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Between Paradigms: School Principal Leadership in Restorative Practices Implementation

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by

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DEDICATION

"Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion." – Bell Hooks

This dissertation is dedicated to all those who have and continue to experience the physical, emotional, and spiritual impacts of ongoing settler-colonialism. May we one day find our way back to ourselves and to each other.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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Restorative practices (RP) have been shown through research to produce positive results on school culture and reductions in measures of exclusionary discipline especially when a whole-school and culture change approach is utilized. Further, the benefits of RP include fostering community, belonging, and supporting the development of positive relationships among staff and students. However, the role of school principals and their role in RP implementation has been underexamined in the literature. This study aimed to answer the following research questions: 1) What are the lived experiences of secondary school principals working to create transformative

change through leadership in restorative practices? 2) How do school principals integrate restorative mindsets and behaviors in their leadership practices? 3) How do they transfer knowledge about their practices to staff members? 4) What conflicts and tensions (if any) do they face as they seek to engage in culture change? The purpose of the study was to use school principals' experience to define restorative leadership and surface the challenges they face. The study employed a phenomenological approach to explore the experience of school principals who are currently implementing restorative practices at their school site. In-depth semi structured interviews were conducted with seven school principals from California and New Mexico. Interview data was analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Four themes surfaced from school principals' experiences which were 1) Holism 2) Power 3) Advocacy and Organizing and 4) Purpose, Meaning, and Values. These themes are proposed by the study as components of restorative leadership.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

Restorative practices (RP) have seen increasing interest and implementation across schools in the U.S. over the past two decades as a way to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline (Gonzalez, 2012). The school-to-prison pipeline is the result of zero tolerance approaches to school code violations which have led to the disproportionate criminalization of minor infractions and increased chances that Black, Latinx, and Native/Indigenous youth interact with the criminal justice system (Latimer et al., 2005; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Advancement Project, 2015). Critically, patterns of exclusionary discipline in schools mirror those of youth formally involved in the criminal justice system (Wald & Losen, 2003). Such approaches to school discipline not only marginalize but have also been found to be ineffective at maintaining school safety (Anyon et al., 2016; Gonzalez, 2012). Restorative practices and restorative justice are terms often used interchangeably to describe interventions and reactions to harm as well as a continuum of formal and informal approaches that foster community building and promote positive school culture and climate (Fronius et al., 2019). Drawing on a humanistic approach to social management and discipline, restorative practices emphasize the cultivation of relationships and connectedness in classroom and school communities (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Morrison, 2005). These processes have been used to address bullying, violence, classroom concerns, and other harmful behavior (Morrison, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

Increasingly, whole-school frameworks have been developed and implemented as part of larger school climate goals (Fronius et al., 2019). Examinations of schools early in their

implementation of RP have shown positive effects such as increasing measures of school climate and decreasing rates of suspension and expulsion (Anyon et al., 2016; Augustine et al., 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2020). Overall, evidence suggests that restorative approaches to creating positive school culture hold much promise (Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). Despite the potential positive impacts, the current research also suggests that RP programs suffer from misimplementation (Gregory et al., 2021), a lack of resources (Fronius et al., 2019), and the persistence of traditional punitive mindsets and beliefs (Lustick, 2017; Vaandering, 2013). Shifting schools towards authentically embodying and valuing restorative principles of building community, collaboration, inclusion, and reparation of harm is one of culture change in which school leaders play an integral role (Morrison et al., 2005). Without committed and aligned school leadership, the potential of restorative approaches continues to be unrealized and risk perpetuating inequitable discipline practices (Davis, 2019; Lustick, 2021; Valandra & Yazzie, 2020). Further, when school leaders' actions are not aligned with restorative values, teachers are less likely to feel empowered to make change (Hall et al., 2020). A culture change approach is critical and requires leaders to embody restorative principles and establish legitimizing messages in the school community (Hall et al., 2020; Morrison et al., 2005; Vincent et al., 2021). Although restorative practices have been thoroughly described and conceptualized in school-based contexts, restorative leadership models and paradigms are undeveloped and unexamined. The following research questions sought to explore the experiences of secondary school principals as they engage in culture change by integrating restorative mindsets and values into their leadership practices.

Research Questions and Purpose of the Study

1. What are the lived experiences of secondary school principals working to create transformative change through leadership in restorative practices?
2. How do school principals integrate restorative mindsets and behaviors in their leadership practices?
3. How do they transfer knowledge about their practices to staff members?
4. What conflicts and tensions do they face as they seek to engage in culture change?

Overall, the aims of the study were to 1) conceptualize restorative leadership and define its key components 2) describe challenges faced by school principals as they engage in restorative culture change and 3) illuminate principal experience to better inform education leaders and decision makers about the level of investment and support required at all levels in their efforts to bring these practices to their communities.

Methods Overview

In order to answer the research questions, a qualitative phenomenological approach was used to examine the lived experiences of school principals as they engaged in culture change through their leadership practices. By examining school principal experiences, a deeper understanding about their decision-making and sense-making can be achieved. The study focused on how principals' make sense of the intersection between restorative paradigms and their role as school leaders. Specifically, the study aimed to describe how they integrate restorative mindsets and values into their leadership practices among some of which include "openness, self-determination, collaboration, flexibility, equality, non-discrimination, non-violence, fairness, respect, empowerment, trust, honesty, voluntarism, healing, personal accountability, inclusiveness, empathy and accountability" (Hopkins, 2015, p. 24). Seven

secondary school principals were recruited using purposeful sampling and who fit a set of criteria as outlined in Chapter 3. In-depth semistructured interviews were conducted with 7 participants and analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Conclusion

Restorative practices have shown the potential to ameliorate racial discipline disparities, improve school climate, and increase measures of belonging. The most effective approach to implementing RP programs in schools is through a culture change approach in which school leaders play a central role. Ultimately, school leaders seeking to develop restorative school cultures must remake institutional discipline practices, shift the mindsets of their staff away from traditional punitive approaches, and model the practices in their interactions with staff and the school community. A phenomenological approach allowed for an expansive exploration of their lived experiences which contributed to the study's goal of conceptualizing restorative leadership in an emergent way.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Theory and Need for Restorative Practices

Applications of restorative practices have evolved and found their way into new and expanding contexts with implications for education and society. In this broader sense, restorative theories and philosophies "may offer a unifying trans-cultural 'theory of everyone' which explains how people best relate to those in authority and to one another in any social entity – family, school, community, business, prison, church, government" (Wachtel, 2005, p.16). Additionally, RP represents a set of principles, concepts, and philosophies as well as associated practices (Vaandering, 2013). Its theoretical foundations and concepts counter dominant western perspectives of understanding individuals, relationships, and communities (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012) and aims to move schools and society away from retributive justice and towards collaborative and inclusive problem-solving approaches that involve all stakeholders and addresses power imbalances, particularly between students and teachers (Zehr, 2002). In its early stages, restorative practices were used primarily in courts and the criminal justice system in diverse, international contexts such as Canada, in the form of victim-offender mediation programs, family group conferencing in New Zealand, and more recently, in U.S. schools and around the world (Wachtel, 2005). Interventions in criminal justice contexts involve utilizing peacemaking circle processes that draw on Native and Indigenous traditions from around the world (IIRP, n.d.). Peacemaking circles emphasize collective accountability, restoration of community, and making amends (Gonzalez, 2012). Although there is not one agreed upon definition of RP, the common themes among them include the centrality of relationships and community, and repairing relationships rather than removing individuals from the school or classroom community (Fronius, 2019; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021).

The contrast between restorative philosophies and traditional punitive philosophies of social control is made most evident by the patterns of racially disproportionate discipline practices that have been characteristic of public schools over the past several decades (Gonzalez, 2012). There is a general consensus that punitive approaches to school discipline are ineffective, inequitably applied, and do not address the root causes of behavior (Advancement Project, 2010; Wald & Losen, 2003). Punitive practices grew in popularity as schools and districts across the U.S. adopted zero-tolerance policies during the 1980's-1990's, resulting in harsh punishment for minor infractions (Gonzalez, 2015). Exclusionary discipline has been tied to a variety of negative outcomes for students such as an increased likelihood of dropping out of school and being arrested (Balfanz et al., 2015) and exacerbating Black-White academic achievement gaps (Morris & Perry, 2016). Further, one study found that Black students were 26.2% more likely to receive suspensions on their first offense compared to their White peers (Gregory et al., 2016). The prescriptive nature of zero-tolerance policies result in harsh penalties for minor issues. Examples of these minor issues include disrupting class with talking or speaking disrespectfully to the teacher. Advocates of RP argue that collaborative and problem-solving approaches are more effective than traditional exclusionary discipline for addressing these challenges (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Morris & Vaandering, 2012; Zehr, 2002).

Foundational concepts in restorative practices include modes of emotional engagement and interaction, leadership, and informal daily practices that seek to prevent harm when applied systematically. These concepts include the social discipline window, fair process, and the continuum of restorative practices. Central to understanding the goals of restorative practices is the social discipline window which describes different approaches to social management and is applicable in any environment where social norms and boundaries must be maintained (Wachtel,

2005). The four possible domains are represented on x and y axes as intersections between levels of control and levels of support. The ideal domain is the "with" (restorative) quadrant which is an environment characterized by high support and high control while other, less ideal, domains are labeled as "to" (punitive), "not" (neglectful), and "for" (permissive) (IIRP, n.d.). The fundamental hypothesis of restorative practices summarizes the intent of the social discipline window by positing "that human beings are happier, more productive and cooperative, and more likely to make positive changes in their behaviour when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them" (Wachtel, 2005, p. 87). Key to this hypothesis is the collaborative and inclusive nature of interactions between all members of a community which facilitates conflict resolution and problem-solving.

The concepts described also apply to school leaders and staff. Fair process, an idea adapted from business, has been positioned by the International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP) as an example of how leaders enact the "with" domain (IIRP, n.d.). The concept was initially described as a way for managers in the workplace to create conditions of trust in decision-making through transparency and engagement with employees. Importantly, fair process emphasizes transparent decision-making as more important than the outcome and posits that people will be more likely to cooperate whether or not they personally benefit if fair process is utilized (Kim & Mauborgne, 2003).

Restorative Practices in Education

The continuum of restorative practices describes a range of processes on a spectrum between informal and formal (Wachtel, 2005). Informal practices on the continuum include the use of affective statements, de-escalation strategies, and restorative questions whereas formal practices are more structured and tend to follow a script and predetermined process. Core to

restorative practices is the use of various kinds of circles. In circle practice, there is typically a circle keeper who facilitates the conversation using a talking piece that is passed sequentially around the circle during rounds of questions. The circle keeper ensures equity of voice and that agreements are being followed (Amstutz and Mullet, 2005). The following are common circle practices used in schools from informal to more formal.

- Community-building circles - Community-building circles are regular, structured opportunities for students, staff, and community members to build connections. Participants in these kinds of circles might answer prompts about their experiences, interests, and personal background as a way to facilitate mutual understanding.
- Responsive circles - Responsive circles may be used in response to events, needs in the school community, or other situations that would benefit from group dialogue and collective sense-making. Responsive circles may also be used to address low-level conflict between two or more individuals.
- Restorative conferences - Restorative conferences tend to be more intensive both in the planning and execution and in the level of conflict that is addressed. Conferences involve bringing together the person who caused harm and the person who was harmed as well as other school community members to address the harm and repair relationships. In the preparation process, the circle keeper prepares both parties by using mediation strategies. At the end of a conference, there are typically a set of actions that the person(s) who caused the harm agrees to complete as a form of reparation. However, these mediation strategies are not

limited to conferencing processes and may be used in more informal spaces (Zehr et. al, 2022)

Thorsborne & Blood (2005) build upon the informal-formal continuum and highlight the need to see restorative practices implementation as an issue of cultural and organizational change. They suggest integrating relational approaches in all aspects of school life including curriculum and pedagogy. Although the concepts described do not address every relevant construct, they do represent the general goals, aims, and modes of interactions that are central to restorative practices. Taken together, these concepts emphasize and promote the free expression of emotion, participatory engagement, and transparent decision-making.

To further understand what RP in schools is, it is important to distinguish it from other initiatives. Restorative practices overlap in some ways with other programs that aim to address the social and emotional well being of students, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions Support (PBIS) and social emotional learning (SEL) curricula that have also seen increasing use and implementation in schools (Wang & Degol, 2015). However, there are important distinctions between RP and these programs. PBIS and SEL approaches focus on skill-building and curricula, do not address the relational elements of school culture, and reinforce dominant beliefs of social control because their ultimate aims are behavioral compliance (Vaandering, 2013). Further, restorative practices distinguishes itself from typical institutional responses to conflict and relationships by acknowledging the "social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions that make up the rich motivational ecologies within the lives of individuals and communities" (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012, p. 140).

Promising Results

Reviewing the literature for the impacts of restorative practice programs in schools provides a challenge because adoption and implementation vary widely (Anyon et al., 2016, Fronius et al., 2019, Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). Implementation of RP ranges from narrow, intervention-focused programs to whole-school approaches. Additionally, the definition of restorative practices also varies depending on context making direct comparisons between programs difficult. Few quantitative studies have been able to comprehensively study the impact of these programs in schools (Acosta et al., 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2020; Kane et al., 2008). Further, research consists largely of correlational and quasi-experimental studies that do not establish causal relationships. Despite these gaps, the research illuminates the state of restorative practice programs in public schools.

In the U.S., decreases in exclusionary discipline have been shown in Denver, Colorado (Gonzalez, 2015), Minneapolis, Minnesota (Riestenberg, 2013), and Oakland, California (Jain, et al., 2014). Some studies that have examined schools and districts in their early implementation of RP have reported positive results. A randomized controlled trial of the impacts of restorative practices on classroom and school climate and suspension rates in 44 Pittsburgh Public Schools found that school climate improved and school suspensions decreased in the treatment groups when compared to the control groups. Further, they found that the number of days lost to suspension as well as socioeconomic and racial discipline gaps declined with the most notable effects at the elementary level (Augustine et al., 2018). Similar results were found in Maine and found that students' self-reported experiences with restorative practices was linked to improvement across a range of measures such as student, peer, and school outcomes (Acosta, 2019). These studies represent two of limited available studies that utilize randomized controlled

trials. Both studies occurred in the early phases of implementation possibly obscuring the full extent of the impacts of RP. Given that full implementation may take 3-5 years or more (Gonzalez, 2012; Gregory & Evans, 2020; Morrison et al., 2005), long-term studies of RP implementation is a critical gap in the literature. Despite this gap, the evidence seems to suggest that RP, when implemented with fidelity, has the potential to impact measures of school climate.

A correlational study examining 180 schools in Denver Public Schools found that the use of restorative interventions is associated with a decreased likelihood of reoffense across student demographic groups in the second semester of the same year. However, despite decreases in discipline and the likelihood of reoffense the suspension gap between Black and White students persisted (Anyon et al., 2016). These findings support an earlier study in the same district that found restorative interventions decreased overall suspension rates from 10.58% to 5.63% (Gonzalez, 2015). The study also reported a decrease in suspension disparities for African Americans by 7.2% and that the Denver Public Schools showed a steady and substantial increase in the percentage of students scoring proficient in statewide tests in reading, writing, and math. Although the correlation between discipline practices and academic achievement was noted, Gonzalez (2015) concludes that at the very least, the gains indicate that RP is not correlated with decreased academic performance. Similarly, an examination of ten years of implementation in the Oakland Unified School District also showed a 24% drop in chronic absenteeism among middle schools with RP programs, increases in reading levels among 9th grade students, and increases in four-year graduation rates (Jain et al, 2014).

At the classroom level, RP has positive impacts on culture, increasing the quality of student-teacher relationships, and student-relationships (Garnett et. al., 2022 ;Vaandering, 2013). A study of 412 students across 29 classrooms in two large diverse high schools found that the

use of RP in the classroom can lead to increased positive relationships between teachers and diverse students, decreases in referrals and the racial discipline gap, and increase students' perceptions that they are being treated more respectfully. Using hierarchical linear modeling and regression analyses, the study was also able to compare results between high implementers and low implementers. High RP implementers issued fewer exclusionary discipline referrals compared with low RP implementers (Gregory et al., 2016). Interestingly, restorative practices programs may also positively impact measures of physical and mental health. A study examined California Healthy Kids Survey data from 2013-2014 and found that schools that used whole-school approaches to restorative practice implementation had a 16% decreased likelihood of experiencing absences due to physical health problems (Todic et al., 2020).

Several of these studies illustrate the fragmented nature of the research on restorative practices and its impacts on schools. The study conducted in Pittsburgh Public Schools examined a treatment group that utilized the IIRP (International Institute of Restorative Practices) whole-school model and had more targeted and sustained support (Augustine et al., 2018). However, the Denver Public Schools study examined an entire district of over 90,000 students across 180 schools where training was voluntary and whole-school approaches were not necessarily present (Anyon et al., 2016). In the Maine study, the authors sought to illuminate the impact of restorative practices on bullying and found only modest improvements, a conclusion that is uncertain because the control and treatment schools had statistically insignificant differences in their likelihood of delivering restorative experiences to students (Acosta et al., 2019). Further complicating the research is that many variables impact implementation of RP programs such as funding, consistency, leadership, and voluntary versus mandatory implementation. Thus, the

generalizability of these conclusions to different contexts is limited (Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021).

Critiques and Challenges

Although positive results have been documented, common challenges of implementing restorative practices programs include funding, resources, and misimplementation. Further, traditional, punitive mindsets and approaches to discipline are deeply embedded in the collective social psyche which makes changing beliefs and behaviors difficult (Mansfield et al., 2018; Morrison et al., 2005; Thorsborne & Blood, 2006; Vaandering, 2013). Some studies show that implementation of restorative practices in some contexts led to a decrease in academic performance (Augustine et al., 2018) and higher participation by Black, Latinx, and Native students in restorative processes (Anyon et. al, 2016). These mixed results may be explained by poor implementation. Gregory & Evans (2020) describe five common models of misimplementation of RP programs. The misimplementation models include: top-down mandates of RP initiatives, narrow approaches, colorblind/power blind approaches, "train and hope" approaches, and under-resourced short-term initiatives which result in burnout and frustration (p.12).

Each of the misimplementation models they describe have been substantiated in whole or at least in part by other studies. The consequences of narrow approaches that focus on a single practice, most commonly restorative interventions as alternatives to suspension, have been critiqued by Lustick (2017) because they do not fundamentally change the experiences of historically and currently marginalized groups of students in schools. The train and hope approach refers to the process of having staff members receive training but with no follow-up, coaching, or sustained support to change practice meaningfully. This approach as well as the

under-resourced approaches have been thoroughly described (Gregory et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2021; Vincent et al., 2021). Although all of the misimplementation models represent important challenges for RP in schools, colorblind and powerblind approaches to marginalizing dynamics are of particular interest. Colorblind/powerblind approaches refer to a lack of awareness and understanding about how race and identity impact circle processes. Without addressing the biases and power differentials that exist between participants in circles, they risk perpetuating inequity and injustice (Gregory and Evans, 2020). Of the various aims and goals of restorative practices, the potential for reducing racial discipline gaps is a central and prominent justification for its use in U.S. schools. Superficial implementation of programs that impact measures of discipline but do not fundamentally change the experiences of marginalized students in schools, should be concerning to advocates of RP.

Race, Identity, and Restorative Practices

Restorative practices is often described as drawing on Native/Indigenous traditions of sitting in circle (Amstutz and Mullet, 2005; IIRP, n.d.; Zehr, 2022). However, Indigenous communities and scholars have critiqued the appropriation of cultural practices by non-Native or Indigenous practitioners. These critiques include the commodification of RP through the use of Indigenous practices and symbols as well as questioning the connection between restorative practices and Indigenous justice systems (Tauri, 2014).

Further, restorative practices aim to address persistent issues of disproportionate discipline connected to racial and other marginalized identities. However, implementation of these practices broadly suffer from bias and disproportionality. An examination of a national random sample of data from the National Study of Delinquency Prevention found that schools with proportionally more Black students are less likely to use such techniques when responding

to student behavior (Payne & Welch, 2015). Further, schools with higher percentages of Black, Latinx, and economically disadvantaged students are less likely to have restorative programs (Payne & Welch, 2017). Anyon et al. (2018) found that Black and Latinx students received restorative interventions at a rate proportional to or higher than their white peers - a fact the study authors interpret as positive. However, it raises questions about whether or not restorative interventions are simply supplanting traditional suspension and expulsion processes without the required shift in the culture of schools or mindsets of adults. In this way, restorative practices risks replicating racial disproportionality while decreasing suspension rates because traditional notions of control are often alive and well in the minds of administrators and teachers (Lustick, 2017). In a year-long multicase ethnography, Lustick examined three New York schools implementing restorative practices and found that despite decreases in suspension rates, RP acted as an extension of past punitive practices. Central to the concern the study raises is that the schools' approach focused on changing student behavior rather than addressing educator beliefs that lead to disproportionately harsh discipline for students of color. In effect, the decrease in exclusionary discipline measures obscured the reality of restorative practices in the school. The issue of a lack of fidelity in implementation and institutional alignment is also substantiated in other studies. Vaandering (2013) utilized purposeful sampling and focus groups to examine the mindsets of administrators and teachers across grades 4-12 and found that despite their articulation of care for students, they worked from a position of control rather than engagement. This finding, they state, is a natural consequence of other dynamics typical to school life such as a lack of power sharing between adults and students and the tendency for schools to institutionalize harmful practices.

Implementation of RP without addressing racial harm and colonization, position it as another tool to maintain and perpetuate oppression (Davis, 2019). Some have argued that restorative justice as a movement has been "silent, afraid, and conforming - complacent with institutional and structural harms. Rather than changing systems, RP is called on to 'patch up' the harms that racist and colonizing structures and institutions cause routinely" (Valandra & Yazzie, 2020, p. 12). Further, punitive discipline structures operate as a pathway of embodiment between larger social forces of oppression on historically marginalized populations of students, the consequences of which are social, academic, and physical (Lustick, 2020; Todic et al, 2020). The relationship between factors of race and likelihood of exclusionary discipline still remains a problem (Anyon et al., 2014; Gregory et al., 2018; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Lustick, 2017; Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). Black girls for example, are often punished for attempts to engage their own agency and defend themselves from over policing and surveillance - a result of the tendency of adults to view Black children as adults while their White peers' actions are excused for being young and acting like children (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Wun, 2016). Rather than addressing racial dynamics, restorative practices are often deployed to compel behavioral compliance. These dynamics are further exacerbated by the fact that typical RP training does not address trauma, bias, or cultural responsiveness (Lustick et al., 2020). Effective implementation of restorative practice programs is contingent on shifting school culture - a process that takes time, resources, and effective leadership (Blood & Thorsborne, 2005; Hall et al., 2021; Morrison et al., 2005). Whole-school approaches attend to developing relational school cultures, examining and remaking institutional structures, empowering students, and engaging the larger school community while centering equity and social justice (Gonzalez et. al, 2018; Gregory & Evans, 2020; Vincent, 2021).

Whole-School and Multi-Tiered Approaches to RP Implementation

Whole-school approaches to RP implementation have been found to produce more positive outcomes when compared to partially implemented and intervention-focused programs (Gregory et. al, 2021; Hall et al., 2021; Todic et. al, 2020). One of the early frameworks for whole-school implementation developed by Morrison et al. (2005) includes five stages that take place over the course of 3-5 years, a process they describe as nonlinear and recursive. Embedded within this framework is a process that in its early stages includes gaining commitment and developing a shared vision. They note that it is important for school communities to recognize that changing traditional cultures of discipline which have been in existence for centuries takes time and must happen strategically over the long term. The importance of culture change and leadership is emphasized as the determining factor in the success or failure of RP implementation. Other models such as the IIRP's SaferSanerSchools Whole-School Change model includes 11 elements that are divided into preventative and responsive categories (Mirsky, 2003). These elements are structured based on a tiered public health model that delineate levels of action from school-wide or universal (100% of students), targeted (10-15% of students), and intensive (1-5% of students). The multi-tiered public health model first applied to RP implementation by Morrison and Vaandering (2012) is common across whole-school implementation models. Both frameworks have similarities such as the need to engage with families, inclusive decision-making, and the use of the fundamental principles and practices of restorative practice theory and concepts.

More recently, a framework of 12 implementation indicators grouped into three broad categories emerged from a thematic analysis of RP leader interviews (Gregory et al., 2021). The broad categories include RP infrastructure, RP capacity building, and RP tiers of support.

Generally, the categories and indicators address the need for administrative support, attending to institutional structures such as discipline policy reform, and engaging all members of the school community including students and families. Notably, the framework foregrounds social justice and equity in ways that previous models have not. Considering that bias and racism have been shown to impact restorative practice, this is an important expansion of the scope of implementing RP programs.

Culture Change, Leadership, and RP Implementation

The causes of misimplementation of restorative practices in schools have been thoroughly described in the literature. They include a lack of resources (Hall et al., 2020; Karanxha, 2020), administrative buy-in (Vaandering, 2013), persistence of punitive mindsets, and superficial implementation (Gregory & Evans, 2020). Each of these challenges are obstacles that should be addressed and overcome in order for schools to realize the full potential of restorative practices. Applying a lens of culture change however, may provide deeper insight into the root causes of misimplementation. Culture, as defined by Schein (2010), is "both a dynamic phenomenon that surrounds us at all times, being constantly enacted and created by our interactions with others and shaped by leadership behavior, and a set of structures, routines, rules, and norms that guide and constrain behavior" (p. 1). Further, school culture manifests as cues that serve as signals to the broader community about its values (Thorsborne & Blood, 2005). Examples of these cues are how leaders speak to staff, how criticism and disagreement are handled, and how the school responds to the needs of both students and adults in the school.

As schools seek to implement restorative practices, the need to view it as organizational and culture change is critical. McCluskey et al. (2008) have suggested that the central challenge of RP lies in its contrast with prevailing punitive school cultures which are "taken for granted"

structures and systems of discipline (p. 413). In their examination of RP implementation in Scottish schools, teachers' beliefs about discipline and punishment were often contradictory to restorative concepts and philosophies. However, schools where culture shift was most likely to happen had visible commitment, enthusiasm, and modeling of restorative behaviors by school leaders. School leaders promote shifts away from punitive to restorative cultures through thoughtful approaches to implementation and sending messages throughout the school through their actions and decisions (Morrison et al., 2005). Furthermore, effective implementation of RP programs requires the development of a cohesive, long-term strategy and vision because deconstructing centuries of institutional and legal investment in traditional discipline will not happen quickly (Thorsborne & Blood, 2005). The role of formal leaders plays an important role in the organizational change process which often requires culture change (Bryk, 2010). Given that restorative principles represent a paradigm shift in how a school operates, (a process often led by school principals) the need to conceptualize restorative leadership is warranted.

Restorative Leadership

School leaders, particularly principals, have an important role in leading the development of restorative cultures. A case study of 18 school administrators suggest the importance of modeling the values and practices of restorative philosophy is central to successful implementation of RP initiatives (Gregory et al., 2020). Further, these values must inform concrete decisions such as prioritizing RP, allocating funding to support RP programs, and developing accountability systems (Hall et al., 2020; Gregory et al., 2020; Vincent et al., 2021). Leaders that do not align their actions with their values are more likely to leave teachers feeling disempowered (Hall et al., 2020). However, even school leaders that attempt to embody restorative beliefs and values may face different internal and external pressures that make it

difficult to draw on such values as they make decisions (Lustick, 2021). In a multicase ethnography, the decision-making of three principals were examined as they implemented restorative programs. The study found that school leaders felt pressure to maintain the image of school order in the eyes of various stakeholders. Yielding to such pressures was justified as accountability to the community. In short, the leaders often felt caught between their desire to draw on restorative philosophies in their decision-making and the public image of accountability that maintenance of the status quo offers.

Restorative practices is often cited as having a more recent and still emerging history in U.S. public schools (Fronius et. al, 2019). Consequently, this means that still fewer studies exist that conceptualize effective RP leadership. As challenges with implementation continue to be studied, the need to examine leadership practice in RP implementation is becoming increasingly evident (Lustick, 2021). Little research or models exist that explicitly guide the actions of school leaders as they aim to develop relational school cultures, remake institutional structures and policies, and overcome pressures to maintain punitive status quo practices. Searches for restorative leadership yield very little in the way of a definition or framework. One study describes the application of restorative principles to leadership in the context of an engineering workplace (Lappalainen, 2018). They draw on concepts from the social discipline window to create a management praxis that both accomplishes the goals of effective management and removes barriers to teamwork. Another definition of restorative leadership was developed in the context of environmental leadership and sustainability amidst the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the United Nations (Steffen, 2021). They describe it as:

> "A holistic approach to leadership that recognizes the interconnectedness of all life and acts for the highest benefit of all...an engaged way of being and going that restores balance, restorative leadership embodies a sensibility of significance beyond oneself, one's community, and one's organization" (p.19).

The definition offered while aspirational is not empirically based. Much of the examination of school leadership in service of RP implementation has focused on how leaders fall short in enacting restorative values. While they engage various lenses and perspectives they do not offer guidance on how school leaders might enact a restorative leadership practice. Overall, the definition of restorative leadership has yet to be developed in the context of school-based restorative practices implementation.

Conclusion

The diverse and multifaceted research on restorative practices implementation illustrates both that RP holds much promise for positively impacting school culture as well as common implementation challenges. Evidence has shown that RP leads to decreases in exclusionary discipline (Anyon et al., 2014; Jain et al. 2014) and positive impacts on factors such as academic achievement (Gonzalez, 2012) and school culture and climate (Acosta, 2019; Augustine et. al, 2018). There is a general consensus that whole-school restorative practice programs have the most potential to positively impact school culture, promote community building, and build trust (Gregory et al, 2021; Hall et al., 2021; Todic et al, 2020). However, when implemented without a culture change lens, RP risks reproducing racial injustice (Davis, 2019; Lustick, 2017; Valandra & Yazzie, 2020). In the process of culture change, school leaders must engage in aligned decision-making and embody restorative values and principles (Thorsborne & Blood, 2005; Morrison et al., 2005) because they play a vital role in the organizational improvement process (Bryk, 2010).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Purpose and Research Questions

The study examined the lived experiences of secondary school principals as they engaged in culture change through restorative practices (RP) implementation. Restorative theories posit that positive social connections within communities result from intentional relationship building, opportunities for collective decision-making, and processes for repairing harm (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Zehr, 2002). In K-12 education, these practices were initially introduced as a way to mitigate the school to prison pipeline through addressing suspension and expulsion processes that disproportionately impacts Black and Brown youth (Advancement Project, 2010; Balfanz, 2015; Gonzalez, 2012; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Morris & Perry, 2016). The school to prison pipeline refers to the structures, policies, and practices of education systems that increase the likelihood that historically and currently marginalized groups of students become involved with the criminal justice system for the same infractions as compared to their White peers (ACLU, n.d.). Restorative practices provides alternatives to involvement with the criminal justice system through repair processes using social engagement as opposed to social control (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; McCold & Wachtel, 2002). In the past two decades as these approaches have become more widely adopted, Restorative practices have become an overarching term that encompasses interventions to prevent youth from becoming involved in the criminal justice system and as an approach to developing positive school culture (IIRP, n.d.).

Whole-school approaches have been recognized in the literature as a more effective approach because building-wide strategies are more likely to produce long-term sustainability, collective buy-in, and meaningful reductions in punitive approaches to discipline (Acosta, et. al., 2019; Gregory et. al., 2021; Gonzalez et. al., 2018; Thorsborne & Blood, 2005). Despite this consensus, limited literature exists examining the roles or experiences of school principals as

they engage in this transformative work. However, several studies have addressed the challenges that principals face as they seek to dismantle punitive discipline systems. Among the challenges described in the literature are the limitations on time principals face due to the nature of their roles responding to many external pressures (Farr et. al., 2020), the complexity of leading in a justice-oriented way (DeMatthews, 2016), and the contradictory pressures of enacting restorative paradigms in traditionally punitive school cultures (Lustick, 2021). Other studies have described common areas of need in the implementation of RP, which include setting the vision and culture, allocating resources to training, and leading staff using restorative practices (Gregory et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2021; Webb, 2021). While these studies have revealed challenges and dilemmas that principals face, their focus was not principals' lived experiences. Given that school principals play an integral role in the culture and climate of a school and serve as important gatekeepers to resources and systemic decision-making (Bryk, 2010; Eacott, 2015), the need to examine their experiences as they implement RP is clear. This sentiment is supported in the literature, referring to restorative leadership as undertheorized and a necessary next step to advance the field of restorative practices (Fine, 2017; Guckenburg et al., 2015).

The rest of the chapter outlines the research questions as well as methods, data collection and analysis, researcher positionality, and limitations of the study. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the lived experiences of secondary school principals working to create transformative change through leadership in restorative practices?
2. How do school principals integrate restorative mindsets and behaviors in their leadership practices?
3. How do they transfer knowledge about their practices to staff members?

4. What conflicts and tensions (if any) do they face as they seek to engage in culture change?

Surfacing the lived experiences of school principals aligns with a core element in theories of change within restorative philosophies which is that these practices must be modeled by all members of a school community. Examining how leaders integrate restorative mindsets in their leadership and/or documenting when they experience tensions and conflicts may also reveal insights into the compatibility of restorative paradigms in prevailing punitively oriented school cultures. Restorative mindsets summarized by Hopkins (2015) includes "openness, self-determination, collaboration, flexibility, equality, non-discrimination, non-violence, fairness, respect, empowerment, trust, honesty, voluntarism, healing, personal accountability, inclusiveness, empathy and accountability" (p. 24). In a restorative paradigm, these mindsets or values are important because they inform leadership behavior. Without a shift in mindsets and beliefs of leaders, staff, and community members, restorative practices may simply supplant traditional punitive approaches to discipline (Lustick, 2017; Lustick 2021).

Overall, the aims of the study were to 1) conceptualize restorative leadership and define its key components 2) describe challenges faced by school principals as they engage in restorative culture change and 3) illuminate principal experience to better inform education leaders and decision makers about the level of investment and support required at all levels to realize the promise of restorative practices in schools

Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological research design was utilized to answer the research questions. Given that restorative leadership is under-examined, qualitative approaches were appropriate because they allowed for a more open-ended exploration of principal experience as

they attempted to shift their schools toward more restorative paradigms (Creswell, 2017). This methodological approach sought to understand the lifeworld of participants which refers to the everyday experiences and perceptions of individuals and the ways in which these experiences shape their understanding of their world and their surroundings (Van Manen, 1990). A phenomenological study was appropriate because it is within participants' lifeworlds that restorative mindsets could be closely examined. While one goal of phenomenology is to describe common experiences across participants, it is not to present a group norm or average. Rather, the goal was to describe both convergences and divergences in participant experiences while maintaining as much fidelity to the particulars of individual cases as possible (Smith et. al., 2022).

Participant Recruitment

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants which is appropriate because phenomenological research seeks to explore specific experiences – in this case with the implementation of RP. The criteria used to select participants were: a) principals in public schools b) self-described experienced practitioner of restorative practices c) described restorative practices as a priority at their school site and were engaged in active implementation. Recruitment emails (Appendix A) were disseminated through various networks and in direct emails to schools and districts to recruit participants. Restorative practices contacts were discovered through online Google searches and included terms such as restorative practices, restorative practices and school, and restorative practices and school district. Webpages for schools and districts that explicitly referenced restorative practices were noted and if available – contact information was collected for recruitment. A list of approximately 15 contacts was created from this search. Further recruitment included disseminating information through an RP-

related online community the Restorative Educators Network (REN) which hosts 116 educators and education leaders from across California. This researcher's professional connections were also used in recruitment and included school districts, county offices of education, a state education department, and an RJ university program. These connections included the San Diego County Office of Education, Humboldt County Office of Education, Butte County Office of Education, San Diego Unified School District, University of San Diego, and the New Mexico Public Education Department. Interested participants were screened through email to confirm that they met the study criteria. 15 responses were received expressing interest in participation of which six were determined to not be eligible due to holding roles other than school principal (e.g. district leader). 9 participants were accepted and two of those participants cancelled their scheduled interview. Participants were then directed to sign a consent form (APPENDIX B). A total of seven participants participated in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Once consent forms were signed, 90-minute semi-structured interviews were scheduled, and conducted via Zoom with seven participants. Actual interview lengths varied and are represented in Table 1. Participant Background Information. The use of the Zoom virtual meeting platform allowed the researcher to access participants from across California and New Mexico. The use of Zoom also decreased barriers to participation in the study by reducing the amount of time and resources required to coordinate in-person interviews. Participants were generally enthusiastic to participate in the study and share their experiences as school principals. They communicated a sense of investment and commitment in their RP work and viewed participation as a meaningful contribution to the field.

Phenomenological approaches require the researcher to surface participants' experiences according to their own construction (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to enter the lifeworld of participants through an open and expansive process and they were encouraged to speak at length (Smith et. al., 2022). The interview questions (Appendix C) focused on leadership practices and how they model restorative mindsets and behaviors using as many open-ended questions as possible. Interviews were recorded via Zoom and transcribed using Rev. Transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and errors were corrected.

The transcripts from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Other types of phenomenological analysis emphasize the use of bracketing to set aside researcher bias as they seek to understand subjects' experiences. IPA, however, recognizes that bracketing is a cyclical process that is only partially possible (Smith et al., 2022). Bracketing refers to the process of setting aside or suspending one's preconceptions and assumptions to gain a clearer understanding of the phenomena being studied (Husserl, 1970). The researcher entered the process of data collection with preconceptions and ontological assumptions that revealed themselves through interaction with participants. As the researcher learned about the participants' experiences, their worldviews inevitably changed (Smith et. al., 2022). Although the complete suspension of one's preconceptions is not possible (in the Heideggerian approach to phenomenology), the researcher engaged in bracketing to the highest extent possible before conducting interviews. This was accomplished by reading through a list of self-identified biases before conducting each interview. After each individual interview was completed, a memo was written within 48 hours to reflect on any subjectivities that may have arisen. Examples of memo content included the researcher's reflections on: assumptions that were challenged, observations about the participant's emotional tone, emerging themes,

emerging cross-case analysis, and overall impressions. The memos added to the available data (transcript, exploratory noting, and original interview audio) as the tables of Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) were developed for each participant (APPENDIX D). They served as an additional source to reference to ensure that the PETs were as accurate as grounded in participants' lived experience as possible. Memos were also referenced during the formation of the Group Experiential Themes to ensure that differences among participants were preserved.

The following analytic steps were employed based on Smith et. al.'s (2022) approach to IPA. The first step of data analysis began with listening to the audio recording while reading the transcript in order to slow down and center the participant. Next, the transcript was read, and exploratory notes were taken on its content and language relating to objects of concern such as relationships, processes, places, events, values and principles, and most importantly - the meaning of these objects of concern to the participant. Transcript notetaking and analysis took place in a word-processing document. The third step was to construct personal experiential themes (PETs) for each participant that reflected their lived experiences. These themes were named and organized into a table for each participant (APPENDIX D). Once each transcript was analyzed for PETs, group experiential themes (GETs) were developed by conducting a cross-case analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The risk of harm to participants in this study were minimal and included a potential for the loss of confidentiality or emotional distress. The following considerations were incorporated into the study design to minimize risk. Participants were provided with an informed consent document outlining the goal of the study, the time commitment, how their data will be used and protected, and any potential risks that may have arisen through their participation. Participants

were informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time. All data was protected using password-protected devices and software. Participants were also assigned a pseudonym to further protect their identity. A document containing self-identified biases and subjectivities as they relate to the study was read by the researcher before every interview to bracket as much as possible. This document included other statements of positionality such as the researcher's racial/ethnic identity, gender identity/sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and occupation.

Positionality

I first encountered restorative practices as a high school science teacher nine years ago. At the same time, I was grappling with what it meant to be a Queer Vietnamese American educator and all of the ways I was implicitly asked to leave who I was at the classroom door. This was the start of a journey of personal and professional evolution as I questioned and subverted the centering of White, Eurocentric, heteronormative ideologies through my teaching practices. I drew on principles of restorative philosophies as I engaged in ongoing inquiry about my relationship to concepts such as race, power, and discipline. My classroom transformed toward a more vibrant, engaging, and relationship-centered space. At the time, I did not have the language to describe all how I resisted, subverted, and questioned schooling structures. Looking back now I understand that I was drawing on anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and decolonizing frameworks as I asked questions about whose knowledge and ways of being in the world were centered. Eventually, I worked in district-level roles to support restorative practices implementation by providing professional development and coaching to school leaders. In these roles, I have seen up close the transformative potential of restorative practices on school culture as well as the challenges of bringing these practices into a system that is inherently contradictory to restorative approaches and philosophies.

As it related to the study, my practical experiences were an asset that I drew on to frame the issue being studied and ensure that the question(s) being asked were relevant and meaningful to participants and the field. Conversely, given my depth of experience as a practitioner and advocate of restorative practices, I have developed stances on implementation issues and common pitfalls that I was mindful of bracketing to the greatest extent possible during interviews and data analysis.

Conclusion

Restorative practices programs offer both short-term and long-term solutions to the school-to-prison pipeline. In the short-term, RP diverts youth away from further involvement in the criminal justice system for minor infractions. In the long- term, RP delivers positive impacts to the culture and climate of schools and fosters a sense of community and belonging. Although restorative practices programs suffer from misimplementation, it has the potential to serve as a platform for cultural transformation toward more equitable and inclusive schooling environments (Lustick, 2021). Given this fact, it is necessary to examine and conceptualize a restorative leadership paradigm that aligns with the intention and philosophy of RP. RP uniquely centers a practice of connectedness for creating, maintaining, and sustaining healthy school communities. An exploration of restorative leadership in K-12 contexts from a phenomenological lens presented an opportunity to uncover, reveal, and describe school principals' lived experiences as they attempt to shift their school cultures. Restorative theories and philosophies invite us to deeply question the paradigms of our schools.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The study sought to answer the following research questions 1) What are the lived experiences of secondary school principals working to create transformative change through leadership in restorative practices? 2) How do school principals integrate restorative mindsets and behaviors in their leadership practices? 3) How do they transfer knowledge about their practices to staff members? And 4) What conflicts and tensions do they face as they seek to engage in culture change?

School principals' experiences were analyzed through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The content of each individual interview was analyzed on its own terms resulting in unique Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) for each case. PETs were then analyzed across cases resulting in Group Experiential Themes (GETs) with particular attention given to preserving the particularities of each participant's experiences.

The structure of the chapter starts with a table sharing key characteristics of each of the participants followed by a table summarizing the GETs and their sub-themes. Next, the full analysis leading to the formation of the GETs is presented followed by a summary and synthesis of findings.

The table below is organized by participant pseudonyms and outlines their ethnic/racial identity, years they have actively implemented RP, location, and information about the school they work at.

Table 1. Participant Background Information

Pseudonym	**Background**
Adrian	● Ethnic/Racial Identity: White ● Years in Active RP Implementation: 8 ● Location: California ● Grades and School Type: 9-12, High School ● Enrollment: 1900 ● Interview length: 73 minutes
Aron	● Ethnic/Racial Identity: White ● Years in Active RP Implementation: 8 ● Location: California ● Grades: 6-12, Juvenile Detention Facility ● Enrollment: 190 ● Interview length: 86 minutes
Lee	● Ethnic/Racial Identity: White ● Years in Active RP Implementation: 6 ● Location: California ● Grades: 9-12, High School ● Enrollment: 1200 ● Interview length: 76 minutes
Georgina	● Ethnic/Racial Identity: White ● Years in Active RP Implementation: 1 ● Location: New Mexico ● Grades: 7-12, Charter School ● Enrollment: 380 ● Interview length: 70 minutes
Jamie	● Ethnic/Racial Identity: White ● Years in Active RP Implementation: 1 ● Location: New Mexico ● Grades: 6-8, Charter School ● Enrollment: 300 ● Interview length: 71 minutes
Hazel	● Ethnic/Racial Identity: White ● Years in Active RP Implementation: 1 ● Location: New Mexico ● Grades: 7-12, High School ● Enrollment: 359 ● Interview length: 65 minutes
Linh	● Ethnic/Racial Identity: Asian American ● Years in Active RP Implementation: 20 ● Location: California ● Grades: TK-5, Elementary School ● Enrollment: 310 ● Interview length: 84 minutes

About the Study Participants

Below are brief descriptions of each of the participants in the table above, their contexts, and an overview of their work related to restorative practices.

Adrian

Adrian has been a principal at a racially and ethnically diverse high school for the past eight years. He first encountered RP formally as an assistant principal at a nearby school whose entire philosophy was based on restorative principles. Although he describes himself as having engaged in some restorative practices previously, he credits his experience at this school for deepening his knowledge and understanding of RP. Over the past six years he has trained 70% of his certificated staff in Tier 1 RPs of relationship and community-building and describes their work as 'ahead of the game' compared to the district. Adrian believes it is important to take a whole-school approach and has seen a 30% reduction in suspensions in the past year and a 17% increase in standardized test scores and attributes that to RP implementation. It has been several years since the trainings have occurred and he feels it is time for his staff to have a 'refresher' training.

Aron

Aron is the principal of eight years at a school located within a juvenile detention facility that serves pre-adjudicated youth. The school's students are between 12-24 years old who may be at the school for as little as two days or for as long as several years depending on the status of the case brought against them. Previously, he worked in a residential facility for children and feels he has a natural ability to connect with students who have severe cases or particularly challenging life situations. He first became aware of restorative justice in 2016 as his local county office of education sponsored trainings and was inspired to bring the training back to his

staff. So far, his school staff have been trained in Tier 1 RPs of relationship and community-building and in restorative conferences for conflict. Aron described how he lost about one third of his staff as he began seriously implementing RP because they did not agree with the practices. The COVID pandemic impacted the consistency with which RP is occurring on his campus. Although there continues to be a strong emphasis on RP at his school, the practices are not happening at the same level of frequency as before the pandemic.

Lee

Lee leads a high school in a semi-rural area he describes as supportive and involved. With the help of a local organization, he has been implementing RP for the past six years with some support through his local county office of education. Lee says that he is 'inventing a lot' given the relatively few funding resources he has to implement RP. RP implementation is currently limited to a discipline response student panel which he feels is a robust program that has significantly decreased suspensions. Rather than traditional suspensions, students who agree to go through a hearing process with their peers which mimics a court process have the option to repair harm through agreements that are developed in the student discipline panel. Implementation efforts began in 2018 when he recruited and trained students to be part of the program. Since then, it has grown from a student group of 9 to over 24 with yearly trainings. These processes are a regular and consistent component of the school's discipline response.

Georgina

Georgina is in her first year as principal at a small charter school in New Mexico. She describes her experience as a mother as being influential on her approach to education because she believes school should be more nurturing to students. The school she leads is in an area that is a 'bubble' compared to the relatively conservative political climate of the state. Georgina

became interested in RP because she feels it aligns with her school's philosophy. Her entire staff was trained in Tier 1 practices which include relationship and community-building using circles. These practices occur during an advisory period at least once a week. The school is transitioning from punitive practices to more restorative approaches. Currently, the school's discipline processes incorporate restorative elements such as listening and dialogue. For example, students may receive a suspension for fighting but have opportunities to experience a reintegration process before returning to class. In these reintegration processes, school counselors facilitate circles for those involved to come to a shared understanding. This process is voluntary. Overall, she describes RP as in its early stages of implementation at her school and she is continuing to attend training supported by the state to deepen her learning.

Jamie

Jamie has been leading a small charter school in a rural agricultural region in New Mexico for the past two years. She describes her student population as being predominantly from working poor families and who are exposed to a multitude of stressors such as PTSD and trauma. Jamie is passionate about social justice and views restorative practices as an expression of that passion. Recent leadership churn has given her an opportunity to advocate for and move the school away from traditional zero tolerance policies. Although leaders in her school system are punitively oriented, Jamie feels she has the influence to slowly change their mindsets over time. After much 'arm wrestling', she was able to bring a three-day RP training to her school site. The first year of implementation has been challenging but worth it.

Hazel

Hazel is in her first year as principal at a rural high school that consists mostly of students of low socioeconomic status. The high school has a reputation as being 'undesirable' and the

local school board consists of affluent middle to upper middle class White men. This contrasts with their nearly 78% population of Hispanic students that the school serves. The COVID pandemic was a catalyst in the school community for exploring alternative approaches to behavior management. Restorative practices are relatively new to the school community. However, more staff are open to trying these new practices than they were previously. Relationship and community-building are currently integrated into the school structure through regular circles on Tuesdays. She used American Rescue Plan funds to secure facilitators to support conflict resolution circles. Recently, the school's behavior matrix was revised to incorporate more restorative practices. Due to push back from the local school board, Hazel often refers to RP as relational practices instead of restorative justice or restorative practices.

Linh

Linh is a long-time principal of a charter elementary school in a large district. Prior to its opening she engaged in a collaborative process with the community to design the school. Schoolwide community meetings have been conducted every week since the school's opening in 2004 and incorporates poetry, song, and dance related to students' cultural traditions and ancestral knowledge. At these meetings norms and expectations are modeled. Where necessary, the community meetings are opportunities for harm reparation and conflict resolution. Linh provides coaching, modeling, and mentorship with teachers, students, and community members in restorative practices. She regularly considers the dynamics of race, gender, and class in her approaches to RP and views discipline and conflict resolution as a necessary part of human development. Linh emphasizes the need to do RP work from the 'inside-out' which is to work on the mindsets and belief systems of students, staff, and the community.

The following table outlines each of the Group Experiential Themes (GETs) and their related sub-themes. The themes were constructed by engaging in a cross-case analysis using participants Personal Experiential Themes (APPENDIX D) and organized into the four GETs.

Table 2. Overview of Group Experiential Themes and Sub-Themes

Group Experiential Theme	**Sub-themes**
GET #1 - Holism	• Community members are an inseparable part of RP • Education has a role to play in the social-emotional development of students and adults • A whole child approach is a more effective response to behavior • Systems and structures must reflect restorative values
GET #2 - Power	• Social and political power dynamics impact how RP is implemented at the school level • School leaders and staff should recognize and use their power positively • RP requires power sharing with students
GET #3 - Advocacy and Organizing	• Effective and proactive communication impacts behavior • Resources (time, funding, personnel, space) are necessary for sustaining RP • Leaders must navigate dominant paradigms about discipline and punishment • Taking the long view is required
GET #4 - Purpose, Values, and Meaning	• RP serves a positive social purpose • Personal leadership values inform leaders' approach to RP

The detailed analysis leading to the formation of the GETs is fully detailed in the following pages. Each GET is structured by an overview and basic definition of its meaning in addition to an explanation of how that GET is threaded throughout each of the sub-themes. Transcript content is weaved throughout to illustrate the analytic process.

Group Experiential Theme #1: Holism

An important theme that surfaced across participants was viewing the challenges facing their school communities holistically. Holism is the view that an individual, situation, or change effort is part of a system of intimately interconnected components that cannot be understood in isolation. This idea is seen throughout each of the following sub-themes which are: 1) Education has a role to play in the social-emotional development of students and adults 2) A whole child approach is a more effective way of understanding behavior 3) Community members are an inseparable part of RP and 4) Systems and structures must reflect restorative values. Participants applied this thinking in their efforts and believed that it improved their ability to effectively implement RP at their schools. The component parts they surfaced included both the tangible (resources, policies) and the intangible (relationships, beliefs).

Education has a role to play in the social-emotional development of students and adults

Each participant emphasized the need for education to play a role in the social-emotional development of both students and adults. Restorative practices, in their view, provide an opportunity to learn and practice these social-emotional skills such as conflict resolution, self-awareness, personal agency, and relationship building. Notably, these school leaders identified that adults are often missing opportunities to learn these necessary skills to solve conflict and relate in healthy ways. Lee commented on the general structure of schooling as lacking these opportunities.

> We're teaching them subjects. We're intellectualizing them from the old European ideal, which is not bad. You teach 'em how to read, write, and all that arithmetic…But schools could play a role in that mentorship to help parents in partnership with parents of like, how do we teach kids when they get in a conflict with somebody, how to solve it in a healthy way?

Lee argued that learning skills such as conflict resolution is as important as traditional academic subjects and that staff members as well as parents may need coaching or mentorship in how to

cultivate these skills in themselves and their children. In this way, he argues that education can and should take a more holistic approach to human development. Hazel further emphasized that staff members may be missing these crucial relationship skills and identified herself as continuing to learn them.

> Just those skills and self-confidence to be able to sit across the table or in a circle with someone and say, look, you hurt my feelings, but you have a chance. We have a chance to fix that. To me, that is so powerful, so impactful, and shoot, me as an adult, I am still learning those skills. And I'm ancient. You know what I mean? I'm older than dirt, and I still struggle sometimes with those difficult conversations and then going in and repairing damage that I might've caused.

Her use of phrases like ‘ancient’ and ‘older than dirt’ suggests that these practices are novel to her and perhaps, people of her generation. All participants described these opportunities as a powerful and transformative process because they allow for the possibility of redemption, an outcome not typical of traditional conflict management approaches. School leaders describe these processes as both an opportunity to restore relationships and also an opportunity to teach. Linh identified discipline as a necessary part of development and maturation.

> You can discipline from a place of solidity and clarity and insight, understanding and compassion. Those things will lay the foundation so that when big difficulties happen, you know how to navigate and don't be afraid of the difficulty. Difficulties is when transformation happens.

To respond restoratively, adults need self-awareness and an ability to regulate their own emotions. A common thread throughout all of the group experiential themes seemed to point to a need for addressing root causes which more often than not indicated the behaviors, beliefs, and mindsets of adult staff in a school. Jamie described the positive outcomes of restorative processes as helping all involved to identify and understand their own emotions.

> They're learning the skillset also, and I guess backing it up a little bit, students are, and adults…if I'm being honest, are better able to identify when they're having some kind of strong emotion that they may need to manage.

Jamie hesitates and is reluctant to identify that adults often lack self-awareness and emotional regulation. This fact challenges a common and underlying premise of schools' approach to student misbehavior which is that students are the only individuals in need of behavioral support and intervention. School leaders understood that adults can often escalate tensions and the need to develop their social-emotional skills was clearly stated across cases. While school leaders acknowledged the need to address social-emotional skills in adults such as emotional regulation and self-awareness, their focus was largely on student behavior. This may be due to limited resources such as time and personnel. Additionally, behavioral approaches tend to be focused on modifying student and not adult behavior. Restorative practices in theory argues that all members of a school community should be accountable for their behavior. However, the emphasis remains on students in practice for most of the participants. Linh was one exception to this pattern as she viewed examining the power adults hold over a classroom to be a crucial element to address 'And when there is a transgression, even though there's a zillion other factors, what's the part that you could contribute to?'. In her coaching with teachers, Linh encourages them to reflect on the areas within their classroom and in their own behaviors that they have influence over.

A whole child approach is a more effective response to behavior

All participants spoke at length about the need to understand students' backgrounds, experiences and needs (physical, developmental, and relational) as factors that influence their behaviors in school. This holistic perspective was one that helped participants have empathy for students rather than to label or judge them. Further, they drew on this perspective to address challenging behaviors with the intent of addressing their root causes. This was described in contrast to traditional approaches which seek to manage behavior rather than to address what may be causing it. Linh described the often-overlooked impact of children's physical needs on

behavior:

> I've seen that a lot of children, they get to a level where no matter how much love and talk and the best RJ practices that you can put into place, they will not get there with you until you let them eat. Until you're like, did you eat? And you're like, oh crap, you didn't eat. You needed breakfast, you ate lunch or you ate crap. And people didn't believe me at first. They thought I was going soft. …Now more and more people see how quickly a child can get back to themselves…the developmental moves that they can make once they have that blood sugar regulated.

Across cases, participants stated a need to attend to students' basic needs before learning can occur. Importantly, a common theme was that any understanding of student behavior was incomplete without a more holistic perspective of all of the factors that impact them. These factors include negative environmental stressors that they experience outside of school as Jamie outlines:

> So most of our students are very poor. They come from a poor family, very hardworking parents who care very much about their children…I'd say with confidence that a majority of our students are either living in toxic stress or they're living with some kind of PTSD, probably have very high ACEs scores...It might help us understand them a little bit more and how to best respond to them.

Jamie describes the students at her school as potentially having PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder) or high ACE (adverse childhood experiences) scores due to widespread poverty in her community. In identifying the negative stressors, she conveys the need to address the psychological impacts of students' negative life experiences. Aron, the principal of a juvenile detention center connected the development of a safe and caring environment as one way of addressing the trauma students may be experiencing:

> It's a sense of caring and a sense of belonging and that we're all kind of trying to pull together for the common cause of getting them through this very traumatic time in their life…You're building a community of belonging, and it's one thing to be at a place, but it's another thing to belong.

Belonging is fostered through community and relationship-building circles that school staff

implement. Circles provide opportunities for students and staff to get to know each other through prompts that encourage personal sharing. The frequency of these circles varied across participants' schools. Some principals (Linh, Hazel, Georgina) had regular weekly school structures for community building circles while other participants set expectations for staff to conduct them regularly. These principals communicated a need to 'follow-up', but it was unclear the extent to which they did that. RP programming at Lee's school, however, consisted of only a student discipline panel as a response to referrals and thus did not communicate an expectation that his school staff would be conducting circles in classrooms. Participants also seemed to categorize the practices of expressing care, actively listening to students, and encouraging agency as examples of restorative practices that foster positive student-staff relationships. Each participant in the study identified caring and belonging as a basic need regardless of the population of students or the community they were serving. Participants saw belonging as an important precondition to academic learning.

Community members are an inseparable part of RP

School principals highlighted the increased potency of Restorative Practices when caregivers, family members, and the community were part of the process. RP then, as understood by participants, positively benefited all who chose to be involved. Georgina shared:

> I think it's in the DNA of the school that we're really fundamentally sort of around relationships and community. If anyone were to ask what defines our school, it's community, family…where we can really be human with each other.

Being human to Georgina involves being vulnerable, sharing her story, and being accountable for mistakes she makes as a school leader. Acknowledging and addressing the emotional realities of the school community also seem to be part of her understanding of RP. A teacher had recently passed away and in response Georgina facilitated an all school gathering. While it was unclear if

she conducted this gathering in a circle format, she seemed to understand this as a restorative practice.

Community includes individuals both within and outside the school. Hazel further emphasizes this when she describes an incident that involved students and adults from a neighboring school who participated in a restorative conference.

> Parents are involved, teachers are involved. We've had sports coaches when an incident has happened in sports where the coaches have to participate and there's that expectation now that this is going to happen. This is when it's scheduled, it's sent out as a calendar invite, people are notified, parents are called, everyone is notified.

Hazel expressed the shared expectation that community members would participate in restorative processes despite school boundaries. The incident in question involved students from two separate schools in the same district during a basketball game. Students from her school had stolen the property of a student from the other school. In response, a harm circle was coordinated and students, coaches, and parents from both schools participated. The outcome of the circle resulted in students returning the stolen property and engaging in community service as an act of reparation of harm. Across participants, Hazel had the most expansive understanding of believing that it should include individuals in nearby schools. Other participants understood community as at a minimum including staff, students, and their caregivers.

Including caregivers in restorative processes was important to school leaders. Principals understood that if they were included restorative conferences that the impact of the conferences would be deeper and be more likely to lead to meaningful behavior change. Adrian recounted an example of a restorative conference that happened in response to an incident that occurred on a school bus:

> 'They had smoked marijuana on the bus…We brought the school bus driver in, and then his wife came in, and then you have the different parents and stuff that

> are there…They had to actually sit in front of somebody and listen to the family member who was impacted, and listen to the bus driver, who they, as a teenager, may not have ever thought about the impact on the bus driver, and all those things. I think it's very, very impactful, and a huge learning tool, especially for kids to learn from it so it doesn't happen again, and that's the biggest piece for me, is I believe the impact is so great that it really is life-changing for our kids, and even some of the family members. It becomes sort of a counseling session about stuff that's happening, but everyone ... at the end, you have parents that you thought might have a problem with each other, exchanging numbers or giving each other a hug on the way out. It's just the best of humanity by the time everyone walks out that door'

Further, parents and caregivers may also cause harm in the community and need an opportunity to be accountable. Linh described how she models a compassionate approach to parents who have exhibited challenging behavior:

> When I'm able to address it with the family member to see and to get the essence of that person's beauty, and they then feel seen and recognized that it was their passion, their love for their child that has them reacting in these very intense ways that you offer face saving opportunities for people to feel like they could continue to engage at the school.

She referenced an incident where one parent yelled at another parent at the school while other students and staff were watching. Linh was able to cultivate empathy and compassion for the parent while also coaching her through a process of accountability. She spoke about the need to be both compassionate and assertive. Through restorative processes, the caregiver was able to take accountability for her behavior and apologize publicly. Linh also describes restoration and making amends as a 'face saving' opportunity that allows individuals to return to the community with the same status they had before the harm occurred.

Systems and structures must reflect restorative values

Across cases, systemic and structural factors were identified as either facilitating or being a barrier to RP implementation. Participants maintained that policies, resources, and structural decision-making needed to be aligned with restorative values to ensure it could be sustained over

time. Policies support restorative approaches to behavior by acting as a source of accountability for school leaders as they set expectations with their staff. The impact of policies and legislation was identified as an influential factor at the school, district, and state levels. At the school level, codifying restorative behavior approaches in schoolwide processes was emphasized by Hazel:

> We started looking at revising our behavior learning matrix, which had not been revised since 2016…there were no relational restorative practices anywhere in the matrix…it was all out of school suspension, no re-teaching positive behaviors, modeling positive behaviors.

Codifying restorative approaches into school policy provides a clear and shared understanding that can be referenced and used to hold staff accountable. The behavior matrix, an outlined set of approaches mandating specific responses to student behavior, provides institutional credibility and a tangible document for the school principal to communicate with their staff and the community. School principals also have a high degree of influence on structural decision-making such as teaching assignments and the master schedule design. The design of the master schedule describes which courses are happening at specific times in the day. An RP coordinator may need to be scheduled at a time when school administrators are most likely to be able to attend a restorative conference. This makes coordination easier and the conferences more likely to occur. This practical consideration was outlined by Adrian:

> You're going to make decisions with what you're prioritizing in your master schedule, who is teaching what, or who is doing what, whether it's someone that's going to be a restorative person on campus, so putting the right people in the right places is huge.

Adrian argued that structural factors such as personnel ‘in the right places’ is important in ensuring that restorative processes are accessible to the school community. Adrian, Lee, and Aron all spoke to the challenges of gathering people into a room at one time as a basic barrier to implementing RP with fidelity. Jamie and Georgina used advisory periods – a designated time in

the day for teachers to work on non-academic topics with students – in their master schedules as opportunities for staff members to try new practices or to facilitate community-building circles.

For schools that are part of districts, district policies and resource allocation make a tangible impact at the school level. School district policies also can influence how its schools approach behavior. Through defining processes for handling issues of discipline at the district-level, school principals can tap into its institutional authority as a resource for implementing RP adding additional credibility to their efforts. Lee described the impact that a change in the school district's behavior matrix had on his school:

> And at a district level…that got restructured a few years ago by a committee, and we were all part of it, and it really, really, really reduced the traditional discipline aspects of how we responded to incidents. And so I think it reduced suspensions by like 66% in terms of how long we suspended kids, added things in Restorative Justice, alternative means of dealing with the behaviors before any suspensions took place.

Although school principals have a significant impact on whether restorative practices are implemented, Lee identified the strong influence that the school district can have on providing the impetus for change. This formal power and its ability to compel behavior change was further emphasized by Aron:

> It really has to be top down...I would say it should be either through their board of education or through their superintendent that says, this is what we want. Because a lot of times teachers won't listen to a principal if they don't like them or have that relationship of respect with them. But when you say, as a district, this is where we're going and this is what we're going to do. The superintendent signs the checks. I mean, the buck stops with them and they need to know that this is going to happen and it's going to take some time.

Aron acknowledged the limitations of his influence as a school principal while also acknowledging the need for a top-down approach. For Lee, Aron, and Adrian strengthening RP efforts requires integrating them explicitly in processes, systems, and structures. However, the top-down approach seemed to resonate most with participants from California, except Linh.

Compared to New Mexico, California has a longer history of RP implementation and also legislation that restricts discipline for willful defiance. Lee referenced the impact of California legislation that resulted in direct changes to allowable suspensions at the school level:

> And now in California, 48910, subsection K, which is disruption defiance. Now you can't, I mean, that's from a state level, but you can't suspend for that. That's against the law. So I mean, it brought about some of those changes and structural changes

In 2023, California governor Gavin Newsom signed SB 274 also called the 'Keep Kids in School' bill which expands on previous legislation that permanently banned willful defiance suspensions in grades TK-5. The law prohibits suspensions for willful defiance in grades 6-12 which will sunset on July 1, 2029. Advocates for the legislation argue that willful defiance suspensions have typically been used for low-level disruptions that disproportionately targets marginalized students (Skinner, 2023). While Linh recognized the importance of a system of aligned processes and supports, she did not emphasize the use of top-down approaches as heavily and instead seemed to believe in the importance of cultivating intrinsic motivation. She described implementation largely in terms of personal development:

> 'But if you're doing RJ work, you got to start from a place of who you see yourself to be. Who do you aspire to be in your best self? … If you can be seen and feel seen, then you can start seeing other people. And then you get to the emotional, imaginal, and then the conceptual, that's where you get to do…some of the other pieces of repair'

Inherent in her account was the notion that you cannot force behaviors from human beings. If the behaviors are being forced, this in some way conflicts with the value of voluntarism and autonomy that is part of the philosophy of RP. This perspective contrasts with the other California school principals' heavy emphasis on the need for mandates.

Among participants from New Mexico (Georgina, Jamie, and Hazel), who are operating within a different educational landscape, the pressure to implement Restorative Practices was not

mandated by a district or state entity. These school principals voluntarily brought RP to their school sites. However, despite the absence of a mandate, the resources provided by the state were critical to bringing RP to their schools. State funding provided trainings that they attended and sent their staff to. A pilot for RP is currently being funded in New Mexico through the state education department. The pilot is voluntary and provides training and resources for implementation for school leaders who are interested. As early adopters in the state, these school principals seem to be particularly enthusiastic about the positive potentials of RP at their schools.

Participants understood that the issues Restorative Practices attempts to address are not confined to individual students engaging in misbehavior. Rather, they appear to recognize an ecology of factors that impact how students, their caregivers, and school staff engage in human relationships. Further, they recognize the influence of systems, structures, and policies on the behaviors of education staff and the likelihood that they engage in restorative approaches. However, their ability to address every factor they identified was often limited by capacity, personnel, and/or resources. School principals in seeing this bigger picture also communicated a sense of exhaustion in their efforts to keep RP as a focus as captured by Adrian when he shared 'Because that's what it takes for it to happen, you got to champion it all the time, and it can be exhausting.' This sentiment was common across participants. School principals seemed to be personally passionate about RP work and committed to its success at their schools but they were constantly working to keep their efforts afloat. School principals who have been implementing RP for a longer period of time (Adrian, Aron, and Lee) seemed particularly weary about the effort it has taken to maintain RP at their schools. However, Linh was a notable exception and seemed energized by her efforts. This may be explained by the fact that she helped to design her school with the community, and she supports restorative culture building through the use of

funding from California's Community Schools Partnership Program. The initiative provides grant funding to schools to partner with community agencies and local government to integrate health and social services, and community development and engagement (CDE, n.d.)

Using a perspective of holism helped these school leaders see a larger picture around a given student, adult, community, and/or implementation effort. In seeing a more holistic picture, they are better able to engage in and understand power structures as well as organize and advocate for the resources, personnel, and policy change they see as necessary.

Group Experiential Theme #2: Power

Power – the influence or ability to affect change in the environment or on others – was a key theme across cases. These forms of power existed on the individual, institutional, and political levels. The ways in which school leaders enacted school culture change through Restorative Practices was heavily influenced by larger power dynamics as well as how they recognize the power they individually hold. School leaders described the need to navigate these dynamics to move RP work forward.

Social and political power dynamics impact how RP is implemented at the school level

Participants from New Mexico described the challenging political climate they find themselves in. Both Georgina and Hazel commented on the intermingling of ideas such as social-emotional learning (SEL), critical race theory, and Restorative Justice in local political discourse. Social-emotional learning takes many forms in schools but can be broadly described as a process for people to learn relationship skills, manage emotions, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, n.d.). Whereas Critical Race Theory is a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw that critiques the social construction of race and the role of institutions in perpetuating a racial caste system (ABA, 2021). These ideas began to be comingled in national conservative activist spheres around 2021 and gained traction as local school board meetings began seeing more

parent protests against SEL and CRT (NPR, 2022). Georgina described how these dynamics impact her locally :

> 'Our state is kind of split… no critical race theory and no SEL and has that narrative…Who knows what happens with the elections in terms of who gets on the school boards and where that dialogue goes, but we've been able to capitalize on some of those initiatives and funds or take advantage of them.'

She communicated a sense of uncertainty related to initiatives and funding should the political tides turn toward a direction less favorable to RP. RP, while distinctly different than SEL, has been placed in a similar category as SEL and CRT in Georgina's case. Hazel also described the political discourse as a barrier to navigate:

> 'Honestly and truly, unfortunately, one of the largest challenges we are still having is our school board. I think they're very much not on the right side. The word Restorative Justice, they don't like it. They think we're brainwashing kids, and they kind of lumped restorative practice right in with critical race theory, which has nothing to do with anything.'

The conservative political discourse in these participants' context have made terms such as SEL and critical race theory risky ideas to associate with. While Hazel describes critical race theory as having 'nothing to do with anything' this is counter to the goal of restorative approaches. Restorative justice has an agenda that is in line with critical race theory. Restorative justice or Restorative practices in education began as a way to address patterns of racially disproportionate discipline practices that have been characteristic of public schools for decades (Gonzalez, 2012). These discipline practices result from over policing of minor infractions and have been found to increase the likelihood that youth of color interact with the justice system, a phenomenon referred to as the school to prison pipeline by advocates of RJ (ACLU, n.d.). RJ seeks to disrupt institutional practices of incarcerating youth of color and so therefore could be said to align with CRT's goals. Hazel's implication that CRT and RJ are completely unrelated may reflect a lack of knowledge and/or a hesitancy in acknowledging issues of race as part of her RJ efforts.

Political discourse impacted participants from California to a much lesser extent – an environment that is inarguably more favorable to RP as indicated by state-level legislation and education initiatives. School leaders from California (Adrian, Aron, and Lee) did describe some resistance to RP but understood them as issues of communication with the community rather than one that might threaten the existence of RP as participants from the New Mexico described. However, school leaders still must contend with prevailing punitive mindsets in the community. These misconceptions were described by Adrian:

> 'Most families have been on board, but I think it depends on how you describe it… Some people have preconceived notions of what restorative practice is, or what restorative justice is. I feel like some people have more of a negative connotation with restorative justice because whatever they read or they think it's for, there's no consequences for whoever's doing something bad, that's kind of the biggest thing'

Consequences in traditional approaches to discipline include referrals and/or suspensions. Accountability in restorative approaches include consequences; however, their intent is to repair the harm that occurred and are typically designed to address each unique incident as is typical in conflict circles or restorative conferences. Messaging of these intentions is complex and requires making new meaning of terms such as accountability and discipline in a restorative paradigm.

School leaders and staff should recognize and use their power positively

School principals described the need to use their formal authority to set expectations and hold staff accountable to the practices. They also understood that they had an influence on structural decision-making at the school-level that could create favorable conditions for Restorative practices. Aron shared about the need to be visible and present in classrooms:

> As an instructional leader, you have to go into that classroom, you have to watch…I think the accountability piece on the school leader is that you're there as a support and you're also there watching, you're observing.

The need to be present provides an opportunity for school leaders to see if the practices are

happening in classrooms and also to communicate and provide support for their implementation. The phrase ‘you have to watch’ implies a positive pressure that school leaders’ presence may have on the behaviors of school staff. Directives are also sometimes necessary as Hazel states, ‘There are times when…It is a directive. It is a non-negotiable. It is happening.’ The need to assert formal authority suggests that the successful implementation of RP cannot depend on an expectation that all staff members would engage in the practices voluntarily. Through issuing directives and/or applying and offering guidance, school leaders have the power to influence staff behavior. Further, school leaders implementing RP support their staff in understanding their own power and influence in the classroom. Linh described how she works with her staff to help them reflect on this idea:

> When I'm working with my teachers, it's about what's your sphere of influence? So if that child might be having all these difficulties, what's your sphere of influence? And when there is a transgression, even though there's a zillion other factors, what's the part that you could contribute to? And the balancing act in the way that you coach so that people don't feel like you're blaming them. People are used to hearing that as blame, but it's about power.

Linh specifically recognized a need to be strategic in how she communicates with her staff. She considers how her message might be received while also helping teachers to reflect on their ‘sphere of influence’ when managing student behavior. Participants recognized that they had choices as individual leaders about what to focus on and prioritize at their school sites. Recognizing that that power is important because they might otherwise be able to ignore issues of inequity and injustice. Georgina recounted how her counselors helped her to understand how systems of oppression lived in her school:

> Our counselors…recognizes the injustices of our current system and really puts voice to it and recognizes the adults in the room as contributing over and over and over to replicating systems of oppression. And so that perspective has been incredibly enlightening and challenging in some regards because it's also like, yes, that's true and what's our plan within this context? What can we do to set some

things in motion that are going to help this certain situation?

Georgina could have ignored the issues brought up by her school counselors but chose instead to learn from and listen to their perspectives. Although Georgina is still learning about what it might take to address issues of injustice she chose to provide an environment where such concerns could be heard and action be potentially taken. An awareness of issues of social dynamics of race, culture, and identity is crucial in understanding how and why people behave the way they do. Linh highlighted a need to understand these dynamics and how it impacts the way behavior may be perceived:

> I'm always kind of looking at the race, gender dynamics of how it's [behavior] kind of being perceived…Sometimes I try to find ways to see if the other adults are aware of that too, and to what extent we can explicitly have that conversation.

Relationships and behaviors – both positive and negative cannot be interpreted only on the surface but rather in context of social, political, and power dynamics in any given community. However, addressing these realities can feel risky or challenging to school principals because it might reflect poorly on their leadership as stated by Lee:

> And that's hard for some schools and groups…to really start to dig into that because you're really reflecting on yourself and the leadership and the culture you provide. So I think it can really lead to betterment of culture and just really recognizing that problem.

While Lee recognizes that addressing the realities of disproportionality can be challenging, it ultimately leads to improving school culture. Inherent in his statement is that there may be a potential risk in addressing these issues explicitly and clearly if leaders feel they are not incentivized within power structures to do so.

RP requires power sharing with students

Participants all described a need to share more power with students and to provide opportunities for them to have agency in addressing conflict. Power dynamics between students

and adults are traditionally heavily skewed toward adults who have authority and power to interpret the meaning of student behavior and to determine potential disciplinary action. In a more restorative paradigm both students and adults are accountable to the community and thus power is more balanced. Linh shared about the need to talk about power explicitly with students:

> Young people need to be taught about power…because what the experience we know of power is usually when it goes wrong, when power doesn't feel right. And so when young people and adults even have a discourse around power where it's about personal power and responsibility, those things lay the foundation for restorative practice.

Additionally, Aron stated a need for adults to give up some of their power when he shared 'And ultimately it's about giving up some of our adult power and hearing students what they have to say, respecting them as younger individuals.' It is implied in his statement that adults may not inherently respect students because they are younger. 'Hearing students' is one practice in sharing power because it allows them to share their experiences – a practice typically monopolized by adults in the school system. In having opportunities to share their experiences and perspectives through restorative conferences and community-building circles students exert more power and influence in their school community. Outside of processes such as circle, participants seemed to communicate that the need to be open to student voice is a mindset shift. Aron explained it in the following way:

> 'So giving the youth, giving students voices ultimately is what I think is the biggest restorative thing we could do. Because one of the worst things that could happen is not being heard. And I feel like a lot of the discipline and the behavioral problems you have that happen in classrooms around everywhere, not only this state, the city, this country, is that we're not giving them that opportunity or that platform to be heard.'

Traditional approaches to discipline and the typical practices of schooling are such that adults have much more power to express their perspectives often in a vacuum of student voice. School staff must first recognize the value of student voice and many often do not as Aron shared.

Further, Aron's use of the phrase 'giving students voices' emphasizes the point that the locus of power typically lies with adults in schools. Whether or not student have a voice is ultimately up to school staff. Power can also be shared through providing opportunities for students to lead student discipline panels. Lee outlined the discipline panel process:

> 'So what we do is we'll call, we'll get a referral from administration or a teacher or a student request to have a panel. We'll dive into the issue, we'll look at it, we'll get all the facts about it. I'll call the panel in. They get briefed on it. We hold them during the school day, so they're during fourth period, and the panel will come meet with me…Then the students will come down that are involved in the incident. The panel will usually talk to them, one-on-one first, get their side of the story. And none of it's punitive. I mean, that's a big part of it. And I tell my kids to tell these students, look, you're not here to be judged and you're not here to be punished…We're here to help navigate kids through issues, through making amends or through restoring relationships or whatever that has been damaged. And that's the process.'

Lee recognized the important of student leadership in RP because they provide a perspective that adults do not have access to – the experience of being a student in his school today. These leaders help to cultivate empathy in his school administrators and help connect them to the general student body. During the panels, Lee sits in the back and learns from his student leaders as they make recommendations to the student who caused harm. Participants also believed that students could use their power responsibly. When given the opportunities for autonomy and agency, students seek out restorative solutions to their own conflicts without prompting as described by Hazel:

> The student came and said on their own I think I need a restorative conference with this teacher first. That's profound…What I found even more amazing is that the teacher agreed. And so they went into the student success center, they had the conference. The student was able to express…I think you don't like me, and this is how I'm feeling in your classroom.

Her use of the words 'profound' and 'amazing' indicates that she finds this to be surprising or atypical. Other participants in this study also expressed a similar amazement or surprise at the

idea that students have their own motivation and desire to resolve conflict when given the opportunity to. Power and the ways in which it is used was a key concept across participant experiences. Whether at the level of the social-political, within structures and systems, or at the individual level who has it and importantly how it is used are all impactful in the implementation of RP.

Group Experiential Theme #3: Advocacy and Organizing

School principals described a need to not only enact RP with their own staff and school community but viewed it as a form of advocacy and organizing work – the process of promoting restorative approaches in the social consciousness of their communities and spurring collective action. Throughout participants' accounts, they describe strategies they used to effectively communicate with the school and community, obtain resources, navigate prevailing beliefs and mindsets, and take a long-term view of RP implementation. Together, these strategies seek to move a school community toward restorative paradigms by changing beliefs, behaviors, and mindsets.

Effective and proactive communication impacts behavior

Participants were all sensitive to the impacts of language and communication on the perception of Restorative practices. Communication was described as crucial to shifting school culture among different members of the school community. In Adrian's school community, these messages are heavily emphasized during the first four days of school and revisited throughout the year with students and explicitly outline behavioral expectations. During each of the first four days, teachers across campus spend one period reviewing these expectations. Adrian shared the impact of this communication strategy:

> We have school-wide strategic messaging…We'll spend an entire period schoolwide in talking about choice words, and what does that mean, not just what comes out of your mouth, but also how you talk to yourself … and all the things

> that go along with being on time to class, and those things, respect, and then obviously the excellence of just trying your best. But when it's schoolwide it makes a big difference.

Consistent messaging with students was a strategy Adrian felt set the tone for a positive school culture. The need for effective messaging seemed to take many forms across participants such as setting expectations with students, outreach and training for parents and staff, and showing proof that RP is an effective approach. Adrian describes the impact of misconceptions:

> Generally, the resistance has been just because people either aren't doing it, or they haven't been trained, or they really don't have a grasp or understanding of what it really is.

Participants generally understood resistance as resulting from either a lack of understanding and/or a lack of training. After running a restorative conference in which one student threw a pair of scissors at another student, Jamie reflected:

> Yeah, so there's still plenty of people. I think they're a minority adults in our school and probably some parents also who they want the harsh, hurtful consequences when certain things happen. And it's like, it seems like they don't care what may have been at the root of why somebody did what they did.

According to her account, the students involved felt that the incident had been appropriately addressed. However, some teachers who participated in the conference sought more harsh punishment for the student who caused harm.

Demonstrating tangible results was also seen to be an important part of the process of consensus-building through communication. Jamie described the need to gather stories of success to gain community support:

> So pushing a lot of revision with our behavior matrix, continuing to do that work, to push that work to highlight data as we see we're getting less severe referrals sent to us that we have these anecdotal stories to share about how successful the work can be with kids and with families.

Given that these practices are new to many, sharing the tangible results of early implementation

is one way of building consensus among members of the school community who might otherwise be hesitant. The impact of school staff seeing the results of change was also underscored by Adrian 'Now, our teachers are starting to see the results, and feel the results of when you do it with fidelity...things change for the better.' Additionally, being mindful of the political climate was also important to consider when communicating with the community, a challenge that was particularly difficult for Hazel. Hazel described why her school uses the term 'relational practices' instead of Restorative Justice.

> Our school board, even when we did the behavior matrix, it has to be approved by the school board and they approved it. And then I'm not quite sure what happened, but a month later, they came back and questioned and said something along the lines of, well, what are you doing with this restorative justice? What does this mean? What is blah, blah, blah? And in an open meeting, we told them what it was and said, look, it's in our behavior matrix. And the comment was, well, we didn't read it, and that should not be in there. I'm like, but you approved it last month, so you shoulda have read it. And so that's why we don't even use the word Restorative Justice anymore anywhere. And we don't call our space for this to happen, anything to do with Restorative Justice. Our space is called the Student Success Center. And we say relational practices now, because literally we were told that we're not stern enough and we should be kicking all kids out of school… And that's been the most disheartening. That's what I have to put in my board report every day, every month, what the referrals are for, how many referrals I have, to do a detailed data analysis, every board report for this, and it's ridiculous. So honestly, that's one of the biggest challenges.

Hazel found that changing the language was a worthwhile concession to make to continue implementing RP if that meant it was less likely to be attacked by local school board members. However, she expresses exasperation in her efforts to navigate this dynamic. The school board has allowed the practices to continue but added an additional burden on Hazel in needing to detail every referral so that they can monitor how and with whom restorative interventions are being applied. In this way, she is taking on the burden of helping the school community to navigate the complexity of the prevailing conservative political climate. by making her RP efforts less susceptible to hostility over the long term.

Resources (time, funding, personnel, space) are necessary for sustaining RP

School principals described the need to advocate for resources and funding to hire personnel and sustain RP over time. Adequate resources support the personnel and labor required to run restorative conferences and other practices. Additionally, having the appropriate allocated space was also a key theme. Many participants rely on one-time funding to support their RP efforts. Hazel described her fears about this funding running out:

> I am not going to lie. I am terrified after September of 24'. I am going to have to be able to sustain my facilitators in there because it's not in our budget, it's not funded in our budget, and we don't receive additional funding for this. And outside resources are limited in this area.

Hazel hired facilitators to support RP and recognized that school staff alone do not have the capacity to run conferences in addition to their regular duties. Adrian also underscored this reality:

> On a busy comprehensive high school, it's really hard for the assistant principals to take that time to do it right, and to get that many people in the same room together during a school day when you got teachers getting pulled, and who's covering what. It's almost impossible, but we've been more strategic and on purpose down here, doing that as often as we can, and covering for each other and making it happen.

While he shared that being strategic about coordinating personnel is one possible approach, it challenges the capacity of school staff. There was an underlying sense communicated by Adrian that this is not a model that is sustainable over time. School principals communicated a sense of exhaustion and urgency in their efforts to implement RP in addition to their regular duties. Aron described this in the following way:

> The biggest challenge I think for Restorative practices is time. There's no time built into instructional days. It's always go, go, go, go, go, go, go.

Without resources to hire dedicated staff, much of the implementation of RP falls on school principals. Additionally, the importance of physical space was communicated across cases. Hazel

described the outcomes of her advocacy for a dedicated space for RP:

> We are very fortunate right now that… we have two facilitators in our room, in our space that can run our low-level relational practices circles or our full blown on Restorative Justice conferences. We are very fortunate, and the expectation of that is right now, since we are about 18 months into having this space and then having these facilitators, the expectation is now that…students can walk into that space as a self-referral to go in and ask for support.

The existence of a physical space dedicated to RP is important because it makes it easier for staff and students to seek support, especially given that space can be scarce in public-school buildings.

Leaders must navigate dominant paradigms about discipline and punishment

School principals understood that bringing RP into their communities required them to resist prevailing paradigms about discipline, punishment, and accountability. Navigating these dynamics were important to their ability to effectively implement RP. Lee described his understanding of how his school community perceives discipline:

> Lots of people want to see people who have done things wrong, severely punished with no question really. But then when those things are applied to them, obviously they want understanding and empathy.

Aron added that working against these prevailing paradigms and belief systems is a constant task:

> If you don't continue to talk about relationships and being restorative, then people will fall back to old habits much faster than the way that you built up their capacity for something new. And that is tough.

This sentiment was echoed by other participants who felt that implementing RP was a constant uphill battle. Systems conditions seem to position school principals as holding RP efforts at the school-level. Jamie described how she navigates these paradigms among the ranks of her own school leadership:

> Our executive director, I think, realized that as much of a pain in the ass that I could be and I would ask hard questions and demand certain things as I was advocating for kids and families, I think he realized that it was probably better to

have me on his team.

In this case, Jamie was advocating for more restorative approaches with someone with a higher-level leadership role. She described her executive director as punitively minded but she uses her positive relationship with him to slowly gain his support over time.

School leaders committed to and invested in Restorative practices find themselves pushing against dominant beliefs about discipline and relationships in many facets of their work. The default mindset of focusing on academic instruction and giving students office discipline referrals is difficult to change because school systems have little time to dedicate to RP. Referrals represent a quick solution to student behavior challenges whereas restorative approaches are preventative and proactive. The prevalence of short-term thinking makes it difficult for educators to understand that RP is an approach that pays off over the long-term. Further, a lack of resources in the form of time and personnel make the task of changing punitive paradigms the task of school principals.

Taking the long view is required

Long-term thinking consistently surfaced as a necessary quality for leaders to have across cases. Participants often described the need to cultivate patience in themselves and others in order to reap the benefits of RP which takes years to implement. However, they felt that the investment was worth the positive outcomes. Lee described the widespread tendency for educators to engage in short-term thinking as opposed to long-term thinking:

> I think a weakness a lot of educators share, including myself sometimes, is patience. A lot of times we do things whether they're initiatives or grants or whatever else, and they last a year, they last two years and we're like, oh yeah, this doesn't seem to work. And we abandon it and then we try something else. I think that's a poor practice.

Given that shifting toward restorative cultures asks individuals to change their mindsets and

practices, this short-term thinking can lead to stopping implementation before it has produced positive benefit. Adrian described how having patience with RP implementation ultimately saves time for everyone:

> It's almost getting easier every year because now there's so many people that have been trained that are actually seeing their own data in their own classrooms, and how it's working for the better...There's no kids in the office anymore, so now my assistant principals can actually get in classrooms, and do some work with the teachers on teaching, where five, six years ago the office is full of kids, and they're constantly doing discipline.

When administrators are not constantly handling discipline issues, they have more capacity to work to support teachers in their academic instruction. School leaders act as advocates for the resources they need and to gain the influence of important decision makers. Additionally, through strategic communication and messaging with staff, students, and members of the community they organize people by building consensus and support thereby creating the conditions for RP to sustain and make an impact. However, school leaders' capacity for holding RP work in addition to their regular duties was challenged by a lack of support and time.

Group Experiential Theme #4: Purpose, Values, and Meaning

Across cases a strong sentiment about having a personal belief or greater purpose related to RP arose. Participants understood restorative approaches as a fundamental good for their school communities but also for the greater social context. The most salient personal and professional values surfaced through the interviews were varied and diverse but all seemed to be influential in their implementation efforts.

RP serves a positive social purpose

Adrian shared his perspective on the benefits of RP:

> I think restorative practice, and the way we're doing it is good for all kids, across the board, it's good for our staff, it's good for teachers. It's just a win-win across the board, regardless of your income, your race, your culture, it's just good.

His use of the word ‘good’ illustrates the moral underpinnings of his perspective on RP. This goodness as he describes it is universally beneficial to anyone regardless of identity and circumstance. Adrian and other participants seemed to draw motivation from this moral perspective when implementation was difficult. It also helped them to take a long-term perspective in their efforts. Georgina went further and connected RP to humanity’s relationship with the planet:

> It kind of loops back around to systems of oppression and breaking down some of that, like restorative practice as a living practice, how that's essential. I think we have to live differently on this planet.

She made a philosophical connection to RP as an approach to rethinking how humanity lives, implying that RP may have something to offer beyond school walls.

School leaders also all communicated a strong sense of personal belief and conviction. Aron communicated succinctly ‘If they're not believing in it, then their teaching staff is not going to believe in it. It's not going to work. It's just a talking point.’ Aron asserts the need for ‘belief’ in RP suggesting that alignment of personal values and behaviors is important for effective implementation. ‘It’s just a talking point’ implies that without personal belief RP implementation might otherwise be superficial and not impactful. Hazel also uses the term ‘belief’ in her account when she said ‘You got to believe it...You have to stand firm in your resolve and your willingness to do what's right for kids, what's best for kids.’ If one truly ‘believes’ in RP work then the resolve and commitment follows. Commitment was evident in principals’ actions in advocacy and organizing for the supports they needed as discussed in the previous section. Additionally, Prioritizing RP over other initiatives is one way school leaders can show their commitment as Adrian described it:

> There's so many things flying at you and all that stuff, but if you're able to prioritize those things, so for me, restorative practice has been one of the top

> priorities I've had since I started here, including the school I was at before. The data shows it…There's no kids in the office anymore.

Participants belief in the social and moral good of RP provided them with the motivation to continue to pursue implementation even in circumstances where they lack funding and resources.

Personal leadership values inform leaders' approach to RP

All participants appeared to draw from similar motivations in their RP implementation. However, each participant emphasized different values and skills needed in their approach to leadership. Courage was one value Aron found important:

> Otherwise people continue to do what they've always done. And that's where I started seeing light bulbs go off, the switch goes off. But that's a very courageous to have to do for a school leader to pull that data and call it and say, we got to change this.

Aron describes how choosing to consciously engage with data that might reveal discipline disproportionality is courageous because making these inequities visible and explicit carries an inherent risk for school leaders. Taking this risk for the purposes of addressing inequity then, is necessary to meaningfully implement RP. Lee similarly described a need to be willing to address shortcomings:

> You have to have a very strong sense of humility, I think in leadership, but also in Restorative Practices. I think that showing humility and vulnerability to people leads to better trust. And I just think that the heart of leadership really is trust the relationship and it takes time to build that, but you got to have those qualities…I know you can't lead from a mountaintop.

There is a sense in Lee's account that vulnerability and humility builds the trust necessary because 'you can't lead from a mountaintop'. RP requires building consensus and involving as many people as possible. Trusting relationships facilitate staff willingness to try new and unfamiliar practices. Other values surfaced from participant accounts. For example, Jamie described love as an important motivating principle for her work:

> Relationships really are critical so that the students and the families can really grow to trust us. We speak very openly about love and loving our students and loving our families and really being a place that cares and we want to support our students as best as possible.

Creating a culture of belonging and community for Jamie is rooted in love – one she sees as an act of care. The need to align values with behavior was a common theme across participants. Supporting students and engaging in RP was for Jamie an act of love for her students and their families. Linh shared about how she integrated the values of justice and belief in restoration through her approach with a caregiver. On a school campus within a neighborhood where the police has a contentious history with the community, Linh shared her approach in an incident with a parent that was highly activated and aggravated:

> So what do most people do? A stay away order. What would that have done? You wouldn't have humanized, you wouldn't have learned about the gift of this family and you wouldn't have helped build pride back to that child and give them back…that child never gets to feel affirmed that this is a beloved grandmother who gets to come back on campus and he feels pride again and he gets to his status as a human, his family status gets raised again

By not involving police unnecessarily, Linh saw restorative approaches as a more productive approach to conflict for all involved. She went further and described RJ as spiritual work:

> If you're going to do restorative practice and you get it, you have to understand it's a spiritual practice…The spiritual is the work of the soul and it's not a set of skills, not as a practice. If you think of RJ as what you do, then you're missing it. It's who you be.

Linh sees RJ as 'the work of the soul' suggesting that to do these practices effectively requires self-work and reflection. She asserts that RJ is more than observable external actions and is impacted by who 'who you be'. She argues that one may be sufficient in technical practices but without a parallel alignment of one's 'soul' with RJ that it is not meaningful.

Together, participants communicated a strong personal connection and belief in the moral value of RP for their school communities. They each emphasized different values needed in their

leadership approaches but they all conveyed a need to be personally and professionally aligned. This was particularly important as they felt that their own leadership practices and behaviors served as a mode of transmitting similar beliefs, behaviors, and mindsets to their staff, students, and to the community.

Summary of Findings

Participants' experiences analyzed through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis resulted in four Group Experiential Themes (GETs). The four GETs were:

1. Holism - the view that an individual, situation, or change effort is part of a system of intimately interconnected components that cannot be understood in isolation.
2. Power - the influence or ability to affect change in the environment or on other people and to understand and attend to power dynamics in schools.
3. Advocacy and Organizing - the process of advocating for the use of restorative approaches in their school and their communities and promoting collective action.
4. Purpose, Values, and Meaning - the need to have a personally meaningful connection to RP and using personal values to inform and drive implementation at the school-level.

Together, the GETs provide insight into how school leaders navigate the complex process of RP implementation in their contexts. In a process of culture change, participants understood both the tangible and intangible factors at play. In engaging a lens of holism, school leaders could more clearly see all of the factors impacting an individual, community, and/or implementation effort. This clearer vision helped to inform strategies that they used to create the conditions necessary for restorative approaches to take root in their schools. By attending to power – their own and others', they worked toward decreasing power differentials in adult-youth relationships necessary for implementation fidelity. Participants also recognized how power exists in social-political and systemic structures and engaged in advocacy and organizing

practices. They engaged in a variety of strategies to build awareness and understanding of RP and to promote collective action within the school community. Each school principal possessed their own unique leadership values that informed their approaches and provided motivation to continue implementation work in difficult circumstances. Their belief in the social and moral good of RP coupled with these values provided a framework of purpose and meaning.

Supports Needed for School Principals Implementing RP

The study revealed that school principals are uniquely positioned to support the implementation of RP at their school sites. However, these leaders experienced and had to contend with a lack of funding supports, personnel, and time in their efforts. Although they attempted to navigate this lack of support, sustainability over the long-term was threatened in some cases by the use of one-time funds and the disproportionate burden of implementing these efforts on school principals. In order to sustain RP work within education systems, education leaders and decision-makers should support and plan for the need to have ongoing funding as part of their regular budgets. This ongoing funding can be used to appropriately train school staff, hire personnel to support the implementation of RP and to facilitate circles and restorative conferences, and to relieve some of the burden for implementation on school principals. Adequately funding these efforts are an investment that may result in potential returns in the form of increased academic learning due to students being in class more often, less days of school missed by students due to suspensions, and more time available for school principals to focus on supporting academic instruction. Education leaders should also realize that meaningful culture change takes time and commitment. Expecting results in the short-term without the appropriate resources allocated is a poor practice and may lead to underwhelming results.

Restorative Leadership Framework

Based on the findings, a framework of practices is proposed for Restorative Leadership. Restorative Leadership aims to advance the goals of RP which is to cultivate a school culture of healing, justice, restoration, wholeness, and to foster community and belonging (Thorsborne & Blood, 2005). Leaders work toward this goal by engaging in the four domains of Restorative Leadership which emerged from the Group Experiential Themes outlined above. The figure below illustrates the process of culture change through a Restorative Leadership framework. An explanation of the figure follows.

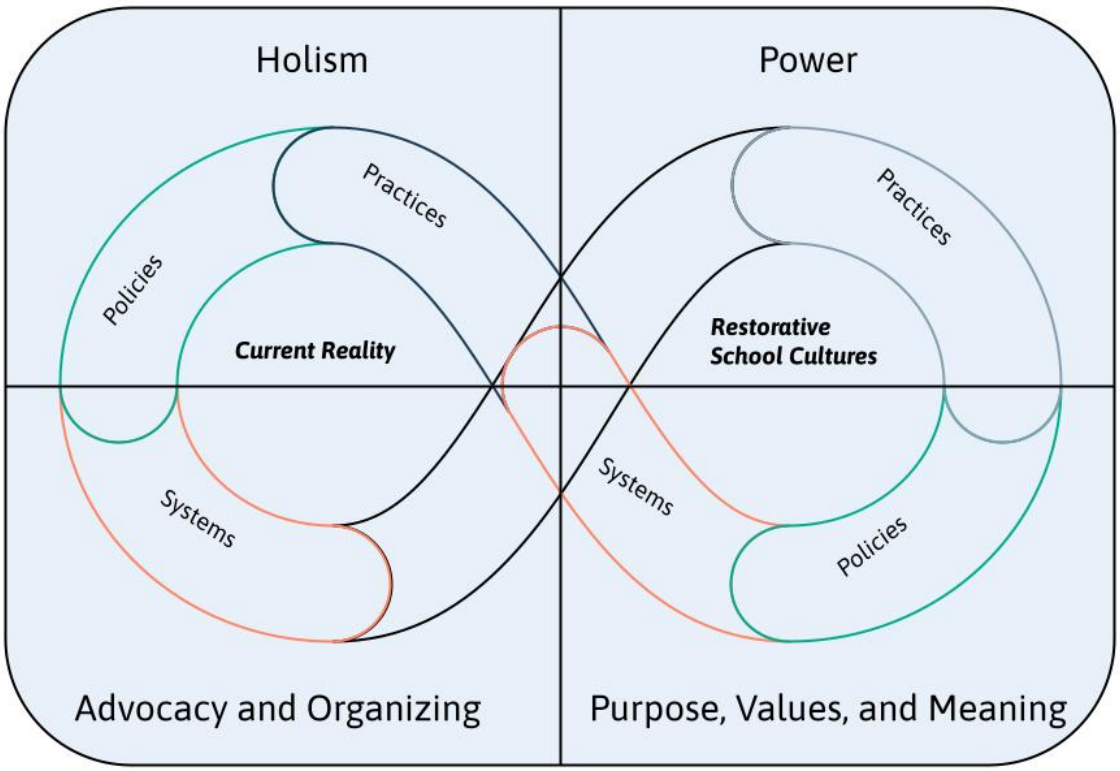

Figure 1. Restorative Leadership Framework

The figure shows an infinity symbol representing the iterative, recursive, and non-linear process of change as schools move toward restorative cultures. As leaders help shift their schools toward these restorative ways of operating, they shift the systems, policies, and practices. Inevitably, the community is changed, and restorative elements of school culture become current reality. However, unlearning and deconditioning the community from traditional punitive

mindsets is an ongoing process that requires revisiting and reflecting on assumptions, beliefs, and practices. The infinity symbol seeks to resist binary modes of evaluating the extent to which a school community has achieved its restorative ideals. Rather, the framework proposes that the challenge of developing restorative school cultures will to some extent always exist between paradigms. The quadrants holding culture change depicts the four domains of practice in Restorative Leadership that school principals uniquely are positioned to enact in their RP implementation.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine school principals' leadership in the implementation of Restorative Practices. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was applied to allow for an emergent and expansive exploration of participants' lived experience. The purpose of the study was to 1) conceptualize restorative leadership and define its key components 2) describe challenges faced by school principals as they engage in restorative culture change and 3) illuminate principal experience to better inform education leaders and decision makers about supports that are necessary to implement these practices.

This chapter will explore the extent to which the research questions were answered, make connections to current literature on the topic, discuss limitations, explain the significance of the study, and make recommendations for future research.

Research Questions Through the Group Experiential Themes

The Group Experiential Themes (GETs) surfaced from the analytic process each provide their own insight into the research questions. The Group Experiential Themes were: 1) Holism 2) Power 3) Advocacy and Organizing and 4) Purpose, Values, and Meaning. The study was able to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are the lived experiences of school principals working to create transformative change through leadership in restorative practices?

RQ 2: How do school principals integrate restorative mindsets and behaviors in their leadership practices?

RQ 3: How do they transfer knowledge about their practices to staff members?

RQ 4: What conflicts and tensions do they face as they seek to engage in culture change?

Each theme and its contributions to answering the research questions are outlined below.

Group Experiential Theme #1 – Holism

Holism describes how participants used systems thinking to understand behavior, their communities, and/or their implementation efforts. This theme helps to answer RQ 2 and RQ 4. As it relates to RQ 2, this theme demonstrates how school leaders were committed to viewing individuals as whole people rather than as a set of behaviors. This lens was the foundation for a compassionate and empathetic approach that they integrated into their leadership practices and included an understanding of the social, economic, psychological, and systemic in the lives of individuals. Faced with challenging behavior from students, staff, and/or the community, school leaders employed a problem-solving approach seeking to understand and address root causes. As it relates to RQ 4, holism surfaced in participants' experiences the various challenges they encountered in both tangible (policies, resources) and intangible (relationships, prevailing mindsets) forms in their attempts to transform school culture. School leaders understood that part of the process of Restorative Practices implementation was navigating these challenges while taking advantage of the supports that were available to them.

Group Experiential Theme #2 – Power

Participants were attuned to the various power dynamics that exist on the individual, interpersonal, and systemic levels. Through first recognizing their individual power, they were better able to navigate conflicts and tensions (RQ 4) that they faced. Participants did this by using their decision-making and positional power to gather resources or make structural decisions that facilitated the conditions for restorative school cultures. They also understood that power dynamics must be addressed to fully realize the positive potentials of Restorative Practices. School leaders also described the need to share power with students and to take collaborative approaches to leadership. They emphasized a need to model and embody

restorative mindsets because they recognized the influence it could have on staff behavior (RQ 2 and RQ 3).

Group Experiential Theme #3 – Advocacy and Organizing

School principals frequently described the limited resources they had access to and engaged in advocacy and organizing to garner support for their efforts. They advocated for restorative approaches to school culture, conflict resolution, and student discipline with key decision-makers and among staff. This was a crucial strategy especially when participants found themselves in environments hostile to restorative approaches (RQ 4). They also engaged in strategic communication and outreach efforts to promote collective engagement within their school communities. This theme also revealed the tireless task school leaders are faced with as they attempt to change dominant punitive paradigms. Participants communicated a sense of exhaustion in their work to maintain their school's focus on RP efforts (RQ 1).

Group Experiential Theme #4 – Purpose, Values, and Meaning

Participants felt that these approaches were positively benefiting their schools and the larger community. Additionally, RP represented an opportunity for them to align their own values (e.g. love, courage, humility) through the process of transforming school culture. These aspects of their experience were internal resources that they drew on to sustain motivation to continue RP implementation in the face of difficulty (RQ 1). This sense of personal meaning also helped participants to take a long-term perspective on implementation knowing that positive outcomes would occur over time.

Unanswered Questions and Limitations of the Restorative Leadership Framework

Although the study provided insight into the research questions, some elements remain unclear. The process of school principals transferring knowledge about their practices to school

staff was not discussed in detail by participants (RQ 3). School principals referred to the need to be a 'role model' and to hold and practice values such as empathy and compassion. While they pointed to these actions as important, how that looks in practice was vague. This may be because the interview questions did not prompt participants to be clearer about these processes. Additionally, it is unclear how school leaders came to integrate restorative mindsets or behaviors in their leadership practices (RQ 2). Participants seemed to hold values which they describe as impacting their actions but their journey and how they came to develop these values as well as descriptive examples of daily practice was not evident in the data. The study data could have done more to reveal school principals' lived experience and surface richer and more illustrative stories that reveal the detail of implementing RP on a day-to-day basis.

The Restorative Leadership framework is the result of Group Experiential Themes based on participants' accounts of their own experience. As a result, the domains of practice in this framework are limited by school principals' perspectives who might overstate or understate the extent to which they actually engage in these practices. The framework emerged from school principals' own account of their leadership. It does not speak to how effectively participants acted on these areas of practice. For example, while school leaders sought to have an expansive and holistic perspective of the root causes of student behavior (GET #1 Holism), it is unclear if they were able to effectively address those root causes in practice.

The framework also does not reflect how students, staff, and community members experience the role of school principals in the implementation of RP. As a result, critical components of leadership action and behavior could be missing.

Connections to Existing Literature

The results of the study align with much of the existing literature related to RP implementation in K-12 schools. The misimplementation models described by Gregory and Evans (2020) of under-resourced and "train and hope" approaches were themes that surfaced throughout participant accounts. Despite these obstacles, school leaders continued to make efforts to work around them and use their influence and power to find resources for ongoing professional development of their staff. Additionally, the literature identifies the challenges of implementing Restorative Practices within punitive social contexts (Mansfield et al., 2018; Morrison et al., 2005; Thorsborne & Blood, 2006; Vaandering, 2013). School leaders were consistently working against deeply entrenched mindsets and beliefs about discipline and punishment. This finding aligned with the observation made by Thorsborne & Blood (2005) when they described these mindsets as the result of centuries of legal and institutional investment. These prevailing mindsets presented conflicts and tensions and made it difficult at times for school leaders to act per their restorative values. This challenge was identified by Lustick (2021) and underscored the limitations of school principal leadership to implement RP with fidelity on their own.

Gregory et al,'s (2021) 12 RP implementation indicators described by the three broad categories of RP infrastructure, RP capacity building, and RP tiers of support are largely compatible with this study's findings. The Restorative Leadership framework overlaps with a number of indicators. These indicators which include: administrative support for RP, schoolwide buy-in and distributed leadership, discipline policy reform, RP professional development, RP student leadership and student voice and RP family/community involvement. The other

indicators are not incompatible rather, they were not surfaced specifically through the interview data.

Limitations of the Study Design

One limitation of the study includes language and interpretation. Phenomenological studies rely on the language participants use to describe their experiences and interpretation can be influenced by culture, background, and other researcher identities. This may have had an impact on the study findings. Additionally, the study relied on participants' subjective accounts. This may make the study difficult to replicate and limits the generalizability of the results because it is focused on a small group of seven individuals with specific experiences. However, IPA does not seek to make generalizable claims as this is a feature of this methodological approach. Rather, it seeks to describe the lived experiences of individuals with a common experience in depth and detail. At most, the study would be able to some extent shed light on the experiences of school principals seeking to implement RP through a process of culture change. The participants were from California and New Mexico. Each state has its own unique education contexts which may further limit the generalizability of the results.

Significance of the Study

In an era of increasing interest in approaches to education that aim to be more holistic and human-centered, there are a plethora of curricula and programs. Among those that RP tends to find itself categorized with are approaches such as SEL (social-emotional learning) and PBIS (Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions). The latter two and other similar approaches tend to view behaviors as manageable through skill-building and explicit teaching or as being able to be incentivized through systems of rewards. Although these approaches have their benefits and, in some ways, overlap with restorative approaches, however, they are oriented in

fundamentally different ways than RP. Restorative practices can be explicitly taught but it is not a curriculum. Rather, it is a worldview that represents a paradigm shift away from using social control towards one that uses social engagement. Further, it sees students, staff, and community members as all needing to engage in accountability. In contrast, SEL and PBIS tend to be oriented toward being an intervention to undesired behavior with no attention paid to the harm that staff members and other adults can and often do cause. In this way, these approaches neglect attending to power dynamics between adults and youth in school systems. Additionally, RP views motivation to repair harm and maintain positive relationships as intrinsic to human beings. SEL and PBIS view motivation as either being from a lack of skill and awareness or as able to be developed extrinsically through rewards.

The goal is not to advocate for RP at the expense of other approaches but rather to identify the contrasting paradigms with which they approach the issue of discipline and thus interpersonal relationships. This thinking can also be applied to Restorative Leadership. Leaders who are facilitating the effective implementation of RP act in accordance with these restorative values (or attempt to). In the same way that RP represents a paradigm shift in the practice of relationships, community-building, and accountability so too does Restorative Leadership represent a shift in the practice of leadership.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research is needed to learn more about how school staff experience the behaviors of school leaders who integrate RP into their leadership. This research might provide more insight into the impacts school leaders' practices have on their likelihood of also integrating restorative approaches. A deeper understanding of the transfer of practices from school leaders to their staff would help to refine the proposed Restorative Leadership framework.

School leaders such as those represented in this study are already engaging in leadership paradigms that are vastly different than traditional hierarchical approaches. These approaches to leadership facilitate the development of restorative school cultures which have been shown in the literature to contribute to a variety of positive outcomes of particular importance to systems of accountability such as chronic absenteeism, measures of belonging, and improved academic attainment. However, if education systems and its leaders remain narrowly focused on traditional accountability measures and see RP as a means to an end rather than a meaningful and positive outcome in and of itself, they risk missing the point. Authentic, meaningful, and deeply engaged human relationships are at the very core of education. It is these relationships that give meaning and purpose to education, not the other way around.

Societal Implications and Conclusion

Restorative Leadership approaches have implications far beyond the sphere of K-12 education. It represents a set of practices for humanizing organizations, workplaces, and society more broadly. Ongoing social, political, and economic unrest occurring against the backdrop of increasing wealth inequality, worsening educational outcomes, geopolitical turmoil, and an accelerating global climate crisis (among many other crises) prompt the need for deeper reflection in the broader social consciousness. One of these questions is—What is the purpose and role of today's organizations, governments, schools, and workplaces in prefiguring futures of human thriving? The answers are many but they all will require deep and meaningful engagement of human creativity to develop solutions to the myriad issues facing our planet. Restorative approaches tap into the basic human need to be seen, understood, acknowledged, and to belong. These are the preconditions for tapping into the collective human intelligence to fabricate the futures of tomorrow. While these questions are big individual, interpersonal, and

social conditions are interrelated. Said another way, the everyday on the level of individuals contributes to that which emerges on the social or collective levels. If our systems have created the conditions we currently face, how might these conditions exist in the behaviors and ways of being of individual people in their daily lives? Restorative Leadership is one way of imagining how our visions for futures of human thriving might manifest in the way we choose to lead wherever we may find ourselves. If nothing else, restorative ways of being offer a potential balm to the human spirit in this time of ongoing collective unrest, exhaustion, and weariness.

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APPENDIX A - Recruitment Email

Dear Potential Participant/[Recipient Name],

My name is Lan Nguyen, and I am a student researcher in UCSD/CSUSM's Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership. I am reaching out to ask for your assistance with my dissertation study.

I'm interested in understanding the experience of secondary principals who are working toward changing their school cultures through the implementation of restorative practices. Specifically, my goal is to learn more about how school leaders integrate restorative mindsets and behaviors into their leadership practices.

Participation in the study would require completing a background survey and one 60-minute interview via Zoom with potential follow-up for individuals who meet the following criteria:

1. Public school principal in California
2. Describe restorative practices as a priority at their school site
3. Are actively implementing restorative practices at their school site

All interview responses are confidential and no real names will be used in the publication of my dissertation study. If you are interested in participating, please email Lan Nguyen at: Ltn009@ucsd.edu.

With gratitude,

Lan Nguyen
Doctoral Student
University of California, San Diego
California State University

APPENDIX B - Informed Consent Form

Consent Form

University of California, San Diego
California State University, San Marcos
Consent to Act as a Research Subject
Leading Restoratively - A Phenomenological Examination of Secondary School Principals

Who is conducting the study, why you have been asked to participate, how you were selected, and what is the approximate number of participants in the study?
This study is being conducted by Lan Nguyen, a doctoral student in the Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at the University of California, San Diego and California State University, San Marcos. Participants are selected to participate in the study who meet the following criteria a) secondary school principal in California and have been at their school site for at least two years b) have been a practitioner of restorative practices for three years or more (in any role) and c) prioritize restorative practices at their school site and have been actively implementing restorative practices for two years or more

Why is this study being done?
The study is being done to explore the experiences of principals as they engage in school culture change with a particular focus on how they integrate restorative mindsets and behaviors in their leadership practices.

What will happen to you in this study and which procedures are standard of care and which are experimental?
If you agree to be in this study, you will be invited to participate in one semi structured interview. In this interview you will be asked to share about your school, your experiences at your school, and your leadership practices.

How much time will each study procedure take, what is your total time commitment, and how long will the study last?
Two 60-minute interviews will be conducted with each participant. The total time commitment will be 2 hours. The study is to take place from April to August 2023.

What risks are associated with this study?
Participation in this study may involve some added risks or discomforts. These include the following:

1. A potential for the loss of confidentiality. To minimize the risk of loss of confidentiality, the following actions will be taken:
    a. All digital files (audio recordings, transcriptions, data analysis) will be stored on the PIs password encrypted computer.
    b. Audio files will be transcribed immediately after the interview. The transcription of the interview will be redacted to remove identifying information and will be replaced with pseudonyms. Once identifying information has been removed, the

original transcription record will be destroyed. The PI will keep a record of the pseudonyms by participants in a password protected file.

c. The only documentation linking the subject to the research is the consent form. Consent and research records will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. The UCSD Institutional Review Board may review research records.

2. There is a minor risk that district employees will read the study and attempt to identify the participants for evaluative purposes. The PI will use pseudonyms for subjects in any resulting reports or publications to further minimize the risk of participant loss of anonymity. This is likely to prevent the loss of anonymity. Participation in this study is not connected in any way to the employment status of any individual participating in the study and participants' identity will not be disclosed at any time.
3. There is a minor risk that those who participate in the interview may feel stress or discomfort in answering questions related to their experiences as a school principal. During the interview, principals have the option of not answering any question. They also have the option to discontinue at any time. This should minimize any stress or discomfort participants may have responding.

Because this is a research study, there may also be some unknown risks that are currently unforeseeable. You will be informed of any significant new findings.

What are the alternatives to participating in this study?
The alternatives to participation in this study are not to participate.

What benefits can be reasonably expected?
There may not be any direct benefit to you from participating in this study. The investigator, however, may learn more about the experiences of school principals and society may benefit from this knowledge.

Can you choose to not participate or withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of benefits?
Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw or refuse to answer specific questions in an interview at any time without penalty. If you decide that you no longer wish to continue in this study, you will be required to notify the investigator. You will be told if any important new information is found during the course of this study that may affect your wanting to continue.

Can you be withdrawn from the study without your consent?
The PI may remove you from the study without your consent if the PI feels it is in your best interest or the best interest of the study.

Will you be compensated for participating in this study?
No compensation will be provided for participating in this study.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
There will be no cost to you for participating in this study.

What if you are injured as a direct result of being in this study?
If you are injured as a direct result of participation in this research, the University of California will provide any medical care you need to treat those injuries. The University will not provide any other form of compensation to you if you are injured. You may call the Human Research Protections Program Office at 858-246-HRPP (858-246-4777) for more information about this, to inquire about your rights as a research subject or to report research-related problems.

Who can you call if you have questions?
You can contact Lan Nguyen through email at Ltn007@ucsd.edu or by phone at (619)-948-1160

APPENDIX C - Semistructured Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your background in education.
    a. How many years have you been in education?
    b. How many years have you been in a leadership or administrator role?
2. Tell me about the school you work at.
    a. How many teachers are in your school?
    b. How many students does your school support?
    c. What are the racial/ethnic demographics of your students?
    d. What are the racial/ethnic demographics of your teachers and administrators?
3. Tell me about your experiences with restorative practices.
    a. What formal training have you received in restorative practices (RP)?
    b. What informal training have you participated in? (book studies, your own research, meeting with other admin, etc.)
4. How would you describe the state of restorative practices at your school site?
    a. What was the impetus for implementing restorative practices at your school site?
    b. What are the goals related to restorative practices at your school site?
5. Do you feel supported by the district in your efforts to incorporate restorative practices? If so, how? If not, why not?
6. When you think about the physical design of your school, where does RP take place?
7. Describe from your perspective how restorative practices currently live in your school community.
    a. Who in your school community is involved in the implementation of RP?
8. Tell me about a time when you felt restorative practices were really making a difference at your school.
    a. How would you define success as it relates to RP implementation at your school site? What would daily life look like? Who would be involved?
9. Tell me about a challenge you have faced in RP implementation.
    a. How did you (if at all) overcome these challenges?
    b. What support do you have to implement RP?
    c. What more do you feel you need to support successful RP implementation?
10. Describe your leadership style.
    a. What does decision-making look like?
11. How do you view your role as principal in the implementation of RP at your school?
12. In what ways do you integrate restorative mindsets (beliefs, values, and philosophies) into your leadership practice?
    a. Can you share an example of how you do this? What impact do you believe this has? How do you know?
    b. In what ways do you use RP with staff? What does this look like? What impact do you believe this has on your staff? How do you know?

    c. Can you share an example of when you were met with resistance? How did you address this resistance?
13. Restorative practices/restorative justice was introduced into K-12 education initially as a way to address disproportionality in discipline particularly for Black, Brown, and Indigenous youth who historically and currently are as much as 5 times more likely to be suspended or expelled for the same or similar offenses when compared to their White peers.
    a. In what ways do you consider issues related to race/ethnicity, gender, and other historically and currently marginalized identities in your leadership? Can you share an example of how you do this?
    b. Has the implementation of restorative practices resulted in any school wide policy changes?
14. What advice would you give to other school principals who want to do similar work?
15. What else would you like to share before we conclude the interview?

APPENDIX D - Tables of Participants' Personal Experiential Themes

Adrian

A. IMPLEMENTATION CONDITIONS

Access to adequate funding resources is instrumental to successful implementation of Restorative Practices (RP) schoolwide

Ensuring that a high proportion of staff members have expertise in RP is beneficial to implementation.

- 'We're a little ahead of the game in our district, but the goal is to have 100% of our folks trained…Then I have 14 teachers on campus who are trainers of trainers now as well, so it's slowly getting into every department, PLC.'

A lack of time, resources, and personnel make implementation with fidelity difficult.

- 'On a busy comprehensive high school, it's really hard for the assistant principals to take that time to do it right, and to get that many people in the same room together during a school day when you got teachers getting pulled, and who's covering what. It's almost impossible, but we've been more strategic and on purpose down here, doing that as often as we can, and covering for each other and making it happen.'

The nature of working conditions in schools makes it easy to not engage in RP.

- 'I think for most people, they would love to do it with fidelity, it's just the nature of life, and the reality of you have 35 kids in your classroom, there's other things going on, the bell's about to ring, there's just always something.'

Structural and systemic factors impact likelihood of implementation success

Systemic and structural decision-making at the school level in addition to quality RP programming is essential.

- 'You're going to make decisions with what you're prioritizing in your master schedule, who is teaching what, or who is doing what, whether it's someone that's going to be a restorative person on campus, so putting the right people in the right places is huge. You might have the best program, but if you don't have the best person running it, the kids aren't going to sign up.'

Initiatives that are promoted by the school district determine school-level priorities.

- 'So prior to restorative practice on this school site, PBIS was the big thing…so we got into that at this site when I was assistant principal…Then, I think about 2016, our district, it came from the district office, offered some trainings in restorative practice'

B. DEFINING AND DEVELOPING A RESTORATIVE SCHOOL

CULTURE

RP effectively implemented become a part of daily practices for everyone at a school.

- 'So when you're implementing it, especially with fidelity, and your teachers are calling kids out with the affective statements and questions, and your kids know what it is, I think you do a good job when your kids are asking for circles, something happens, they're like, "Hey, we want to circle about this," that you've started making that impact.'

Small, daily practices make a meaningful difference in school culture.

- 'Every morning we have music ... we're blaring music at the front gates where kids are coming in, saying hi to them, good morning. When I say every day, I mean it's the first day of school, the last day of school…I think, for me, I pay attention to the little things, which has been helpful for me in my career, and with my leadership because those things matter.'

Building relationships are a precondition for Restorative school cultures.

- 'The first four days I tell them, "No content, don't teach. Just get to know your kids, have fun activities with them in the classroom."'

Restorative school cultures means that the practices are practiced by staff members.

- 'And then all your new teachers coming in, making sure that they're trained. I think it just depends, but a lot of stuff I've been putting in place is on purpose, like having a question about Restorative Practice, whether you're interviewing for an art position, or math, or whatever, it's on every single interview that we do, including our classified interviews. If you're going to be a custodian, what do you know about Restorative Practice? That's on purpose … but it just shows that it's part of the school culture, and an expectation.'

Intentional and strategic messaging and schoolwide shared practices strengthens restorative school culture.

- 'We have school-wide strategic messaging…We'll spend entire period schoolwide in talking about choice words, and what does that mean, not just what comes out of your mouth, but also how you talk to yourself … and all the things that go along with being on time to class, and those things, respect, and then obviously the excellence of just trying your best. But when it's schoolwide it makes a big difference'

C. MEASURABLE AND IMMEASURABLE IMPACTS OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES LEGITIMIZES ITS USE

Discipline data can show positive impact but may not fully represent the reality of implementation

Getting results is an important component of facilitating buy-in from adults on campus.

- 'Now, our teachers are starting to see the results, and feel the results of when

you do it with fidelity...things change for the better.'

Ultimately, impact is the most important measure to determine if Restorative approaches should be implemented in schools

- 'Restorative practice…it is what we're doing with teenagers and kids, and it's in lieu of serious consequences, but it's more impactful for them not to do it again, and it works'

RP impacts academic achievement data as well as discipline data.

- 'Then we just had a WASC visit…our highest mark was on school culture, and that, I feel, is because of this Restorative push we've had the last three years coming out of the pandemic with kids. Now we're starting to see the fruits of that, and then the data starts following, so not only the discipline data, but we also had one of the highest improvements in our CAST scores with our juniors. our English went up 17% last year, which is huge, and I think it's because kids are in class and they're learning.'

Positive changes in discipline data can be seen without practicing RP with fidelity.

- 'We had everyone trained that first year. Our data was awesome in terms of the number of kids not having three or more referrals, going from 111 kids to nine. But, I also know we weren't doing it with fidelity, but at least we were trying in the classroom, we were trying to do better.'

There is a difference experienced on the level of feelings that is a benefit of RP.

An intangible quality of RP makes an emotional impact.

- 'You could see the impact all the way around, you could feel it….the kid walks out with more of an impact than they would've if they have been suspended for five days… not being in school.'

Students report the emotional impact of RP on campus

- 'We have about 50 students in there, every kid raised their hand and said they're connected to at least one adult on our campus. I believe that's because the restorative piece that we've been pushing, kids can feel it.'

The impacts of RP are experienced over the long-term

Compared to traditional suspension measures, RP is more impactful.

- 'I believe the impact is so great that it really is life-changing for our kids, and even some of the family members..at the end, you have parents that you thought might have a problem with each other, actually exchanging numbers or giving each other a hug on the way out. It's just the best of humanity by the time everyone walks out that door, which is really cool.'

Over time, RP is saving time for school staff.

- 'It's almost getting easier every year because now there's so many people that

have been trained that are actually seeing their own data in their own classrooms, and how it's working for the better...There's no kids in the office anymore, so now my assistant principals can actually get in classrooms, and do some work with the teachers on teaching, where five, six years ago the office is full of kids, and they're constantly doing discipline.'

Restorative approaches to behavior management build intrinsic motivation.

- 'It's like parenting, so if you can talk to your kid and show them the big picture, and why it's important to be in class in a restorative way instead of barking at them to get to class and having consequences…We have kids getting to class, our attendance has improved, our tardies have improved, but our approach has been very restorative to get them to class.'

D. RP IS A SOCIAL AND MORAL GOOD

RP is a universal approach to issues of race.

- 'We are, as an individual, regardless of our color or our background, are responsible for our behaviors, the basics of being a nice person or being on this campus, or basic expectations of everybody, including the adults"

RP is morally the best approach for working with students.

- 'I really believe in my heart it's just really what's good for kids'

The social good that RP has is a case for its use.

- 'I think restorative practice, and the way we're doing it is good for all kids, across the board, it's good for our staff, it's good for teachers. It's just a win-win across the board, regardless of your income, your race, your culture, it's just good.'

E. SCHOOL PRINCIPALS ARE CENTRAL TO EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

School principals can use their formal decision-making power and influence to support RP implementation.

School leaders should model what they ask their staff to do.

- 'Then modeling things, whether it's the use of restorative practice or whatever I'm asking my staff to do, I'm willing to do myself type thing'

Principals must make a choice to prioritize RP above other initiatives for it to make an impact.

- 'There's so many things flying at you and all that stuff, but if you're able to prioritize those things, so for me, restorative practice has been one of the top priorities I've had since I started here, including the school I was at before. The data shows it…There's no kids in the office anymore.'

Administrators can make individual decisions to be more restorative where school policy is less defined.

- “In terms of policies, if you look at our handbook as a district for discipline stuff, it hasn't changed...There's a huge gray area there, and so if you have someone that might be suspended for five days, they might get three days if they agree to do a restorative formal conference…So the policy hasn't changed, but we have the flexibility to offer some things for people that want to make it right.’

School principals must champion the cause of RP continuously.

- ‘Because that's what it takes for it to happen, you got to champion it all the time, and it can be exhausting’

Having a personal connection to and experience with RP provides the needed motivation to effectively implement it.

- ‘I think it'd be more of a struggle to make it a priority for you as a principal if you really don't know what it is, you haven't really lived that.’

Moving toward restorative school cultures is a constant battle against prevailing paradigms of relating, discipline, and power.

School principals should constantly center restorative work or risk a return to previous practices.

- ‘I think the hardest part about it is people will go back to old habits, is you have to champion it all the time. It never ends. You have to bring it up. Every faculty meeting we try to model with our restorative team on campus’

Restorative justice’s origins are a liability for promoting its practices to staff and community members.

- ‘I feel like some people have more of a negative connotation with restorative justice because…they think it's for, there's no consequences for whoever's doing something bad, that's kind of the biggest thing. I think restorative justice, people think of adults in jail and stuff like that, so when they hear it at a school they're like, "Wait, what's this?”’

The default nature of school staff is not in alignment with restorative mindsets.

- ‘It's really easy as humans to go back into our old habits. I have to remind our admin team here too, like, "Did we offer a restorative formal conference or not?"

Resistance to RP is due to a lack of understanding or misconceptions.

- ‘Generally the resistance has been just because people either aren't doing it, or they haven't been trained, or they really don't have a grasp or understanding of what it really is.’

A. THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

School principals' behaviors and decision-making have an impact on RP implementation.

Addressing inequities as a school leader requires courage.

- 'Otherwise people continue to do what they've always done. And that's where I started seeing light bulbs go off, the switch goes off. But that's a very courageous to have to do for a school leader to pull that data and call it and say, we got to change this.'

Making expectations clear is an important part of RP implementation.

- 'And that's important for them to know because it's not like, oh yeah, I'll just do this and there's going to be a conversation. There's going to be a follow-up'.

School leaders need to have a personal connection to RP to effectively implement it.

- 'If they're not believing in it, then their teaching staff is not going to believe in it. It's not going to work. It's just a talking point.'

Implementing RP can be done unilaterally.

- 'And I made a commitment that I was going to make everybody do this training.'

Principals should model that which they ask their staff to do.

- 'First and foremost, you're going to have to have proper training…it's going to be uncomfortable…Because then you're now incorporating it by modeling it, but it's also becoming part of your professional learning component'

Effectively implementing RP requires commitment over time.

- 'It's going to take work and it's going to take years…It's going to take a lot of dedication, and you're going to have to change the way you do business. And for educators that have been around for 15 and 18 years, that's going to be tough'

School leaders should be prepared to potentially lose staff members if they fully commit to RP.

- 'Some may say, you know what? I've been thinking about retirement for five years and now it's my time.'

Modeling affective skills with staff members is one way of teaching RP.

- 'But I'm modeling the conversation that I'm going to have with them that I'm expecting them to also have with their students when it happens to them and their students do something they shouldn't. And being supportive, listening, just asking, so what happened?'

School principals are responsible for holding staff accountable.

School leaders can hold staff accountable for change by being present and involved in the classroom.

- 'As an instructional leader, you have to go into that classroom, you have to watch…I think the accountability piece on the school leader is that you're there as a support and you're also there watching, you're observing.'

RP makes issues of inequity more clear.

- "But restorative practices was kind of that next piece that I think made equity or calling out the inequities kind of real. And you have to look at data, look at what students are being suspended."

Data provides an accountability measure for addressing discipline inequities.

- 'People look around the room and there's 20 teachers. Everybody knows that person kicks out a lot of kids without saying it or being said…Because they always say data doesn't lie when you can pull that stuff."

School principals are working against traditional paradigms of behavior and understanding.

If RP is not constantly centered, people will return to old habits.

- 'If you don't continue to talk about relationships and being restorative, then people will fall back to old habits much faster than the way that you built up their capacity for something new. And that is tough.'

A lack of understanding is an implementation challenge.

- 'So we had to have a tremendous amount of meetings to where we kind of had to lay out what the, some of their problems or issues that they felt like they had with not going into restorative practice. That was a big factor in why wouldn't we want to build relationships with our students? Why wouldn't we want to find a better way than just kicking 'em out of our classrooms? So by identifying those, we kind of found out it wasn't really necessarily about the students, it was more about the lack of understanding what options were on the table for them.'

Not everyone is interested in repairing harm.

- 'That is difficult and challenging because you have to have both sides that are willing to mend what was wrong, right? … If not both parties are willing to do, then it can't happen. At least it can't happen to the extent that it needs to be a true restorative environment.'

School staff need explicit permission to spend time building relationships.

- 'We called it that time of going slow to make connections before getting into the learning aspect of the day. And people got on board with that. They're like, okay, so it's okay to connect with kids and this and that, those permissions, because a lot of times they feel like they have to just get right into the curriculum. And I

think that's important to recognize that giving the educational staff that liberty to continue to make those connections.'

B. IMPLEMENTATION NEEDS

Adequate time, resources, and support are crucial to effective implementation.

Effective support for school staff will depend on their unique needs.

- 'Now, that's not going to work for every teacher...sometimes the teacher that has lots of behavioral issues and has more of an authoritative approach…Sometimes they're the ones that need that co-teacher or classroom assistant or that teaching assistant, someone in there to help that balance, right? That's where I think that accountability piece is being able to find out where the puzzle pieces fit best and it's going to work for your youth first and foremost, and then also make the work better for your staff'

Working with all adults and partners on campus is integral to implementation.

- 'And we had to make that shift and work with not only my educational staff, but now with the bureaucracy and the partners of probation staff. So it wasn't just my staff, it was the probation staff that had to start to understand that what we were trying to do is something different.'

High quality training and information for RP is important.

- 'First and foremost, you're going to have to have proper training, real training …And being able to accept that you're also going to need literature. You're going to need true data driven literature.'

Structures need to be in place to support staff.

- 'Have that teacher struggling over here, being able to watch this person over here to see what kind of things that they might be able to take. Don't have to act like that person, but what can they take? What kind of strategies are they doing that are working for them?'

Lack of time is a major obstacle to implementing RP.

- 'The biggest challenge I think for restorative practices is time. There's no time built into instructional days. It's always go, go, go, go, go, go, go.'

School staff are already overburdened with their typical responsibilities.

- 'And one of the most difficult things to do is have a teaching staff that is already stressed and overwhelmed and then saying, oh yeah, by the way, you need to talk to so-and-so prior to them coming into the classroom. And that takes a lot of work'

Support is needed at the systems level.

- 'It really has to be top down...I would say it should be either through their Board of Education or through their superintendent that says, this is what we want.

Because a lot of times teachers won't listen to a principal if they don't like them or have that relationship of respect with them. But when you say, as a district, this is where we're going and this is what we're going to do. The superintendent signs the checks. I mean, the buck stops with them and they need to know that this is going to happen and it's going to take some time'

C. ADULT-YOUTH POWER DIFFERENTIALS

Power must be shared more evenly to facilitate the development of positive relationships with students.

Adults should be receptive to feedback from students.

- 'Because it's hard for an adult to hear a youth say, I don't think you don't like me because I made fun of blah, blah, blah'

Adults need to share power with students.

- 'And ultimately it's about giving up some of our adult power and hearing students what they have to say, respecting them as younger individuals'

Ideally RP would involve less top-down approaches to working with students.

- 'What you would see is you would see the dialogue between teachers and students being free flowing and not really authoritative top down. You'd have students being able to express themselves without people getting upset'

Respecting youth and giving them an opportunity to have a voice prevents behavior issues.

- 'So giving the youth, giving students voices ultimately is what I think is the biggest restorative thing we could do. Because one of the worst things that could happen is not being heard. And I feel like a lot of the discipline and the behavioral problems you have that happen in classrooms around everywhere, not only this state, the city, this country, is that we're not giving them that opportunity or that platform to be heard.'

Staff members should seek to understand the underlying cause of negative student behaviors.

- 'Recognizing that they're upset and getting beyond just the language component or that's disrespectful, but what are they really trying to say? And then being able to see students and peers to be able to help them. The one that may be struggling to be able to communicate what they're really trying to say properly in the right fashion of where it's going to be heard.'

D. RP HAS POSITIVE IMPACTS

Staff members may understand more about students as a whole through relational connection.

- 'And they're sharing pieces of the students' world or life, the conversation is about

students in a more positive light as a consequence of getting to know them better and having better relationships with 'em.'

Relational connection can prevent negative behaviors such as fighting.

- 'Maybe that meant that you checked in with them and what your relationship with them is so important that that student didn't fight. He's been planning on fighting. Those are the small things that you can't really measure and you don't really know is happening. But a lot of times sometimes the youth will say, 'Hey, I didn't want to fight yesterday. I didn't want to mess up your class.' That's a compliment. In my world, that's a compliment to my staff that they have that relationship with those youth.'

RP at lower levels of implementation is still better than none at all.

- 'Are we a hundred percent as great as we can be? No, but we're still so much better than what we were prior to bringing restorative practices and restorative circles into our world'

RP creates an environment that allows people to resolve conflict themselves.

- Most people when they do understand that, they do handle the situation themselves, meaning that most times I do not have to get involved because they've already squashed it themselves. They've already talked it out and come back and they're better for it.'

A caring environment is conducive to helping youth through a traumatic time in their life.

- 'It's a sense of caring and a sense of belonging and that we're all kind of trying to pull together for the common cause of getting them through this very traumatic time in their life…You're building a community of belonging, and it's one thing to be at a place, but it's another thing to belong.'

Relationships contribute to school safety.

- 'Relationships are the foundation of everything we do. And without it, we're dead in the water. Without relationships with our students, then we actually are in more of an unsafe situation.'

RP is an investment that pays off over time.

- 'But in the end, on the other side of this is where the payoff is at…to be able to have conversations with them to the point where they're going to out of respect, calm themselves to where you can carry on with instruction and them not be a disruption.'

A. POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY SHOULD BE SHARED WITH STUDENTS

Student leadership and mentorship is an invaluable resource.

Peer leaders are important influencers in reinforcing positive school culture.

- 'What I have seen is that it's created better relationships between our students, who I would call our leaders and some of those more positive role models on campus and between those kids that struggle.'

Peer leadership and mentorship is an underutilized resource

- 'The kids…have an innate ability…to just help other kids solve things at a peer level. And I think it really gives validity to the peer element in education'

Students impacted by issues can be engaged to address them

- 'And it's like… maybe we aren't doing some things that help create this as the adults as the system… the best way to do that is engage those kids and ask them, make 'em part of the conversation. They helped create that group and run the diversity group, and they helped. So they helped the problem that they identified.'

Student RJ leaders contribute to social regulation of their peers

- 'If you create a connection between older peers on campus that's positive and a positive experience. And with the adults on campus, there's a realization on the part of those kids who were misbehaving that suddenly it's not cool anymore.'

Peer mentors help adults relate to and understand the experiences of struggling students

- 'But it's also created better relationships between administration and those kids. There's more understanding on our part as adults of the situations those kids are in. Then it breeds more empathy and then there's more of a connection'

Students should have self-determination in RJ processes.

It is important to decenter adult authority.

- 'And that's kind of our mantra is we have six kids in there on the panel. I sit behind them.'

Voluntarism from student RJ leaders and participants is necessary.

- 'They do this because they want to do it, and they're driven by trying to help others, and they just have that kind of affect about 'em'

Students should have autonomy during harm reparation.

- 'They're specifically trained for that. Then the student will come in, the panel will talk to them. We have a lead on the panel who really gets things started. They

introduce everybody. They introduce the student there. They go through the process, Hey, at any time, if you don't want to do it, we can stop. And it explains kind of the guide guidelines.'

B. RJ IS A MODEL AND STRUCTURE FOR STUDENTS' SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The value of restorative approaches is providing students with support and tools.

- 'By the end of the process, they walk out feeling supported, and I think more at ease. And that's kind of our goal…as they exit the door, they feel like they've made some connections with some upperclassmen'

RJ is about helping students navigate issues and repair harm.

- 'We're here to help navigate kids through issues, through making amends or through restoring relationships or whatever that has been damaged.'

The current schooling model is missing the structures for supporting students' social development.

- 'We're teaching them, yeah, subjects. We're intellectualizing them from the old European ideal, which is not bad. You teach 'em how to read, write, and all that arithmetic…But schools could play a role in that mentorship to help parents in partnership with parents of like, how do we teach kids when they get in a conflict with somebody, how to solve it in a healthy way?'

As social environments, students will naturally learn about social skills at school.

- 'Hey, these are things teenagers should be learning beyond the school piece, but just, and how to socialize and get together because high schools are huge social environments and this is where we see the majority of our behavior problems is out of that social environment that kids can't cope in that social environment or don't know how to.'

Mentorship and teaching is missing from traditional discipline approaches.

- 'Then they wonder, well, why does Johnny keep doing these things? Well, no one's talking to him about it because no one's having a conversation beyond five minutes about why he thinks he's doing it. And to get him to try to self-analyze, and then you helping him as kind of a mentor role as an adult, that's not happening. So why would it change?'

C. IMPLEMENTATION CONDITIONS

Adequate resources are required for effective RJ implementation.

Engaging in RP with fidelity requires resources, time, and personnel.

- 'Well, I definitely think it involves more help. So staff personnel, I've talked to my district about this, whether it's a classified paraprofessional, something that we can

train specifically for restorative justice or practices'

Funding supports restorative discipline efforts.

- 'We actually have a district line item in our budget now for restorative justice. … It's like, Hey, we need some money for this. And so they finally put several thousand dollars in our site's accounts for it'

Principals leading RJ work alone is unsustainable.

- 'So I still run it personally as the principal someday that's going to have to end because it's very time consuming in terms of that'

RJ requires a long-term perspective to implement effectively.

- 'I think a weakness a lot of educators share, including myself sometimes, is patience. A lot of times we do things whether they're initiatives or grants or whatever else, and they last a year, they last two years and we're like, oh yeah, this doesn't seem to work. And we abandon it and then we try something else. I think that's a poor practice'

Structural supports and systems contribute positively to RJ.

Technical systems support restorative approaches to discipline.

- 'We added things into our student database system for restorative justice. So now there's specific fields for it, whether or not you've done it, you can put narrative notes in there. So I enter all those in for the kids that do it.'

Structural approaches expand the impact of restorative approaches.

- 'I also think articulation, which we have also started with our feeder schools. So our junior highs, I met with one of our junior highs this last summer with their counselor who has now been tasked with starting a program like this, which feeds directly into us.'

Policy and legislation provides impetus for change to discipline policy.

Statewide legislation led to a change in school level discipline practice.

- 'And now in California, 48910, subsection K, which is disruption defiance. Now you can't, I mean, that's from a state level, but you can't suspend for that. That's against the law. So I mean, it brought about some of those changes and structural changes'

District-level policy changes led to changes in discipline practice at the school-level.

- 'And at a district level, because all three sites are operated under the same discipline matrix, I guess you could say for if they do this, you do this, that type of document. And that got restructured and a few years ago by a committee, and we were all part of it, and it really, really, really reduced the traditional discipline aspects of how we responded to incidents. And so I think it reduced suspensions by like 66% in terms of how long we suspended kids, added things in restorative

justice, alternative means of dealing with the behaviors before any suspensions took place.'

D. EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP REQUIRES OPENNESS, EMPATHY, AND INCREASED COLLECTIVISM

Leading requires non-judgement, humility, and vulnerability.

- 'You have to have a very strong sense of humility, I think in leadership, but also in restorative practices. I think that showing humility and vulnerability to people leads to better trust. And I just think that the heart of leadership really is trust the relationship and it takes time to build that, but you got to have those qualities…I know you can't lead from a mountaintop'

Overemphasis on individual efforts to change the system is ineffective.

- 'There are things that I truly love about the work and doing the work, and there are things that I truly hate about the system that I think are broken. And so again, part of my motivation for becoming an educator was due to some of those broken elements that I thought, of course, naively that somehow as an individual person in Northern California could help change'

Addressing racialized issues can be difficult because of how it reflects on schools and their leaders.

- 'And that's hard for some schools and groups…to really start to dig into that because you're really reflecting on yourself and the leadership and the culture you provide. So I think it can really lead to betterment of culture and just really recognizing that problem.'

Critical self-reflection is important for addressing discipline issues.

- 'And this was a girl who was suspended probably seven times her freshman year for fighting and other things. But it really forced us, I think as a group to say, well, what's our part of this problem? Why do they feel that way? Why are they saying they feel that way? And then is it leading to this misbehavior? And then it's leading to higher suspensions almost four times than anyone else'

Empathy, collectivism, and trust are effective approaches to leadership.

- 'We've all made mistakes as human beings. So I think it really exemplifies that process of, Hey, let's work together as this collective group, whether it's offender or panel member or victim, which I don't like that word either, but work collectively together to come up with solutions.'

Adults in schools need humility to understand issues impacting students.

- 'That takes, I think the big quality that takes is humility and it's like, Hey, yeah, maybe we aren't doing some things that help create this as the adults as the system. So what can we do to do that? And the best way to do that is engage those kids and ask them'

E. MEASURING IMPACT

Availability of discipline data was tangibly meaningful in RP efforts.

- 'Yeah, high suspension rate. And I know that across the state, that's been a conversation. It's a metric for how schools are looked at as part of the California school dashboard. It's a metric on their suspension rate. And so we saw it was pretty high. It was in the double digits comparatively to California. We were similar to many other schools, but really for our area and our size, we were high'

Discipline data illuminates racialized disproportionate discipline.

- 'But we started to analyze that problem as we have more African-American students suspended than any other student… And that's because we started to analyze that. And it was very, very interesting. And you have to get really honest about, so I started, and of course I talked to a lot of these kids that ran through it and all these African-American kids, and it's like there's a problem with them trying to fit into the school. They feel isolated. And after talking to them, getting anecdotal evidence about how they felt, we started to really analyze the problem'

The immeasurable elements of RJ are just as valuable as those that can be measured.

- 'Yeah, I think part of it is measurable, part of it's immeasurable. I think a lot of education is, and we tend to love to measure it, and we want data...our rate for kids who come through the panels, the rate of recidivism or repeat offenses is low…But I think in terms of the majority, and then the reason for that is, I think is immeasurable, which is if you create a connection between older peers on campus that's positive and a positive experience'

F. CONTRADICTION AND COMPLEXITY BETWEEN PARADIGMS

Restorative approaches can live alongside traditional approaches to discipline.

- 'So I think that that's what this process has been for us. It hasn't necessarily replaced traditional discipline. We still use some of those things, but it's a part of the process'

Traditional approaches to discipline are still expected in response to higher level behavior.

- 'We still do it because it's kind of an expectation. We've had some serious incidents. You got school threats, or you got some kid wants to threaten the school or take a picture with himself with an airsoft gun and say, I'm coming to school tomorrow to do this or that. There's certain cases where it's like, yeah, we need to hold those kids out. We got to suspend 'em. But it's really for extreme stuff like that where we still do that.'

Prevailing mindsets and paradigms among community members can be contradictory to restorative efforts.

- 'Lots of people want to see people who have done things wrong, severely punished with no question really. But then when those things are applied to them, obviously they want understanding and empathy

Georgina

A. LEADERSHIP AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

School leaders must be connected to their own humanity.

Vulnerability is a core quality in leadership aligned with RP.

- 'I think just sharing from the heart is part of being vulnerable and emanating a commitment to restorative practices.'

Connecting to one's own humanity is core to leadership.

- 'I think for me in this moment, restorative practice is around being human and I need to be human with students with staff so that I can show up in circles and show up in spaces and share my story'

Self-care helps leaders show up as their best selves.

- 'The more balanced I am in eating and getting enough sleep and taking care of myself, I think that really impacts my capacity to show up in a more restorative way. I think my self-care certainly impacts my capacity'

Self-awareness should be cultivated in interactions with others.

- 'I know my personality can get, I am kind of standoffish. I'm pretty shy and it can have a hard forehead where I am unapproachable to some people. And that's something that I've had throughout my life. And so as a leader, that can put people off for sure, and it's certainly part of my learning edge.'

Traditional conditioning of school leaders needs to be unlearned.

- 'I think that's not an easy thing for leaders to be able to do. And we're not conditioned, or the role is not conditioned to be vulnerable because we have to know it all, right?'

School leaders should center meaningful questions in decision-making.

School leaders ask meaningful questions and cultivate purpose.

- 'And then it allows us to go deep into some philosophical and structural conversations, which you don't always get through the daily. And so I think that's important, and I think that's a part of my leadership. It's just like we have to have meaningful conversations if we're going to look at what we're doing in a purposeful way.'

RP connects to a bigger question of how humans live on the planet.

- 'It kind of loops back around to systems of oppression and breaking down some of that, like restorative practice as a living practice, how that's essential. I think we have to live differently on this planet'

Principals determine the direction in which change happens and thus have decision-making power to support RP implementation.

Setting expectations for RP implementation can impact the practices of staff.

- 'We run circles with our staff and staff meetings…and it's expected, encouraged, supported to run a circle on a weekly basis'

School leaders hold their staff accountable to implementing the practices.

- 'There were two teachers who just really didn't feel comfortable with the training and I don't know how comfortable they feel now running circles... And so that's actually on me to pop in there and maybe do one to help that process along or have a counselor go in to those advisories'

Shifting culture is an effective approach to RP.

- 'And so it's also part of that culture shift. And as we're shifting, it's like, and here's a practice to help build these stronger, more safer spaces for students and staff'

Prioritizing ongoing professional learning is important

- 'I can see us doing maybe tier two next year if we can build up, or maybe even just with staff doing an in-house training of tier one circles…so that component, it's really strong as new people come'

Flexibility in structural decision-making supports RP implementation.

- 'We are accountable to the state for all assessment metrics and growth metrics. And within that, we have the autonomy to meet those expectations.'

B. SOCIAL-POLITICAL AND STRUCTURAL FACTORS IMPACT RP IMPLEMENTATION

Education structures are counter to the needs for effective RP implementation.

- 'The system that we're existing in is not set up for the time that it takes for restorative practices

State level support for RP makes implementation possible.

- 'Our introduction came from the state from a state supported position and person…there's all of these elements of funding sources that have come through the state. And because we're positioned to want to implement that, we've taken advantage and pursued those opportunities with the restorative justice pilot program and sending staff and administration and students to that last year and wanting to do that again this year.'

Social political contexts impact RP work and determine the environment in which they are attempting to be implemented.

- 'Our state is kind of split… no critical race theory and no SEL and has that

narrative. And then [redacted] for sure is in a different bubble…Who knows what happens with the elections in terms of who gets on the school boards and where that dialogue goes, but we've been able to capitalize on some of those initiatives and funds or take advantage of them.'

C. MOVING TOWARDS RESTORATIVE PARADIGMS AND NAVIGATING CONTRADICTION

Restorative and punitive approaches to discipline can exist together.

- 'And then along those same lines, some of the lessons that I've come away with that I think are crucial are about that can help maintain a restorative practice. It's still about communication and follow through and that takes time regardless and it's like, okay, this is the disciplinary action for this student that needs to be communicated with staff no matter what it is, if it's going down one route or another'

Appropriate responses to misconduct can include traditional and restorative elements.

- 'And then up until this year, from a disciplinary standpoint, we really talked about having some, if there's a fight, then there might be an initial conversation or consequence. And then the return back has often had, let's restore this relationship through conversations and through being heard'

Consequences that incorporate learning or service are more restorative.

- 'So now we have a restorative discipline plan and it's totally imperfect and not complete, but it does basically just say these are some of the big infractions you get in a fight, you threaten a teacher, you bring a weapon to school, whatever it is. And then here are the processes and plans. And so it shows that we're going to look at, there might be suspending as consequences or detention as consequences, but we've also shifted our detention to more community service elements.'

School principals must recognize and address injustice in their schools.

- 'Our counselors…recognizes the injustices of our current system and really puts voice to it and recognizes the adults in the room as contributing over and over and over to replicating systems of oppression. And so that perspective has been incredibly enlightening and challenging in some regards because it's also like, yes, that's true and what's our plan within this context? What can we do to set some things in motion that are going to help this certain situation?'

D. RESTORATIVE PRACTICES SUPPORTS THE WHOLE CHILD

Community, family, and being human are core values to a restorative school culture.

- 'I think it's in the DNA of the school that we're really fundamentally sort of

around relationships and community. When anyone were to ask what defines our school, it's community, family. And so that in itself, it has a context for restorative practices where we can really be human with each other'

RP creates community, trust, and safety.

- 'It creates a stronger community where students and staff feel safe, where they feel like belong, they have a voice, we can address the conflicts that may arise …with more trust and safety'

Supporting students academically, socially, and emotionally is a restorative practice.

- 'However, I feel like the…advisory in itself is really a restorative practice to a certain degree. It really is around creating an environment that will support students academically, social-emotionally, and through service.'

Restorative circles can positively impact learning.

- 'I think that's a challenge…for teachers to shift their mind frame to shift of 'I'm a content teacher' to, 'I run restore restorative circles because it's going to support student learning.''

Jamie

A. LEADERSHIP APPROACHES AND STANCES

Leadership is a process of organizing groups of people to move toward restorative paradigms.

Leadership requires advocacy and consensus building.

- 'Our executive director I think realized that as much of a pain in the ass that I could be and I would ask hard questions and demand certain things as I was advocating for kids and families, I think he realized that it was probably better to have me on his team'

Cultivating buy-in requires demonstrating efficacy of the practices.

- 'This more recent leadership team was more of your traditional response to discipline and very far from any kind of restorative practices. So I really felt like it was one of my missions to prove that this actually works'

Making time for RP implementation requires advocating when there are time restraints.

- 'And then this school year, at the beginning of the year after much arm wrestling, we have very little time. I got a full day of this tier one idea with restorative practices for all our teachers, and that's helped'

Advocacy work is central to gathering influence, resources, and formal authority to push RP implementation forward.

- 'I also feel like I am a big advocate for it for our executive director because as much as we disagree about things, we respect each other and we'll listen to each other about things. So I can talk to him about things where he might consider and think about it a little bit more than if other folks on our team would try to talk to him about stuff.'

Demonstrating effectiveness builds more buy-in.

- 'So pushing a lot of revision with our behavior matrix, continuing to do that work, to push that work to highlight data as we see we're getting less severe referrals sent to us that we have these anecdotal stories to share about how successful the work can be with kids and with families'

Being present, involved, and visible is an important message for the school community.

- I try to role model as much as possible. So I'm rarely in my office, I'm always out and about checking in on kids. So I have all these alarms set on my phone, so at the end of every class period…So just being around and having just informal conversation with students and with teachers, and I like to go into classrooms and visit and help and support students that I know are having a rough go'

Communication is central to moving RP forward.

- ‘Having a plan, communicating, sharing those resources little bit by little bit, checking in with staff, asking them how many circles did you do? And what are some examples of ones that went well and that kind of stuff just to keep it alive in the community's mind.’

School leaders have to navigate contradicting viewpoints from different sources.

- ‘There are some issues we've run into families that don't agree with non-punitive kind of discipline either with their own children or with some kids who may be caused harm to their kids. So that's a little tricky sometimes. And so we usually respond and saying we're here to support all students. We're coming from a place of care and support. We want to help all of our students learn how to be the best people they can be.’

Punitive mindsets and attitudes in a minority of staff members can present a disproportionate obstacle to RP implementation.

- ‘I think they're a minority of adults in our school and probably some parents also who want the harsh, hurtful consequences when certain things happen. And it's like, it seems like they don't care what may have been at the root of why somebody did what they did. It's more about what they did. And so that's definitely been challenging’

Leadership values for RP implementation.

Love is an important value for working with students and their families.

- ‘Relationships really are critical so that the students and the families can really grow to trust us. We speak very openly about love and loving our students and loving our families and really being a place that cares and we want to support our students as best as possible.’

Steadfastness and patience is required for changing school culture.

- ‘But just constantly trying to get him to realize how effective and important this work is.’

Allowing autonomy is important in RP

- ‘What some people don't like and don't agree with is that I will never do it if everyone doesn't want to participate. So I'll never force people to do that, where before I learned or started reading about restorative practices and stuff like that, I would force it and I was like, well, you need to apologize. So I've grown a little bit there, where let's say I have two adults who are clashing with two teachers. If one of them doesn't feel ready to have any kind of mediation like that, then I'm not going to do it. And I've had the teacher on the other end then accuse me of not being supportive because I wasn't forcing a mediation. It's like they didn't quite understand that it might actually make things worse.’

Continuous learning is integral to implementing RP.

- ‘I'm a big reader. I gobble up books like crazy, and one of 'em I read was called

Hacking School Discipline, something like 10 Ways to Hack for Restorative practices…There was another one that I read that really resonated with me. It's called the School Wellness Wheel, and it's about trauma-informed practices and mastery-based learning. And it was just all these things that I really wanted to be sure that we held onto at my school. And so I was reading these books, sharing things with staff, saying, Hey, I'm going to share a new kind of restorative practice with you every month, and we can try it out with advisory and we can try it out with whomever.'

Continuous learning and improvement are important attributes.

- 'Nothing's perfect. And when we're learning how to do something, we are always going to stumble a little bit. And we often get up even stronger and more skilled because of it, but not to give up.'

Implementing RP with intention and purpose are the most effective approaches.

- 'I still think it's important to have sort of a multi-year plan. That was something that was one of my biggest ahas through the training, through this pilot. I wanted to do everything right now all at once, but the trainers helped me think about how, well, if the community's not quite ready, it can actually cause more harm then do good. So we want to avoid that for sure, because trying to address harm that's already caused and make amends with that.'

Personal experiences are a source of understanding and empathy when working with marginalized students.

- 'I've always felt that it's really important for young people who may feel invisible to really know that they're valued and loved. And I've always operated from that kind of value. I guess when I was a younger person, moved around a lot, had a lot of really negative experiences in schools where people made a lot of assumptions about me that weren't true and ended up causing harm, which was unfortunate.'

Cultural Responsiveness and Attunement to Community

Understanding students' backgrounds is important for knowing what they're bringing with them to school.

- 'So most of our students are very poor. They come from a poor family, very hardworking parents who care very much about their children. We work very strongly with our families, so we pull them in to problem solve as a team as often as we can...I'd say with confidence that a majority of our students are either living in toxic stress or they're living with some kind of PTSD, probably have very high ACEs scores, trying to figure out if we're even able to ask our students that information. It might help us understand them a little bit more and how to best respond to them.'

Supporting students' native language proficiency builds trust.

- 'Most of 'em speak Spanish as their native language. Most of 'em are straight from Mexico or first generation. The middle school is a bilingual program, so we really

feel it's an asset to promote bilingualism and biliteracy. So all of our students are in a Spanish class, even if they don't speak it as a native language, and all of our students are in some kind of other class where it's supposed to be taught in both languages. It's an area of growth for us...Our students, a lot of 'em have trust issues. Relationships really are critical so that the students and the families can really grow to trust us'

B. RP DEVELOPS RELATIONAL SKILLS FOR STUDENTS AND STAFF

Education has a role in helping students develop their emotional and relational skills.

- 'They may have some issues with their development because of things they've been exposed to so often their responses are strong and they have strong reactions to things. So having an approach to work with them that allows us to really listen and help them figure out how they're feeling, how it's impacted people and what they can do to make things better, really works for most of our kids'

Adults need to be able to see beyond students' behaviors toward their root causes and work to help them understand their feelings.

- 'And so if a kid was having a bad day and he told me to go fuck myself because he was just livid. The teacher next door expelled that kid. And I was like, no, let's go for a walk and calm down and figure out what's going on. It's not about me, it's something else is going on and I want to see.'

Restorative work requires adults to have skills to identify and manage their own emotions

- 'They're learning the skill set also, and I guess backing it up a little bit students are, and adults really honest, if I'm being honest, are better able to identify when they're having some kind of strong emotion that they may need to manage.'

Adults often do not have skills to resolve conflict with students.

- 'So if there's a conflict, then a student, you won't be like, okay, so do we feel like we have the skillset to be able to talk this out ourselves?...Or a student might say, Hey, this happened the other day in class when we had a sub. I'd really like for us to do a restorative circle to process or just some kind of community circle to process. So that's all just naturally happening right now where we're at, some teachers just really have a hard time having these conversations with kids. So we have some forms, like some question handout things with guiding questions to help students process through. But I'm not seeing very many teachers then actually use it.'

RP provides relational skills that matter regardless of age.

- 'So we have a ways to go, but that's where I really want to see the school get to and also with adults, because a lot of my work, unfortunately in this role is also managing adult conflict. And it seems like these skills are also really important no matter your age.'

Allowing for room to grow applies to staff members as well as students.

- ‘So right now there's somebody on my team, on the admin team who's very frustrated that I haven't written up this adult and put 'em on a professional growth plan because that's what they need. And I don't agree. I think that there's still a little bit more room for informal growth, and that's a source of criticism about my leadership with some folks.’

C. ADEQUATE RESOURCES FOR RP IMPLEMENTATION

Restorative work alone is not enough to support students with severe behavior.

- ‘We rely a lot on our social workers to support us with mediations when we're not available…we have a really strong partnership with this company or organization…And they actually have one of our little portables, they're not our employees, it's just partners on campus who are also able to offer therapy, and there's a way that they're even able to do it so the families don't have to pay out of pocket, which is super cool. So that layer is also helping us address some issues because as students, as we see behaviors that aren't healthy or are problematic, if it's a severe behavior or if it's something that continues to happen over and over and over again, then we meet with the family.’

Physical space is a basic consideration for implementing RP.

- ‘We don't necessarily even have the space. So I got a larger space for a little middle school administration building this year. We just moved in two or so months ago. So now we have the space to be able to do that kind of thing. And there's three of us in that building.’

Hazel

A. STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION APPROACHES

School change is more likely to happen when a systems approach is taken.

Approaching RP work with mindsets first.

- 'Let's talk about it. Let's get in the weeds about it. Let's figure out what it is and where we are, what is our mindset with it?'

Working with adults and their mindsets is a key obstacle to overcome.

- 'Honestly, the biggest challenges really are more adults than students.'

RP implementation requires continuous learning.

- 'We come up with a plan to repair the harm and restore harmony. So that in itself is still, we're tweaking it, we're learning, we're readjusting.'

All members of the school community must be involved.

- 'Parents are involved, teachers are involved. We've had sports coaches when an incident has happened in sports where the coaches have to participate and there's that expectation now that this is going to happen. This is when it's scheduled, it's sent out as a calendar invite, people are notified, parents are called, everyone is notified. So that expectation is there.'

RP should be integrated into school policies and structures.

- 'We started looking at revising our behavior learning matrix, which had not been revised since 2016. Like, oh my God, there were no relational restorative practices anywhere in the matrix…it was all out school suspension, no re-teaching positive behaviors, modeling positive behaviors.'

Capacity building at all levels is important.

- My end goal vision is that we end up training our older kiddos, our older students, to be able to facilitate those low level circles, those low level restorative conferences if we have to. We want it to be more student led and less adult led'

Communication is integral to building consensus across groups of people.

Language used in communication can impact perception.

- 'And so that's why we don't even use the word restorative justice anymore anywhere. And we don't call our space for this to happen, anything to do with restorative justice. Our space is called the Student Success Center. And we say relational practices now, because literally we were told that we're not stern enough and we should be kicking all kids out of school.'

Communicating with the community is an important role for principals.

- ‘We did not do a good job of rolling out what restorative practices are and what they mean. Parents still come in that mindset, well, my kid got into a fight, so they're going to be suspended for 10 days. Well, no, not on the first offense. They're not, unless it's something great bodily harm, stuff like that. So that growth mindset is hard.’

Demonstrating effectiveness brings people on board.

- ‘So even trying to show these adults the benefit that we are having, I still feel it's an uphill battle that they don't see that. And it's just time. I guess it's just time. And showing adults the improvements we're making student-wise.

At times, principals may need to issue directives.

- ‘But then there are times when…It is a directive. It is a non-negotiable. It is happening’

Local politics can interfere with RP.

- ‘Honestly and truly, unfortunately, one of the largest challenges we are still having is our school board. I think they're very much not on the right side. The word restorative justice, they don't like it. They think we're brainwashing kids, and they kind of lumped restorative practice right in with critical race theory, which has nothing to do with anything.’

Personal and professional commitment to RP is required.

RP work requires full commitment.

- ‘You either drink the Kool-Aid, you think about drinking the Kool-Aid, or you push back, you're either all in, maybe a little bit or not at all. And I still have some staff that are not in it at all.’

A commitment to following through with the practices.

- ‘You have to have a plan, you got to sign it. We all got to agree to it.’

Commitment and passion are necessary to engage in school change.

- ‘You got to believe it...You have to stand firm in your resolve and your willingness to do what's right for kids, what's best for kids.’

Adequate resources and funding sustain RP.

RP requires ongoing funding.

- ‘I am not going to lie. I am terrified after September of 24’. I am going to have to be able to sustain my facilitators in there because it's not in our budget, it's not funded in our budget, and we don't receive additional funding for this. And outside resources are limited in this area’

Physical space is important.

- ‘We are very fortunate right now that… we have two facilitators in our room, in

our space that can run our low level relational practices circles or our full blown on restorative justice conferences. We are very fortunate, and the expectation of that is right now, since we are about 18 months into having this space and then having these facilitators, the expectation is now that…students can walk into that space as a self-referral to go in and ask for support.

B. RP AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ADULTS AND STUDENTS TO POSITIVE RELATIONAL SKILLS

RP and SEL are crucial to academic learning.

- 'You got to know where your kids are before you can do the instruction…kids don't learn from people they don't like. And so if you don't have some sort of connection with the teacher, you can talk math all you want, but they may not listen to you'

RPs become essential to schools as they're implemented.

- 'I can't picture this school without this space…Adults need this, right? I'm not saying it's the end all be all, but if people, anybody, any age can understand, look, I made a mistake, but I have a chance to fix it. I have a chance to repair that harm. I have a chance to redeem myself and do better. What a beautiful world this would be, right?'

All humans in education need the opportunity to develop relational skill on an ongoing basis.

- 'Just those skills and self-confidence to be able to sit across the table or in a circle with someone and say, look, you hurt my feelings, but you have a chance. We have a chance to fix that. To me, that is so powerful, so impactful, and shoot me as an adult, I am still learning those skills. And I'm ancient. You know what I mean? I'm older than dirt, and I still struggle sometimes with those difficult conversations and then going in and repairing damage that I might've caused.'

RP teaches students about responsibility.

- 'And when somebody messed up, you said, okay, you made a mistake. Let's fix it. And you're teaching the whole child. It's not just reading, writing, math, you're teaching the whole kid. And that whole kid is their social emotional learning, their mental health, their wellbeing, are they fed?'

Educators play an important role in teaching social emotional skills.

- 'I guess that's why I get so frustrated with my board thinking it's not a teacher's responsibility to teach kids how to use manners or to make sure they have food in their belly or to check on 'em. Why are they crying or teach them conflict skills. I push back on that so hard. Yes, it is. If they don't have it at home, how are they going to learn? Who's going to teach?'

Students are active participants in restorative processes.

- ‘The student came and said on their own I think I need a restorative with this teacher first. That's profound…What I found even more amazing is that the teacher agreed. And so they went into the student success center, they had the conference. The student was able to express…I think you don't like me, and this is how I'm feeling in your classroom.’

Linh

A. HOLISTIC LEADERSHIP

Connection with the self is the foundation for work with others.

RP has a spiritual element to it.

- 'If you're going to do restorative practice and you get it, you have to understand it's a spiritual practice…The spiritual is the work of the soul and it's not a set of skills, not as a practice. If you think of RJ as what you do, then you're missing it. It's who you be.'

Seeing the humanity of people when they cause harm is important.

- 'So what do most people do? A stay away order. What would that have done? You wouldn't have humanized, you wouldn't have learned about the gift of this family and you wouldn't have helped build pride back to that child and give them back…that child never gets to feel affirmed that this is a beloved grandmother who gets to come back on campus and he feels pride again and he gets to his status as a human, his family status gets raised again.'

Presence is important for RP.

- 'You have to be present enough to be able to see it and not see them as an accumulation of all their negative behaviors.'

Connection with self on an intuitive and spiritual level makes RP work more resonant.

- 'If you can understand the power of your energy to be in sync with yourself and with your highest truth…it doesn't have to be a religion, your intuition, your internal wisdom, you have that to help others do that, you have to start with self and then you vibrate and you resonate. They resonate with you, right? Yes, you teach and you offer the head stuff, but it's also how you sit with them, how you play with them, how you discipline them.'

RP is about who you are, not just the practical strategies.

- 'It's not in the doing it's being in the moment as you experience something, if you're in your highest presence and clarity how you be determines how you act'

Self identity work is a foundation for RP.

- 'But if you're doing RJ work, you got to start from a place of who you see yourself to be. Who do you aspire to be in your best self? If you can be seen and feel seen, then you can start seeing other people.'

RP has transformative impacts on both the school and the community around it.

Caregivers and families need opportunities to repair harm.

- 'When I'm able to address it with the family member to see and to get the essence

of that person's beauty, and they then feel seen and recognized that it was their passion, their love for their child that has them reacting in these very intense ways that you offer face saving opportunities for people to feel like they could continue to engage at the school.'

Accountability is important for all members of a school community

- 'But that was like I think 12, 14 years ago. And they were new to our school, transferred in and she yelled at I think another parent or another child, and her grandson was there…And so because it was so public…she was willing to apologize. She wanted to do it in the community meeting. So she apologized in front of the whole school at the community meeting. It was very beautiful.'

Transformative potentials of RJ occur when parents are part of the process.

- 'When the restorative circles happen in the classroom, sometimes the parent is there…because there's doubt that the parent really cares enough or is hands-on, but they just might not know what the hell to do. They're spinning themselves at home and sometimes the teacher starts believing that…but the parent is so on board to say, oh my goodness, I'm so sorry that this is happening...I'm really sorry if anyone's been caused harm and I'm here to make sure and he knows and that that's not who we are. You see how powerful that would be.'

RJ harm reparation processes can help community members develop conflict resolution skills.

- 'I worked with them one-on-one deeply naming their stuff, appreciating being forgiven and given the skillset and the modeling, the coaching and how you go about repairing that both with the other parents and with the other child. And in this case, both moms got to such a beautiful place that they repaired it with each other. I swear it is so beautiful. They repaired it with each other, they repaired it with each other's children.'

B. DISCIPLINE AS AN ACT OF CARE

Discipline should result in more connection.

- 'I work with the adults to say, when you do discipline, does the discipline still serve to bring that child closer to you or does that push that child away?'

Students who cause harm need opportunities to write new narratives about themselves.

- 'So those narratives happen all the time. And sometimes it gets ascribed, ascribed to race and gender. There's another black boy who's acting out this way, dah, dah, dah. And as a teacher, you have an opportunity and a responsibility to narrate a new beginning, narrate a new identity.'

Helping young people through difficulty is a necessary part of development and maturation.

- 'You can discipline from a place of solidity and clarity and insight, understanding and compassion. Those things will lay the foundation so that when big difficulties

happen, you know how to navigate and don't be afraid of the difficulty. Difficulties is when transformation happens.'

Effectively leading RP means understanding discipline meaningfully.

- 'If you have other people you're mentoring and training and they're doing discipline and they're good on their RJ work, but they're not so good on the discipline work. No uh uh, you can't, then it's soft. You don't hold credibility. You don't hold credibility with teachers and parents.'

Attending to students' physical needs is an important consideration when interpreting behavior.

- 'I've seen that a lot of children, they get to a level where no matter how much love and talk and the best RJ practices that you can put into place, they will not get there with you until you let them eat. Until you're like, did you eat? And you're like, oh crap, you didn't eat. You needed breakfast, you ate lunch or you ate crap. And people didn't believe me at first. They thought I was going soft. …Now more and more people see how quickly a child can get back to themselves…the developmental moves that they can make once they have that blood sugar regulated.'

C. ATTENDING TO AND UNDERSTANDING POWER

Principals need to assert themselves to maintain status in the community when harm is being done.

- 'I will check you publicly if need be because people need to know that there's somebody here on campus…if it continues and is repeated, they need to know that you are going to be firm and you're no nonsense around it. You're professional.'

Approaching adults and students in compassionate ways does not mean being assertive is not required.

- 'And at some point, as much as you build a forgiving and loving and compassionate and supportive community, at some point students, they need to also feel safe and protected. And it's a balance. And we have to name it.'

Power is an important dynamic to discuss in RP.

- 'Young people need to be taught about power…because what the experience we know of power is usually when it goes wrong, when power doesn't feel right. And so when young people and adults even have a discourse around power where it's about personal power and responsibility, those things lay the foundation for restorative practice.'

Attunement to issues of race, culture, and identity are integral to RP.

- 'I'm always kind of looking at the race, gender dynamics of how it's kind of being perceived…Sometimes I try to find ways to see if the other adults are aware of that too, and to what extent we can explicitly have that conversation

Adults need to understand their power and influence.

- ‘When I'm working with my teachers, it's about what's your sphere of influence? So if that child might be having all these difficult, what's your sphere of influence? And when there is a transgression, even though there's a zillion other factors, what's the part that you could contribute to? And the balancing act in the way that you coach so that people don't feel like you're blaming them. People are used to hearing that as blame, but it's about power.’

Narratives and stories on the individual level impact reality.

- ‘If they get constant input of data and stories from somebody else…and it's like, which is your truth? So when you kids say things, you're like, so where'd you get that idea? And that's the new danger.’

Labels used to describe behaviors can impact people’s perceptions

- ‘I caution people on tossing such a laden judgment term like that…once the parent hears that and once it's been in the water and it's in the water and the teacher tosses it casually and parent hears that, they don't really hear anything else, they can't humanize the other child.’