components of RP to ensure fidelity. In the following sections, I report results as categorized by each of the four research questions, as well as the common themes within each question.

RQ1: RP Principle of Norm Setting

The first RQ addressed primary school teachers' and administrators' perspectives about using the RP principle of norm setting for implementing RP with fidelity. As demonstrated in the data analysis and quotations that follow, norm setting was affirmed as an important theme for implementing RP with fidelity.

Modeling, establishing, and maintaining norms in the classroom was the most exalted and frequently mentioned pillar of RP theory, according to the educators interviewed in this study. All 10 participants reported taking part in norm setting and revisiting the practice frequently. Even P2, who was skeptical about the efficacy of the other pillars, recounted "it all (the school year) has to start with setting the rules and consequences." Norm setting is the first opportunity educators have to establish their

requisite routines and procedures with students prior to any instruction or activities. According to P7, norm setting is the "building block" of positive classroom climate.

P10 is a school-based teacher-leader who serves on the leadership team and supports teachers with classroom management and instructional strategies. Much of her experience with RPs has been supporting teachers to implement morning meetings (community meetings) and norm setting in their individual classrooms: "We are a PBIS school, so obviously our norms are set … respectful, responsible, and safe. We start the year off from that; in my coaching caseload that's pretty much where we start, just climate and culture." She cited climate staff and guidance as additional supports in helping teachers create uniform norms and standards school-wide. She regularly supports teachers in establishing and revisiting norms and frequently looks "to see expectations and norms are posted for all to see in the classroom and even reference throughout the lessons." She is most interested in being "proactive rather than reactive" in her support of teachers and students and encourages students and teachers to create consequences together and "being intentional with norms and expectations and then following through on them, every time."

P8 is a climate manager and serves as a support person for classroom teachers in Grades K–5. She applies the principles of RPs to her support of teachers who rely on her for behavioral issues that disrupt instruction. The "baseline for the school is the ROAR initiative, which stands for respectful, optimistic achiever who is responsible." In this school, morning meetings are used to set the tone for the day and establish and maintain the ROAR initiative. From the beginning of the year, P8 recounted

> I'll start the norms from the beginning. I don't do a lot of teaching at the beginning of the school year. I do a lot of modeling and explaining why we need things a certain way … the community circle does work … and it is a big help."

P9 assists classroom teachers with norm setting by ensuring that each grade band has the same norms and expectations so that the expectations are the same no matter what class students attend:

> At the beginning of the year, we go through and make sure the rules and norms are up and they are basically the same so when they [students] go to someone else's class on the same floor they understand their role.

RQ2: RP Principle of Community-Building Circles

The second RQ addressed primary school teachers' and administrators' perspectives about the RP principle of community-building circles for implementing RP with fidelity. My analysis of the interview transcripts related to RQ2 affirmed community-building circles as a theme and core principle of implementing RP with fidelity in the school. In my personal practice, I also use morning meetings to remind children of required norms and to discuss what these norms look like in the context of our scheduled day. For example, we may start a morning meeting by having one of the students model what hallway norms should be when we are changing classes, or I may ask a student to model the wrong way to line up for lunch and have the other students identify where they went wrong. Along with the inclusive message and the shared activity, morning meeting provides a foundation for students' behavior and reminds them of their important role in the classroom and school.

Theme 2: Community-Building Circles Are a Cornerstone for Implementing Restorative Justice With Fidelity

Community-building circles are an opportunity to meet as a group and build class culture. During the interviews, I discovered that the frequency and duration of community meetings varied a great deal. One commonality was the merit associated with community-building circles among interviewees. P9 conducts fidelity checks to ensure the meetings are done with predictability for students: "Community circles are also a chance every morning for (teachers) to revisit their roles and procedures."

As participant 1(P1) remarked, during morning meeting, "we are getting to know each other, we are building, but then you are also like having fun together." P10 shared that in her school some classroom teachers have "decided to also have a community meeting at the end of the day." This provides a uniform start and end to the instructional day.

Participant 3 (P3) noted morning meeting as an opportunity to include reflection and acclimate students to sharing their thoughts and ideas with the rest of the class: "We start out each week with having a general discussion, a whole group discussion about whatever the topic is, and they can write down their feelings in their journal and share with an elbow partner." Her practice of extending student reflection to journaling scaffolds journaling for students who may be new to the practice and is beneficial for the English learners as they are able to focus on crafting their reflection before they are tasked with sharing with other classmates. In my classroom, I provide sentence starters

for these students so that they are equipped to participate in the morning meeting share question.

P7 is an administrator that values the pillars of norm setting, community building circles, and restorative chats to maintain order and positive relationships in daily practice. While she actively supports classroom teachers to develop their own norms for the classroom, she prides herself on being "front and center" during community meetings and encourages teachers to start AND end their day in community circles:

> Set the intention to start the day, revisit the intentions to be sure we got what we needed out of today and everyone is safe and happy. How we welcome and dismiss the children is as important as what we teach.

Once a week, classes meet along with their floor neighbors to have a large community meeting where classes share their progress and plans with one another and where teachers can celebrate individual achievements of students and birthdays. These meetings always begin with the recitation of the school code and a whimsical song to get the kids moving:

> It is the best way to start the week and really the best way to prepare for any state testing or change in schedule or procedure. That's really what brings the kids together, singing, laughing, and just having fun with their teachers.

P6's experience with community circles affords her class the opportunity to "get to know each other as humans." She also uses community circles for "academic purposes and inquiry-based learning." P6 shared: "I have been doing community circles since 2010, we address anything that is in the kids' minds…if there's neighborhood violence…when things were happening with George Floyd it was a month of

conversations in our circle." Her school frequently holds SEL (social-emotional learning) days where the focus is on peer relationship building and regulating difficult emotions against the backdrop of restorative practices and learning. She reported feeling that this is the perfect backdrop for implementing restorative practices.

Community circles/morning meetings were utilized by 9 participants out of 10 and all 9 reported their inclusion as a benefit to schoolwide culture and climate. While some schools hold circles informally, others make community meetings a priority. P10 recounted, "for the first half of the year our dean facilitated community meetings until teachers got the hang of it," indicating it was of high priority.

Theme 3: Professional Development Is a Needed Support for Implementing Restorative Justice With Fidelity

Educator perspectives on community circles were entirely positive. Even if the educator did not predictably facilitate the circles participants reported success in meeting engagement, participation, and improved class wide relationships. The only negative perspective associated with community circles was limited professional development and resource sharing for implementation with fidelity.

The 4th study participant (P4) is science teacher of students in grades 3-5 who used community building circles during instruction to ensure student equity of voice and engagement. Although her school's administration is supportive of her implementation of restorative practices, it was her motivation that elicited the change in student disciplinary procedures. She shared that she would continue to rely on the practices based on the academic and social-emotional gains her students have made in the last school year. An

interesting insight this participant shared is the need for more support for educators wanting to implement restorative practices: “Even if people are doing it consistently, (we could) stand to have more professional development on it…it is about how can we move forward together and work together in a collaborative way rather than punitive.”

P7 indicated that their use of restorative practices has impacted classroom climate in a positive way but feels that professional development surrounding the implementation of all 4 pillars with fidelity would provide their students with tools and strategies necessary for social and emotional gains in development: “If we have success winging it, I can only imagine that learning more could result in further gains. It seems like we always start these things but are never given what we need to really put it into place.”

P 6 shared that professional development is crucial for teacher confidence citing, “someone who might be less comfortable winging it may have a hard time, or may not even do it,” perhaps hinting at why some of the participants have not had experience with restorative chats or conferences. P1 corroborated the sentiment, adding, “this is not just another token initiative, this is worth the time and resources needed because it works!”

RQ3: RP Principle of Restorative Chats

The third research question sought to understand the primary school teacher and administrator perspectives about the RP principle of restorative chats for implementing restorative justice with fidelity. The themes unpacked for RQ3 included the power of restorative chats when utilized and administrator support for increasing the utilization of restorative chats by teachers.

Theme 4: Restorative Chats Are Powerful When Utilized

Many educators did not utilize restorative chats in their daily practice, but those who did found restorative chats to be an effective strategy for implementing restorative justice with fidelity. Conducting periodic restorative chats to mediate peer conflict or to scaffold self-regulation was a vital part of how P1 established the positive relationships she enjoyed with 3rd graders recounting, "(Chats) establish our culture of like how we react to each other…and how we manage the inevitable harm and conflict when…you have 20-30 bodies in one room basically all day." Of her regular restorative chats, she referred to them as "peace talks" and she is sure to facilitate them on at least a weekly basis, depending on circumstances.

P9 is a climate manager and part of the leadership team that support teachers in their implementation of restorative practices in the classroom. P9's learning institution is the only school out of the 10 in the study that performs frequent fidelity checks to ensure the quality of practices' implementation. As a result, the administration cites improvements over teacher motivation to learn more about restorative practices. This motivation has resulted in the school being down to "like 1 or 2 suspensions in a year because we function as a family." This climate manager creates a student-centered approach to resolving conflicts among students and details:

> (A student) might need some extra attention. The first thing is a restorative chat with me and we'll get some strategies to use in the future. I'll try to talk to the student and not have it go to the next step and get the parent involved, for the most part, that's all it will take.

Chats aimed at addressing undesirable behavior or conflict may not always be comfortable for the facilitator, but the outcome is that in most cases the air is cleared, and the parties are getting closer and closer to understanding each other. P3 enjoyed what she described as a "close-knit and family community" because of implementing restorative practices, most notably community meetings and restorative chats when peer conflicts arose in the classroom. Community meetings start each week with a general topic and a whole-group discussion: "A lot of times we're just taking up the work of teaching self-regulation so kids who haven't had the opportunity to develop it yet, along with empathy and things like that." These meetings allow her students to "talk and express their voice" because she is interested in what students are feeling and thinking.

She conducted restorative chats surrounding some long-term peer conflicts with a group of 4 young ladies that were frequently losing recesses and serving detention. Her approach to restoring the students' friendships was to play the role of what she calls "the observer":

> I tell them, I am just the observer, so I am just going to listen…being an observer, It cuts down on the finger pointing with me and I found them to be more honest about what the situation was instead of calling them out, one at a time.

She reported feeling that students were much more contemplative and empathetic because of participating in restorative chats and she intends to extend her practice to include family conferences should the need arise. "There are not a lot of behaviors, but you still need your routines and procedures." P3 continued:

> Sometimes, it's positive that the truth comes out. But sometimes I think it can be negative depending on who the perpetuator is, because sometimes we will have issues and we're talking about how if you (the student) wouldn't have done anything you wouldn't have caused your class to lose this privilege and it is finger pointing.

While this is an understandable reaction for kids to have when they miss out on something, restorative chats provide so much more to class culture than merely problem solving. As P 8 stated, "a lot of problems come from the lack of communication, so I use (chats) to model how we effectively communicate. Chats can be an opportune time for teachers and administrators to encourage ownership of their classroom climate with their patience and participation. Participant 8 continues:" (I have explained) to students, you know, we want you in this learning community, but you also have to respect it…put in the work and make it better. "

Theme 5: Administrator Support Is Needed for Increasing the Utilization of Restorative Chats by Teachers

Through the exploration of educators' perspectives on implementing the principle of restorative chats, some participants shared that they receive too little support from administration and have no protocol for students who habitually fail to follow norms. Of the participants that reported having supportive administration, they also report overall school and classroom climate have improved since their implementation of restorative practices.

Participants experienced a variety of administrative support from little or even no support (participants 9, 6, and 2) to supportive environments that actively engage in the planning and implementation of restorative practices (participants1, 10 and 5). Schools that receive administrative support in implementation seem to have fostered teacher "buy-in" of implementing these practices and committing to development and improved student communication. Where the support was lacking, teacher perspectives of restorative practices were not as encouraging.

P1 is a proponent of implementing restorative practices in the elementary grades and even independently sought out additional training and information on restorative practices' theory. Even though administration from her home school was lukewarm about implementing practices like community circles and restorative chats, they supported her in the inclusion of the practices and shared her perspective that they positively impacted her classroom management and relationships. Without administrative endorsement of more formal restorative conferences, P1 felt like the components of restorative practices that she incorporates into her classroom management are efficacious and moving toward integrating restorative practices would benefit her student relationships even more. She described her students' comfortability with community circles by remarking, "By the end of the year kids were facilitating (the meetings) and that was super cool."

While participant one faithfully implemented morning meeting and norm setting at the prescribed duration and frequency recommended, (Smith et al., 2022) she only conducts restorative chats when "really needed" and does not have administrative

collaboration on conferences with families. However, she sees the efficacy in conducting the chats and conferences on her own and reported much success:

> We (got) to a point where kind of an intervention is needed. So, we have a peace talk if you will, and that was exclusively focused on him (a student having behavioral challenges) and that was like intense because it was basically your whole class in being like-get it together-I'm pretty sure that the counselor worked with him, and I worked with him to prepare. (It was scaffolded to explain) this is going to be hard, you are going to hear some things, so he had that prep, and I also prepped the rest of the class on our tone, how we are going to be gentle, how he is our friend. He is part of our community, so how can we talk to him in a way that will create change but not make him feel bad.

P 3 remarked upon the critical need for climate and administrative support" "Sometimes, if it doesn't work the counselor (must) come in because you got to come in and pull them and take them off to talk about what could be a resolution."

Delivering instruction, attending to basic needs, and differentiating learning considerations are so encompassing that participant 3 felt that support and reinforcement should be provided to classroom teachers, "it is simply too much to be able to juggle." Her idea of proper implementation is represented in what P 4 detailed when she describes her school's inclusion," Coaches will go in and support the teachers that (need it), whenever they need it." This kind of support provides teachers with tools and strategies to be able to implement practices in their classrooms that will contribute to the positive

changes to climate that will motivate them to “stick with it” and “make room in (their) crowded schedule.”

Without administrative support, teachers may not “buy in” long before they can even assess whether the practices are efficacious. P 8 confessed that she has, “0 support from climate, all they ever say is that I have to do PBIS with fidelity but at some point, throwing points at students is not going to fix problems.” While PBIS is a system designed to reward students in a proactive way for desired behavior, it does little to address those students that need more support in tier two and three intervention status.

RQ4: RP Principle of Restorative Conferences

The last research question sought to understand primary school teacher and administrator perspectives of the RP principle of restorative conferences for implementing restorative justice with fidelity. The two themes that resulted from my analyses of the interview transcripts related to RQ4 were (a) affirmation of restorative conferences for implementing restorative justice with fidelity and (b) educators must include of all four RP pillars to implement restorative justice with fidelity.

Theme 6: Affirmation of Restorative Conferences for Implementing Restorative Justice With Fidelity

The performance of restorative conferences was somewhat limited but the practitioners that conducted the conferences reported them to be efficacious and requisite for the smooth functioning of the classroom. Restorative conferences are a delicate balance of ensuring equity of voice for students, families, and educators while also mediating the conflict in a purposeful and restorative way. P5 is the climate manager at

an urban elementary school and serves as part of the administration in charge of developing and maintaining positive school climate and culture. His personal interest in restorative practices has inspired the school community to develop a "restorative practices room" where students can participate in restorative chats and conferences with tools that will accommodate peer mediation such as anchor charts and question sets to scaffold their understanding of their own participation in restorative practices: "[We have] a restorative room…where if a kid needs to be removed from the classroom or chooses to leave and take a self-directed break, we work in here to deescalate. Repair harm and get back to class!"

P5 has a systematic procedure for ensuring positive protocols during restorative conferences. He conducts the conferences using the Zoom application and ask families to keep their students home so that all the families involved can log in together. Administration, climate, and teachers are also on the call, and they can provide their accounts of the situation and take part in any decision making going forward. He shared:

> We made a push this year to go away from having parents' mediations on site in the building. We utilize Zoom for that…I use the conversational framework (Smith et al., 2022) to keep things on track. We are able to go through everyone's needs and a big need for me is voice, given the children and parents their voice. Really, it is about understanding the harm that needs to be addressed and repaired, and then an agreement. It is not a good meeting unless there's an agreement in the end.

P5 emphasized the need for an agreement or plan before the meeting can be closed so that all stakeholders have their voices heard and can brainstorm ideas around conflict resolution and restoration to a positive class climate.

P7 is not a proponent of the restorative conference and feels that it creates "too much drama when there is already too much drama." She shared that with limited or no parental support, the conferences were useless. P2 reported similar impressions and confessed that he is not a "fan of sitting in on parent conferences," adding that they are seldom helpful in quelling undesirable behavior and may even "make behaviors worse" in the short term.

In my own experience I have conducted restorative conferences that do not go as planned and may have even increased tension among families involved. In the end, however, it has always lent to a greater understanding of each student's perspectives and the areas of need we as a team of educators need to examine. At their best, restorative conferences ensure each family has equity of voice and inclusion in the plan of care for conflict resolution and restoration of classroom relationships. I continue to advocate for conferences with students who habitually find themselves in the center of conflict and I have noticed a marked improvement in their ability to share their perspective and work toward reconciliation and restoration of a peaceful classroom climate.

Theme 7: All Four RP Pillars are Needed to Implement Restorative Justice With Fidelity

While most participants had limited experience with taking part in restorative conferences, many I interviewed indicated a need for non-punitive approaches that

include families and administration working together to implement plans for proactive solutions to future infractions or conflicts. Failure to include all four pillars of the practice limit the non-punitive approaches teachers and administrators have at their disposal to effectively manage conflict while maintaining and building relationships.

As prescribed in *The Restorative Practices Playbook* (Smith et al.,2022) using the four pillars of restorative practices: norm setting, community circles, restorative chats, and restorative conferences; no participants have implemented restorative practices to include all four pillars. Most cite lack of training (professional development) as an impediment to their inclusion. While P10 feels that including any of the pillars is "beneficial for improved climate", P2 feels that in his school, restorative practices have been just another initiative "rolled out with no resources, no guidance, zip." This frustration may signal lack of willingness and "buy in" on the part of teachers and may negatively impact their commitment to implement the pillars at all.

Summary

Participants reported varied experiences with implementing restorative practices with most only actively engaged in one or two of the four pillars that comprise the practices according to *The Restorative Practices Playbook* (Smith et al., 2022). The first RQ addressed the RP principle of norm setting. All participants reported the importance of establishing and maintaining norms throughout the year. While approaches may vary, all educators shared the perspective that establishing norms and routines is a vital tier 1 intervention necessary for the establishment of a positive class climate and as a a proactive solution to addressing students' behavior. The theme that resulted from my data

analysis of interview transcripts related to RQ1 was: Norm setting is a cornerstone for implementing restorative justice with fidelity

The second RQ addressed the RP principle of community building circles. Participants all believed that community circles are efficacious in promoting positive class climate and ensuring student equity of voice. The differences among participants were the frequency with which they facilitated these circles. Only a few reported scheduling them every day as prescribed in restorative practices theory. One participant uses them frequently as academic circles to aid in scientific inquiry. The lack of predictable meeting frequency makes implementing all four pillars of the practice problematic and may reduce the efficacy of the program based on the intended inclusion of all four pillars for implementation with fidelity. The theme that resulted from my data analysis related to this RQ was, Community building circles are a cornerstone for implementing restorative justice with fidelity

The third RQ addressed the RP principle of restorative chats. Only a few participants had experience with facilitating restorative chats but among the educators who habitually conduct them, participants reported improved student and teacher relationships and additive opportunities for the building of conflict resolution skills. These participants also shared that classroom climate is often improved when class wide restorative chats are conducted and that these chats afford them a unique opportunity for sharing concerns and perspectives after an event. The educators who frequently conduct the chats report that they are a vital component of implementing restorative practices with fidelity. Two themes emerged as a result of analyzing the transcripts related to RQ3. The

two themes were (a) Restorative chats are powerful when utilized and (b) Administrator support is needed to increase the utilization of restorative chats by teachers.

Concerning restorative conferences (RQ4), two participants were grateful for restorative conferences for ensuring conflict resolution that include student and family voice as well as coping skills and agreements that move the parties to resolution. While these educators have found success within this pillar, one administrator reported that bringing families together amid a conflict "sounds like a nightmare" and avoided the practice while participating in the other three RP principles faithfully. Two themes emerged from this RQ. The first was that Restorative conferences were affirmed for implementing restorative justice with fidelity and the second was, All four RP pillars are needed to implement restorative justice with fidelity.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perspectives of administrators and classroom teachers as they implement RPs with fidelity in the primary classroom. The four research questions for this study were the following:

RQ1: What are primary school teachers' and administrators' perspectives about using the RP principle of norm setting for implementing restorative justice with fidelity?

RQ2: What are primary school teachers' and administrators' perspectives about using the RP principle of community building circles for implementing restorative justice with fidelity?

RQ3: What are primary school teachers' and administrators' perspectives about using the RP principle of restorative chats for implementing restorative justice with fidelity?

RQ4: What are primary school teachers' and administrators' perspectives about using the RP principle of restorative conferences for implementing restorative justice with fidelity?

Interpretation of Findings

Research Question 1

The first research question addressed primary grade teachers' and administrators' perspectives on the RP principle of norm setting in implementing restorative justice with fidelity.

Theme 1 was norm setting is a cornerstone for implementing restorative justice with fidelity. In my teaching practice, I have relied on norm setting to establish my

expectations for the year and ensure students have opportunities to share their voice. During the daily morning meeting, I have students share our classroom norms along with how these norms look and sound in our classroom. This exercise gives students the opportunity to take ownership of the norms and express what they mean in the context of common areas in the building. One student may share the norm of active listening by detailing that this means eyes on the speaker, body still, mouth quiet, brain engaged. This kind of detailed response explains to students with what the norms look and sound like from the student's view and prepares them to understand and comply with classroom routines and procedures.

P1 put it best when she shared "we build our norms around the humanity of each other and how we relate to each other, and … around vulnerability." In this way, norms are not merely the establishment of rule and procedures, but more of a shared ownership and expectation of how students and teachers relate to one another. Likewise, P3 shared that her class creates a "constitution" that exacts responsibilities and details "how they're going to treat each other with kindness." Often, setting, modeling, and maintaining norms communicates expectations in a clear manner that most students will follow.

Revisiting norms is as important as their development during a school year. After any long break or change in the schedule, it is critical for teachers and administrators to provide several resets for students to remember and adhere to the norms. Even with frequent resets, some students may have difficulty complying with norms. P9 recounted "I know teachers have to go in and possibly reset their classrooms … (as an administrator) I usually pull students out to talk to them, remind them of the expectations,

and then put them back in the classroom." In this example, classroom teachers model and explain the norms, and administrators support teachers by providing extra climate support services and reinforcement. P10 shared "I [will do] check-ins figuring how I can support [students] so we can be more proactive rather than reactive." This kind of support makes norm setting a uniform process that bolsters the cohesion and unity of the schoolwide climate. Many educators recognized the importance of setting norms for procedures and routines because it is foundational in creating a positive class climate (Wong, 2020). The efficacy of norm setting was corroborated by all 10 participants who reported that the practice is a staple in their classroom management style.

Research Question 2

The second research question addressed primary grade teachers' and administrators' perspectives on community circles as a principle of implementing restorative justice with fidelity.

Theme 2: Community Circles Are a Cornerstone for Implementing Restorative Justice With Fidelity

Community circles functioned as morning meeting circles for nine of the participants who reported conducting them, and was the pillar of the practices initiated by the school district as the first initiative to introduce RP theory. Some participants shared that their learning network provided Google meeting slides to aid teachers in facilitating the daily morning meeting to set a positive tone and build relationships before the instructional day begins. P8 recounted that he expects his teachers to follow his teams' slide decks for morning meeting to include an "inclusive opening, a share-out (students

respond and share their answer to a daily prompt, an activity (usually a game or song), and finally a closing setting the intention for the day."

This model is similar to the one I follow in my classroom to start each day. Our focus in the inclusive opening is to outline the activities for the day and give students the opportunity to share upcoming events and important announcements. The sharing portion usually involves a whimsical question that allows students to share their perspectives and helps us get more acquainted as a classroom family. After students have a chance to share, we usually take part in a game or song and follow that activity with a closing that sets our intention for the day. I have children recite an inspirational mission statement to establish our goals for the day: "I am in charge of my success. Success doesn't just happen. I will work hard and make good choices every day to achieve what I want!" By establishing close relationships and shared comradery, students feel invested in the operations of the classroom, and they are secure in their belonging. Morning meeting and community circles provide bonding opportunities among classmates and gives students an opportunity to learn more about themselves and their peers. Educators can also use this time to address classroom management issues and reward students for academic or social-emotional successes. In my classroom, this is my favorite part of the day, and it helps in setting a positive tone and checking in with students emotionally to ensure that they are in a productive and positive frame of mind. All participants who reported participating in community circles corroborated that the circles are an effective principle of RP that improve classroom culture and climate.

Theme 3: Professional Development Is a Needed Support for Implementing Restorative Justice With Fidelity

P4 and P6 revealed that they implement community circles in an informal, extemporaneous manner when they would much rather have professional development and resources to clarify the facilitation of community circles and have an explicit model to follow in their implementation. Their perspectives mirrored teachers' perspectives in my school where classroom teachers from Grades K–8 have remarkably different styles of morning meeting and community circle. In institutions that have provided little to no training or support for community meetings, the structure of the meetings varies and does not always include the necessary components. Providing adequate professional development would give educators the requisite resources and confidence to implement this important principle of RP.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 addressed the primary grade teachers' and administrators' perspectives on the RP principle of restorative chats in implementing restorative justice with fidelity.

Theme 4: Restorative Chats Are Powerful When Utilized

Restorative chats address the Tier 2 challenges among students who fail to exhibit the norms and expectations of the classroom. These chats can occur anytime the tone needs to be reset, whether it be a conflict between two students, a student's failure to regulate their emotions, or a student's failure to adhere to classroom norms. Teacher-facilitated restorative chats allow students to have their voices heard and afford students

the opportunity to see the situation from another person's perspective. P1 referred to these chats as "peace talks" and noted that they facilitate open dialogue among students and active participation in conflict resolution. She frequently holds chats when there is an unusual issue in her classroom. She also uses the chats to address students' concerns regarding current events or neighborhood conflicts. This affords her an opportunity to explore students' concerns and understand their way of life, giving every student a stake in the functionality of their classroom. Having students believe that their concerns are important is "the most important thing to establish" (P1) any time of year.

I have orchestrated many restorative chats that have varied in nature depending on the situation and the parties involved. When I have needed to address undesirable behavior with a substitute teacher after my absence, I have conducted the chat as a whole-group discussion utilizing a talking piece to ensure equity of student voice and instill the importance of sharing perspectives in a safe space. On other occasions, including when two students fought during recess, I have conducted the chat with only those students, taking time and care to ensure that each voice was heard and plans for restoration served both parties. Even when the chat seemed unsuccessful and produced no improvement in behavior or student relationships, I could recognize the efficacy of the chat later in the year, and the chat has always improved relationships between the students and me.

Theme 5: Administrative Support Is Needed for Increasing the Utilization of Restorative Chats by Teachers

Facilitating restorative chats is a critical piece of the four principles of RP. Conducting frequent chats addresses the varied needs of students and provides

opportunity for classroom problem solving and perspective sharing. Although restorative chats are a vital part of the restorative classroom, they are also a complex and challenging undertaking because some students may resist participation and compliant students may find the process emotionally draining. The challenge of participating in a chat to restore peer relationships is difficult but vital to the development of self-regulating skills and conflict resolution. Chats are needed to negotiate conflicts but also to "link incidents to a change of the culture in the school … as a resource to affirm the culture of the school" (Elliott & Gordon, 2005, p. 43. Missing this principle in RP implementation compromises the integrity of the restorative classroom and eliminates the opportunity for guided practice of the principals in tandem.

Research Question 4

The final research question guiding this study addressed the primary grade teachers' and administrators' perspectives about the RP principle of restorative conferences in implementing restorative justice with fidelity.

Theme 6: Affirmation of Restorative Conferences for Implementing Restorative Justice With Fidelity

Restorative conferences were conducted among the 10 participants infrequently. Only P1 and P5 had experience with the practice, and most participants shared that conferences are most often conducted by the principal with one party at a time. These conferences, as described by P7, are not restorative in nature and serve to "make parents aware of the situation and give the student consequences in the form of detention or in and out of school suspensions." I found these experiences to be common among most

participants because they did not have a role in conferences; only two participants had facilitated a meeting with both parties present. P5 described facilitating restorative conferences in detail and shared that he has a copy of the framework laminated for his frequent use. His conferences culminate in the formulation of an agreement that all parties agree to with the intention of providing strategies and explicit plans of action to improve peer relations and restore peace. This essential part of conflict resolution is the foundation of RP theory that emphasizes both parties' responsibility to take part in relationship repair.

In my third-grade classroom, I facilitate restorative conferences between students who have conflict and their families. My experience is consistent with P5 who shared "there is no end to the meeting without an agreement." The agreement outlines plans for restoration and identifies resources and support that parties may require to move forward. These provisions can be vital to the sustenance of a positive classroom climate. The finding that many teachers and administrators do not conduct these conferences could be a reason that climate improvement does not occur at a predictable or substantial rate. Facilitating restorative meetings is critical to the development of conflict resolution skills. "Empowering participants often means developing the level of responsibility from the offender and resilience for the victim" (Elliott & Gordon, 2005, p. 67. Because conferences usually involve students in Tier 3 intervention, it is even more important to take advantage of the framework and apply all four pillars to support educators in their practice.

Theme 7: All Four Pillars Are Needed to Implement Restorative Justice With Fidelity

The four pillars of RP are designed to work in tandem to nurture and support the restorative classroom. Omitting any of the pillars eliminates critical opportunities for students to work together in a collaborative spirit to improve and maintain their classroom climate. Students must have the experience of taking part in their conflict resolution and developing plans for restoration if they are to develop the self-regulation skills and coping strategies they need to be successful and part of a productive and positive learning environment (L. C. Smith et al., 2021). Developing a whole-school approach would aid administrators in gauging the efficacy of the practices because this approach includes supportive practices for behavior and "systems to support practices and data to support decision making" (Elliott & Gordon, 2005, p. 21All participants shared that they would implement the four principles if they had access to the guidance and resources necessary to implement them with fidelity.

Limitations of Study

Although this study provided insight into the implementation of RPs with fidelity in an urban school district, it did not address how educators perceive the implementation in rural or suburban districts. Additionally, the study was limited to primary grades, so educator perspectives about the implementation in Grades 4 and above were not considered. In addition, this study lacked parental or family perspectives because it was limited in its scope and breadth.

Recommendations

Further research could focus on the need for applying fidelity to all 4 pillars of a restorative practice plan to determine the plan's efficacy and a quantitative study examining data before and after implementation would illuminate the targeted efficacy of the plan on any given student population. In districts where parental involvement is substantial, a study considering family perspectives of restorative practices would also provide background to schools considering a plan's adoption and provide an opportunity for increased community outreach and support.

Implications

Educators' perceived efficacy of restorative practices has provided necessary tools for teachers and administrators in disciplining students with chronic behavioral challenges. Having strategies in place to facilitate peer conflict resolution and self-regulation deficiencies is critical for developing a non-punitive proactive measure for discipline that builds relationship and contributes positively to school climate. Limiting punitive discipline (like out of school suspensions) not only ensures equitable access to instruction, but in many cases, also ensures access to basic needs like medical care and meals. Educators need to keep students in school to receive these vital services and by adopting restorative practices in a positive school climate, students have ownership over their own behavior and the climate of their classroom, ensuring inclusion for all students within the caring community of their classroom or school.

Implementation of restorative practices also addresses the needs of the "whole child" (Kelly, 2020) considering social/emotional development, socialization, and self-

regulation. Students benefit from explicit instruction and access to social-emotional learning to develop coping skills they will need in school and beyond and this curriculum is even more critical to students who struggle in meeting the norms and expectations of the classroom. By facilitating relationship building and self-regulation students are better equipped to become successful academically and social-emotionally.

Conclusions

Classroom and schoolwide climate and culture can make or break a learning institution (Wong, 2020). If students are not centered for learning, even the most motivated and talented educator cannot deliver instruction while children are unfocused and out of control. Implementing the fundamentals of restorative practices in primary grades proactively addresses students in tiers 1, 2, and 3 interventions while building relationships among peers and addressing students' social and emotional needs. Inclusion of all four pillars of RP is requisite to "connecting and rebuilding the social and emotional fabric of relationships within the school community" (Elliot & Gordon, 2005), but unfortunately none of the participants reported implementing all four pillars. Even though participants of this study worked within school districts that required the implementation of restorative practice principles, educators reported that lack of professional development and administrative support made the inclusion of all four pillars challenging. Moreover, some educators were not even aware of two of the principles of restorative chats and restorative conferences.

By modeling and reaffirming norms for procedures and routines, students are aware of the expectations for their conduct in the classroom. Holding frequent

community circles, or community meetings provide children with the opportunity to build quality relationships with peers and staff and establish their own voice and perspective during group discussions. For students who have conflicts with peers or need additional support adhering to the norms of the classroom, restorative chats provide educators the opportunity to work with students to make amends and return to a positive learning environment. Students who have more significant transgressions or conflicts can participate in a restorative conference with their families to ensure equity of voice for all parties involved and an opportunity to make amends and repair harm. Implementation of the four pillars with fidelity (Smith et al., 2022) provides a strategic approach to classroom management that is both proactive and non-punitive, allowing students to stay in school and work on ownership of classroom rules, norms, and emotional regulation.

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Appendix A: Social Media Invitation

There is a new study about the experiences of educators implementing restorative practices in the primary grades that could help teachers and administrators better understand and help students For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences implementing restorative practices in the primary classroom (grades K-3).

About the study:

- One 30 zoom interview that will be audio recorded (no videorecording)
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- 18 years old or older
- Teacher or administrator of grades K-3
- Use of restorative practices in classroom or schoolwide.

This interview is part of the doctoral study by Kelly Jenkins, a doctoral student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during January 2024.

Please message Kelly.Jenkins@waldenu.edu privately to let them know of your interest.

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Interview Guide:

- **Introductory Statement**: This study is an exploration about educators' perspectives about the challenges and successes of implementing restorative practices in the primary classroom with fidelity. Your identity and responses will remain anonymous, because all participants will be referred to only by participant codes in my final study's report. You will have access to the interview transcripts after our discussion to verify accuracy prior to my qualitative data analysis. Do you have any questions for me?

  I have organized the interview questions within the 4 pillars of restorative practice because the 4 pillars serve as the conceptual framework of my study, which informs the study's four research questions.

  RQ 1: Norm Setting *What are the primary school teacher and administrator perspectives about using the RP principle of norm setting for implementing restorative justice with fidelity?*

  How do you establish norms for the beginning of the year?

  Please share how classroom norms are initially set from your perspective.

  How often do you revisit establishing and reinforcing norms?

  What supports are at your disposal to aid students in following norms and expectations?

What is the procedure for students who do not exhibit established norms?

What support do you receive from administration in establishing and supporting norms and expectations?

Are any other support personnel or climate staff involved in supporting and enforcing norms?

RQ 2: Community Building Circles *What are the primary school teacher and administrator perspectives about using the RP principle of community building circles for implementing restorative justice with fidelity?*

Tell me about the frequency and planning of community building circles.

Are these circles prescribed at any frequency and duration by administration and if so, do you perform them at the prescribed frequency and duration?

Do you utilize a "talking piece"? If so, how efficacious do you find its application in ensuring equity of student voice and if not, how do you ensure equity of student voice?

How involved are administration in daily circles? Do they join or observe?

What changes to classroom climate (positive or negative) do you notice after implementing the circles?

RQ 3: Restorative Chats *What are the primary school teacher and administrator perspectives about using the RP principle of restorative chats for content for implementing restorative justice with fidelity*?

How often have you conducted restorative charts in the last 60 days?

What was the impetus behind instituting these chats?

Can you walk me through the procedure and the outcomes of your last chat?

How effective do you feel restorative chats are in conflict resolution?

RQ 4: Restorative Conferences *What are the primary school teacher and administrator perspectives about using the RP principle restorative conferences for implementing restorative justice with fidelity?*

How many restorative conferences have you held within the last 60 days?

Can you walk me through the process of the last restorative conference you facilitated?

Situational Question:

You have a student who has already participated in restorative conference without parental support in the process. What steps do you take in planning the next conference to either ensure more family support or recruit support from other sources?

Closing Statement: Thank you so much for your time. When I have completed the transcripts of our meeting, I will share them with you. Do you have any questions for me?