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# A Case Study: The Effects of Restorative Justice Course on African-American Students in an Urban School.

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A CASE STUDY: THE EFFECTS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE COURSE  
ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS IN AN URBAN SCHOOL.

by

Troy D Washington

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Urban Education

at

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December 2018

## ABSTRACT

### A CASE STUDY: THE EFFECTS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE COURSE ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS IN AN URBAN SCHOOL.

by

Troy Washington

The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 2018  
Under the Supervision of Professor Gary L. Williams

This ethnographic critical case study investigated the usefulness of a restorative justice course as an alternative to punitive discipline in a high school setting, the goal of which was to holistically address ways to effectively deal with conflict, safety and wellness issues of African-American students in an urban high school. The researcher has worked closely with the school and identified the strengths of an under-utilized approach that has the potential to completely eradicate excessive suspensions and expulsions. Given the research purpose of studying a model of discipline with possible replication at other sites, the research approach was that of a single critical case study employing methods of document analysis, observation, and individual interviews.

Alternative approaches to discipline in urban school settings is sporadic and is rarely promoted with concerns of its gentle nature and inability to be retributive. For the purposes of this study, the term alternative was used as an umbrella term to encompass the multiple facets of restorative justice and the impact it has on school cultures, differences in organizational practices, mutual engagement, dialogue, negotiation, power, and joint problem solving. While there is growing support for restorative practices in school settings around the globe, the evidence for their effectiveness is somewhat mixed.

Given the importance of equitable learning as a common strategy in teaching students in an urban environment, this research study attempted to understand in detail the effectiveness of a restorative justice model used successfully in an urban school. The research indicates both students and staff responded positively to the use of restorative practices at this urban high school. Suspensions were limited, the student attendance rate was high, and academic success was above average as compared to other schools in the district. Relationships between students and staff were strong, as well as the relationships between students. Restorative practices were not only used at the high school, but were extended in many of the students' homes and communities. Moreover, restorative practices were successfully used as an alternative to punitive discipline approaches.

The study describes and documents the unfolding of these practices. The focus of the research was to investigate the lived experiences of the 2017-2018 12th grade students and staff at one urban high school that implemented a program of restorative practices with fidelity in order to eliminate excessive suspensions and expulsions. The research extends the study findings to discuss the nature of learning in this context as well as the implications for teachers in facilitating peacekeeping circles and repair harm circles in their classroom.

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Moreover, to those aspiring Restorative Justice Practitioners allow this bit of information to provide you with an outline in which to follow. Being a part of the restorative justice community requires a commitment to service but more importantly a willingness to contribute to the fundamental tenets established by our indigenous predecessors. It is imperative to remember that we do not own restorative justice and it is not to be treated as some sort of concept to be dominated but as a service to be provided. Learn to become an innovative thinker, and advocate for children. Meet them at their level!

Finally, I dedicate this entire manuscript to the late Dr. Melvin Jones, who fully understood the importance of social service and dedicated his entire life to social progress. Dr. Jones was exceptionally gifted in the area of community building. Your contributions will forever be considered as I push forth the mission of restorative justice.

## I. INTRODUCTION

One growing area of concern in urban schools throughout America is the punitive approach to discipline. More schools are embracing the practice on school discipline and policy of “zero tolerance” without considering the long-term negative effects it has on students. Specifically, African-Americans are reportedly being targeted for behavior related infractions, (i.e. suspensions, referrals) and defined as having irreparable psychological, behavioral, and academic problems, in some instances seven times as much as their peers (Hughes & Chen, 2013). As stated by Albert Hughes, African American students in predominately urban schools are not only being targeted for the over use of punitive discipline, consequently, they are being undereducated and stereotyped in a way that humiliates and discourages their academic progress. The zero-tolerance policy suggest a removal process where students being disciplined are taken out of the class and kept in a disciplinary holding area until further notice (Dedinsky, 2012).

Restorative Justice (RJ) is a system of criminal justice that focuses on the rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with victims and the community at large. More schools are focusing on RJ because it encourages academic achievement. Despite lack of evidence that zero tolerance policies work, more schools are expanding zero-tolerance policies as a direct “response” to the rampage shootings that occurred during the late 1990’s and early 2000’s the policy makers have very little idea as to what contributes to such behavior, i.e. alienation, distrust, bullying, segregation, and a lack of caring (Shah, 2013).

There are different views and approaches about how to best reach the goal of providing a safe and supportive school for students without the use of excessive discipline. One approach to school-wide discipline includes a “zero tolerance” philosophy, which can result in severe penalties being applied to a wide range of infractions with little consideration for unique circumstances. This approach often focuses on removing a student from school with the intended

result of curtailing the offending behavior for that student and serving as an example of deterrence for other students (Nelson, 2014). The “zero tolerance” approach to discipline was generally used on those that committed the most egregious offense; however, now students are suspended and expelled for having butter knives and theater prop swords in their possession (Simmons, 2009). The federal Gun-Free Schools Act, enacted in 1994, was the vehicle for an era of severe punishment for minor offenses (Shah, 2013). A **zero-tolerance policy in schools** is a strict enforcement of regulations and bans against undesirable behaviors or possession of items.

The label of zero tolerance began with the Gun-Free School Act of 1994, when Congress authorized public school funding subject to the adoption of zero-tolerance policies.- Similar policies of intolerance coupled with expulsions for less serious behaviors than bringing a weapon to school had long been a part of private, and particularly religious, schools. The use of zero-tolerance policies in secular, public schools increased dramatically after the Columbine High School Massacre, with principals declaring that safety concerns made them want zero tolerance for weapons (Meernik, 2003).

#### **A. Background of the Problem**

According to Boyes-Watson (2008), public education across the nation is preparing students for a winless battle. Black students, more specifically black boys are disproportionately disciplined (e.g., suspensions and expulsions) in K-12 public schools, according to the US Government Accountability Office analysis of Department of Education (Education) national civil rights data for school year 2016-17, the most recent available. These disparities are widespread and persist regardless of the type of disciplinary action, level of school poverty, or type of public school attended. For example, Black students accounted for 15.5 percent of all public school students, but represented about 39 percent of students suspended from school—an overrepresentation of about 23 percentage points. In all estimations, that is a flat out war on a particular group of individuals. Policies of zero tolerance and the youth justice system are

modeled after the adult punitive system. These policies treat young people as if they were the cause of the problem. “As a result, we do not respond to troubled behavior with connection, support, listening, responsiveness, caring, compassion, or love. Instead, we increasingly rely on surveillance, detention, suspension, expulsion, and incarceration” (p. 4).

America is one of the wealthiest nations in the world, yet poverty is increasing in each sector of society and in record numbers. America is gradually becoming a country separated not only by class but also by race. The have-nots have outnumbered the haves (Pierce & Stapleton, 2003). Public schools in urban areas are being dissipated by outside influences and those influencing public school policy are affecting schools functionality. Poverty, racism, classism, drugs, and crime all influence the educational system. School officials across the nation are increasingly using punitive policies to address discipline. Suspending students for misbehavior in the classroom has become the preferred method of discipline (Fries & DeMitchell, 2007).

More recently, there has been a focused effort to determine if there is enough research to justify the implementation of the zero tolerance policy in schools. The American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) thoroughly analyzed the zero tolerance policy, but was not able to find any other studies that evaluated this policy to find out whether or not it was effective. There are few details known about how teacher supervision, classroom management expectations, suspension and expulsion rules, or established policies on bullying, crisis intervention and sexual harassment affect levels of school violence (Astor, Guerra, & Van Acker, 2009). The American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) concluded that “Ultimately, an examination of the evidence shows that zero-tolerance policies as implemented have failed to achieve the goals of an effective system of school discipline” (p. 14). Without evidence from empirical studies, it comes to question why suspensions continue to be used as a primary strategy for discipline in some school districts.

The increase of school violence, along with the political and social pressure to maintain school order, consistently overshadows students' rights, especially for students of color (Browne, Losen, & Wald, 2003). The current educational system utilizes due process rules. Students are often disciplined under strict punitive practices that seldom allow for interpretation of the facts or circumstances surrounding the offense (Reyes, 2006). The zero-tolerance policies rely on punitive approaches rather than restorative approaches to discipline.

A discussion of the significance of a problem can be an opportunity to discuss ways to contribute to policy, influence practice, develop theory, or spur social action (McCarthy, J. D., & Hoge, D. R., 1987). From a research perspective in terms of theoretical development, this study identifies a gap in the literature with respect to restorative justice practices impact on African-American students in which the study seeks to add knowledge. This knowledge may touch upon several ways to alter educational policy, practice, theory, or social action contributions. Listed below are some specific ways that knowledge from this study might be additionally significant on a practical level.

Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) is an urban school district that relies on suspensions as their primary means of discipline. When compared to Academy X and other inner city urban school districts in America, the MPS system's rate of suspensions is the highest in the nation. Table 1 marks the number of students and percentage of all students who were suspended during the 2011-2012 school year through the 2016-2017 school year. Throughout urban school districts across the nation, the MPS system's rate of suspensions is the highest (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2018).



*Number and Percent of Suspensions in all MPS Sites from 2011-2012 through 2016-2017*

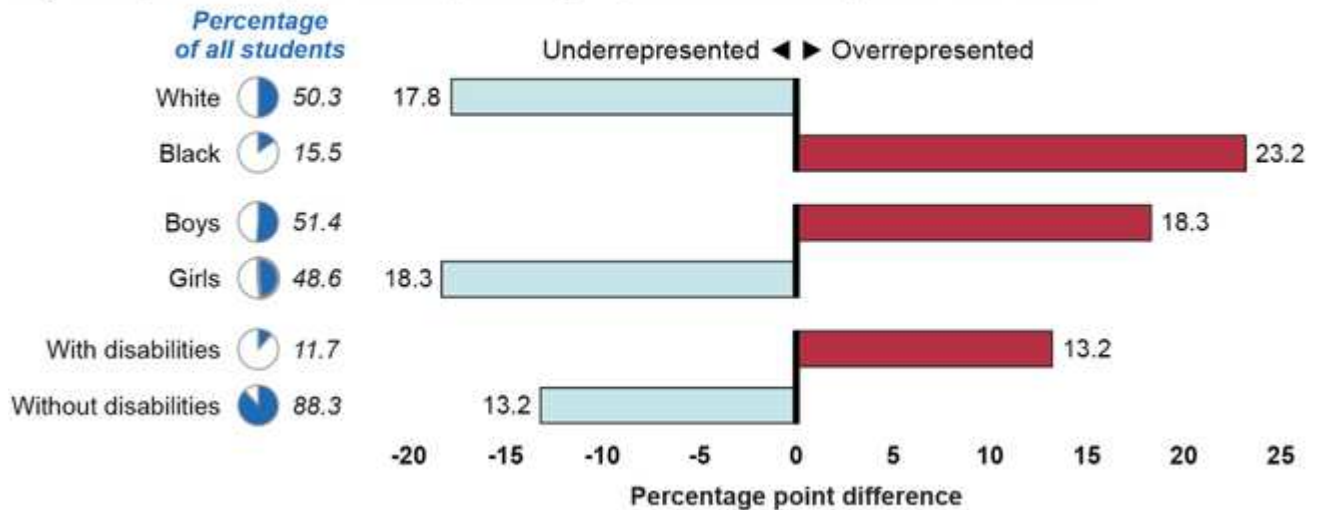
| <b>Percent of Students Suspended</b> | <b>School Years</b> | <b>Number of Students Suspended (on at least one occasion)</b> | <b>Total Number of Suspensions</b> | <b>Percent of 9<sup>th</sup> graders suspended</b> |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| 21.3%                                | 2011-2012           | 21,578                                                         | 70,054                             | 41.8%                                              |
| 22.7%                                | 2012-2013           | 22,405                                                         | 72,972                             | 44.0%                                              |
| 24.9%                                | 2013-2014           | 24,171                                                         | 79,065                             | 48.3%                                              |
| 26.5%                                | 2014-2015           | 25,478                                                         | 87,016                             | 49.6%                                              |
| 25.3%                                | 2015-2016           | 23,791                                                         | 75,483                             | 47.6%                                              |
| 25.4%                                | 2016-2017           | 23,165                                                         | 72,801                             | 47.8%                                              |

(Milwaukee Public Schools Data Warehouse, 2017).

These paradigmatic descriptions within MPS regarding the nature of suspensions in urban school systems show a desire to be more punitive in their approach to discipline in spite of the racial divide it creates. Such a description serves only to provide trend analyses data, depicting increasing percentages of students of color who receive a disproportionate number of suspensions as the effect of their misconduct that is similar to their peers.

## Students Suspended from School Compared to Student Population, by Race, Sex, and Disability Status, School Year 2016-17

This chart shows whether each group of students was underrepresented or overrepresented among students suspended out of school. For example, boys were overrepresented by about 18 percentage points because they made up about 51% of all students, but nearly 70% of the students suspended out of school.



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection. | GAO-18-258

The first area of significance centers on the school system’s adoption of restorative justice. Recall that this study’s problem statement centered on the utilization of suspensions as a first, rather than last, resort. Hence, the adoption of restorative approaches to discipline signified Academy X High School’s concerted attempt to depart from a perceived overreliance on punitive responses. The uniqueness of my study will address the disparities between black students and white student’s way of being disciplined.

There are different views and approaches about how to best reach this goal of providing a safe and supportive school for students. One approach to school-wide discipline includes a “zero tolerance” philosophy, which can result in severe penalties being applied to a wide range of infractions with little consideration for unique circumstances (Hirschfield, 2008). This approach often focuses on removing a student from school with the intended result of curtailing the offending behavior for that student and serving as an example of deterrence for other students (Nelson, 2014). The “zero tolerance” approach to discipline was once reserved for the most serious of offenses; however, now students are suspended and expelled for having butter knives

and theater prop swords in their possession. The federal Gun-Free Schools Act, enacted in 1994, was a catalyst for an era of severe punishment for minor offenses (Shah, 2013).

The label of zero tolerance began with the Gun-Free School Act of 1994, when Congress authorized public school funding subject to the adoption of zero-tolerance policies.- Similar policies of intolerance coupled with expulsions for less serious behaviors than bringing a weapon to school had long been a part of private, and particularly religious, schools. The use of zero-tolerance policies in secular, public schools increased dramatically after the Columbine High School Massacre, with principals declaring that safety concerns made them want zero tolerance for weapons (McMahon, L., & Sharpe, E., 2006).

Thus, an initial assumption surfaces: Restorative justice would be implemented to reduce school suspensions and increase the understanding of pro-social behavior expected of students referred for misconduct to the academic course, all resulting in improvements in academic achievement. Should both students enrolled in the course, and students referred to the course for misconduct, benefit from the experience, then sound and valid reasons will exist to continue the expenditure of resources and merit consideration of further expansion of restorative justice programming (Kajs, (2006).

There is also a preconceived notion that teaching the principles of restorative justice to high school students in some way improves their understanding of alternative behavior methods and therefore directs them toward additional service besides disruptive behavior (Hamilton, M.V., 2008).

In turn, if effective, the participating students will perceive themselves more positively due to their involvement in helping their peers respond to discipline issues in a responsible, pro-social manner (Fullan, M., 2005).

Secondly, should this study achieve beneficial results to justify the continuation and expansion of Restorative Justice, and then the findings might be used to improve the way in

which restorative justice is implemented, rather than the way it is currently in use, educational policies may be changed. Further, additional information may be used to gather information for implementation of the course in supplementary schools within the school district. In this sense, the study would demonstrate an “urban causation” impact (Kupchick, 2009).

A third area of significance arises in the leadership capacity at the high school involved in the study. Moreover, although Academy X is a charter public school located in Milwaukee. It prides itself as a pioneer within the Milwaukee Public School systems for adopting restorative practice as an academic course (Lewis, 2003). Occurring in the context of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students federal grant initiative, lessons learned from their work is having national implications. An academic course centered on restorative justice practices might potentially receive consideration as an innovative program nationally, from whence these Milwaukee urban schools can boast leadership. By aiding, other institutions outside of MPS and beyond, Academy X high school potentially benefit from a boost in their standing while improving their own school climates (Lipman, 2003).

This study may add to related fields of research, knowledge, practice, and theory through the uniqueness in how we administer discipline equitably, and compatibility of the research as I look at the different racial groups. Restorative practices offer an opportunity for educators in schools to create safe and peaceful environments that honor and respect everyone in the school community. Increased safety and decreased violence are supported through restorative practices implementation in the schools. This leads to a peaceful learning environment where students stay in school and concentrate on learning (Skiba, 2009).

### **B. Statement of the problem**

In 2008, within the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) system, high rates of student suspensions for discipline caused the school district’s administrators to proactively seek solutions and alternatives to suspensions as a primary form of discipline for student misconduct. One such

potential solution, the utilization of restorative justice practices as an approach to student misconduct, gained favor with MPS (Dedinsky, 2012).

Given the struggles of the Milwaukee Public School district regarding high suspension rates, can it be determined that students enrolled in a restorative justice course help the school district achieve its goal of lowering suspension rates while improving academics and safety? Is an academic course centered upon teaching training, and experiencing restorative justice a valuable experience for students? Are the high school students enrolled in the restorative justice academic course influenced to change their thinking or behavior in a positive, pro-social manner?

The Council of Great City Schools stated that “(t)he disciplinary process within the Milwaukee Public Schools is oriented toward setting forth punitive consequences, rather than toward reinforcing positive behavior” (Bowditch, C., 1993). In order to set a strategic framework, the Council recommended that charter schools like Academy X challenge MPS’s approach to discipline and adopt a three-tiered model of positive behavioral interventions, commonly referred to as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (Bear, 2012). The Council recognized a need for public schools to address the underlying issues at the root of student misconduct. Thus, Academy X high school responded by creating a course that dealt with discipline differently than that of the Milwaukee public school system. The course is an alternative approach to the punitive policies that the Milwaukee Public Schools have in place. There is a distinction between traditional public schools like MPS and charter schools like Academy X high school. That distinction allows Academy X greater discretion to implement what Dougherty (2004) describes as compensatory education. Academy X provides a compensatory education (supplementary programs or services designed to help children at risk succeed) through its restorative justice course.

## In a Nutshell

**Charter schools are public schools that are independent of school districts through contracts with state or local boards.**

The basic concept of charter schools is that they exercise increased autonomy in return for greater accountability. As public schools, charter schools are open to all children, do not require entrance exams, cannot charge tuition, and must participate in state testing and federal accountability programs. The schools draw up their own “charter” which is a set of rules and performance standards that they are held accountable for.

Related: *What is a Charter School?*

**Traditional public schools are tied to school districts and set their curriculums based on state education standards.**

Traditional public schools must adhere to education standards set by the state education board and are not exempt from any state, federal, or local laws regarding education. They are governed by the school district, which is run by a democratically elected school board.

## Comparing Charter Schools and Traditional Public Schools

| Category               | Charter Schools                                                                                                                         | Traditional Public Schools                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Funding                | Funded on a per-pupil basis with government funds and can sometimes receive private funding, but typically receive less funding overall | Funded partially through state budget funding but primarily through local taxes                                                                                     |
| Government Regulation  | Independently run but must meet standards outlined in their charter in order to secure state funding                                    | Must adhere to all state school board regulations and laws, governed by school districts, which implement state law. Local school board (elected) runs the district |
| Teacher Certification  | Teachers don't necessarily have to be certified, but this differs from state to state                                                   | Teachers must be certified by the state education board                                                                                                             |
| Curriculum Flexibility | Curriculum is also flexible, but school is held accountable to a performance contract                                                   | Curriculum is decided by the state education board, and implemented by the school district                                                                          |
| Application Process    | May have an application, but students do not have to take an                                                                            | All students within the school district are free to attend the                                                                                                      |

|  |               |                                  |
|--|---------------|----------------------------------|
|  | entrance exam | school, and do not have to apply |
|--|---------------|----------------------------------|

**How they are the same:** Charter schools and traditional public schools are both free, cannot discriminate against students they admit to their schools, and receive state funding.

**How they're different:** Charter schools receive state funding on a fixed, per-pupil basis, while traditional public schools receive more funding more heavily in the form of local taxpayer dollars. Both types of schools directly compete for state funding.

In terms of accountability, state schools adhere directly to standards set by the state board of education, but charter schools are bound to their charter, which is drawn up by a group (could be a for-profit organization, a group of teachers, parents, the local school district, or government entities). Theoretically, a charter school can be shut down if it does not meet the standards outlined in its charter.

While there are multiple approaches of alternative discipline that addresses issues in urban schools, they all have one common characteristic: “they all address the issues from the lens of the instructor or administration and rarely consider the student’s perspective” (Van dusen, 1981). Perspectives that bring the needs of students into the mix are considered more tolerant in their approach to dealing with disciplinary issues. The effort to change or address punitive discipline in urban schools give rise to students and administration working together, but what is also clear is that the focus shifts—namely, the willingness to address discipline differently but also be aware of the system that exist by which schools may be uncomfortable implementing an alternative approach to punitive discipline. The successful use of Restorative Justice, specifically peacekeeping circles, in a course dictates the quality and desire of the urban school that practices restorative justice. In other words, the practice of Restorative Justice in a course or classroom cannot be separated from the overall goal of the school (Mendez, L., & Knoff, 2003).

Yet safe spaces, alternative discipline and behavior modification are all buzzwords that are used in urban schools so commonly and so indiscriminately, that no one really knows what they really are. As with all buzzwords, we have a somewhat ambiguous understanding but if

challenged, we will most likely express those words differently. Restorative Justice is ubiquitous in practice and a recognized approach to address school behavioral issues but there is little evidence they are being seriously considered as an alternative approach to punitive discipline in urban schools (Monroe, 2005). Everyone acknowledges that creating a restorative environment where schools fully embrace an alternative disciplinary model similar to Restorative Justice is difficult to establish. Therefore, it is important to understand the dynamics of the processes that go into creating a restorative environment in a school and a restorative justice course where students learn how to live restoratively, given the frequency with which students are being disciplined. The overwhelming rhetorical support for an alternative approach to discipline is not always supported by school administration. This becomes a compelling reason to investigate discipline through the eyes of students.

### **C. Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of 12th grade students and staff who participated in the program from 2016-2018 school year. Another purpose is to identify ways that one urban high school implemented a program of restorative practices with reliability as a way to lessen suspensions and expulsions in a school setting.

In addition, the researcher will be using a single critical case study that will hopefully provide a genuine opportunity to present a story within an urban school system to promote shared learning with other educational sites. For this reason, this case study will provide a unique opportunity to establish improvements in a school system that has set a goal to reduce suspensions and expulsions. The selected high school implemented the restorative practices model in the context of the Safe Schools/ Healthy Students federal grant initiative. Because this study will be shared with the U.S. Department of Education Federal Program Officer, the study will have the shared effect of benefiting the evaluation of the grant itself.



Due to the limited number of schools that currently utilize restorative practices, as a means of alternatives to punitive discipline, the uniqueness of this research is evident. In review of the literature, evidence of large urban districts implementing restorative practices consistently throughout all of the school sites was not found. This critical case study could present an opportunity for duplication of the restorative practices model as a means to promote safety, peace and a productive learning environment for students in urban districts across the nation (Foucault, 1977). Furthermore, the research findings could provide school administrators with alternatives to suspensions and expulsions as a form of discipline (Skiba, 2000). Use schools disciplinary styles should then begin to focus on healing rather than retribution and restorative practice as a tool for teaching appropriate behavior, community building both inside and outside of school and curve the school-to-prison pipeline. Therefore, Students would increase their attendance by staying in school, which would eventually lead to improved academic performance (Whitman, 2005).

This study will hopefully contribute to knowledge, theory, and practice regarding school discipline, climate, culture, and community. This study also may possibly contribute to the impact of effective leadership in schools when implementing discipline models, such as restorative practices. Restorative practices implementation creates a model for reducing school suspensions and nurturing a peaceful and positive learning environment. This may ultimately result in students spending more time focused on learning and thus, improving student academics (Dedinsky, 2012).

Secondly, interview questions were developed as related to the research questions for both adults and students (See Chapter Three). Related research questions focused on the four research questions previously listed. There was one set of interview questions created for adults and a separate set of interview questions created for students. Variations of the questions were expected dependent upon the category of the individual being interviewed.

Finally, individual interviews of students and staff using restorative practices on a regular basis will be conducted. How long will these interviews last? What will be covered in these interviews? Where will these interviews take place?

#### **D. Research Questions**

First, from a research perspective in terms of theoretical development, this study contributes to the impact of effective leadership in schools when implementing discipline models, such as restorative practices. Restorative practices implementation creates a model for reducing school suspensions and nurturing a peaceful and positive learning environment. This will ultimately result in students spending more time focused on learning and thus, improving student academics (Duncan, 2000).

This knowledge may touch upon several of the policy, practice, theory, or social action contributions listed above. Listed below are some specific ways that knowledge from this study might be additionally significant on a practical level.

Secondly, this study will contribute to the determination of resources for discipline in schools based on the results. Should funding and human resources be allocated to support restorative practices? Should further expansion of restorative practices be encouraged in schools across the nation? Dedinsky (2012) refers to restorative practices course implementation at an urban high school, “In turn, if successful, the enrolled students will perceive themselves as positively contributing leaders due to their involvement in helping their peers respond to discipline issues in a responsible, pro-social manner” (p. 45).

Thirdly, this research will also address the disparities in discipline between African-American students and white students at local public schools. As mentioned previously, the results of the research added important knowledge and education about the successful adoption and implementation of restorative practices. This information will hopefully prove useful to

practitioners from Academy X, who are largely responsible for sharing their experience with the researcher.

Fourthly, the case study should be able to provide an opportunity for reflection for the high school itself. That reflection, coupled with the study results, will provide this Milwaukee Public high school the time and space for future planning and improvements to their own restorative practices simulation, as the school continued to build upon its successes for the future.

Lastly, local collaboration may be achieved within the school district itself, as the story of one urban high school is shared with other schools within the district as school officials communicate at district wide professional development seminars.

The intended results of this research study will be well developed and sound. The related research questions were explored:

**How does a restorative justice course in an urban school influence suspensions, referrals and expulsions for African-American Students?**

Additional Questions to explore.

1. What part of the school's ideology shifted because of the use of restorative justice?
2. What kind of influence does restorative practices have on relationships both administrative and students?
3. How did school administration use restorative practices to create a more empathetic environment?

Questions that will inform the study:

- a. What are the factors that facilitate punitive discipline in schools?
- b. What are the patterns of behavior that lead to punitive approaches to discipline?
- c. What are the factors that prevent instructors from using Restorative Justice as an alternative to punitive discipline?
- d. How does institutional structures and educational practices influence the use of Restorative Justice?
- e. How does the power structure within the school embrace alternative approaches to discipline?

- f. What kinds of accommodations does the school make for students with a reputation for challenging authority?
- g. What kinds of tensions in the school and perceived narratives shape the way students and teachers embrace Restorative Justice?

### **E. Significance of the Study**

This study will hopefully contribute to relevant fields of research, knowledge, practice, and theory through the uniqueness of the research. Restorative practices provides an opportunity for school officials to create safe and peaceful environments that are empathetic and understanding of various backgrounds and people from different walks of life. Increased safety and decreased violence are supported through restorative practices implementation in the schools. It is reasonable to believe that this leads to a peaceful learning environment where students stay in school and focus on learning (Kajs, 2006).

This critical case study provides a lens into an urban school system as a way to promote shared learning with other educational sites. For this reason, this case study will hopefully provide a unique opportunity to establish improvements in a school system that has set a goal to reduce suspensions and expulsions. The selected high school has in place a restorative practices model in the context of the Safe Schools/ Healthy Students federal grant initiative. Because this study will be shared with the U.S. Department of Education Federal Program Officer, the study will have the shared effect of benefiting the evaluation of the grant itself (Kupchick, 2009).

Due to the limited number of schools that currently, utilize restorative practices as a means of alternatives to punitive discipline, the uniqueness of this research becomes evident for its usefulness.

This critical case study may eventually present an opportunity for duplication of the restorative practices model as a means to promote safety, peace and a productive learning environment for students in urban districts across the nation. Furthermore, the research findings

could provide school administrators with alternatives to suspensions and expulsions as a form of discipline (Lewis, 1999).

School disciplinary approaches could focus on restoration rather than punishment and be used as a tool for teaching appropriate behavior and community building both inside and outside of school. Students would increase their attendance by staying in school, which would ultimately lead to improved academic success (Gastic & Gasiewski, 2008).

#### **F. Definition of Terms**

**Administrator** – For the purpose of this study, administrator refers to principal or assistant principal.

**Assumption** - A statement that is presumed to be true, often only temporarily or for a specific purpose.

**Circle Process** – The circle process is a voluntary process in which the participants sit in a physical circle facing each other. Everyone is respected, everyone gets a chance to talk without interruption, participants explain themselves by telling their stories, everyone is equal and spiritual and emotional aspects of individual experience are welcomed (Simmons, 2007). There is a talking piece so only one person speaks at a time and everyone listens. A facilitator uses guiding questions related to the outcomes desired. Ground rules are set and respecting the process is key.

**Community Building Circles** – A circle process (see definition) that focuses on building relationships and trust within the school community. Students sit in a circle and share about themselves one at a time while others listen and provide support. Students build community by learning about one another and finding their commonalities and respecting their differences. The purpose is to create bonds and build relationships among a group of people who have a shared interest. Community Building Circles support effective collective action and mutual responsibility (Simmons, 2007).

**Culture** – The shared, learned beliefs, material products, and social actions that characterize a social group (Altheide, 1987).

**Curriculum Circles** - A circle process (see definition) that focuses on building relationships and trust within the school community. It also provides a systematic way for reviewing or discussing curriculum as a community of learners. Students sit in a circle and share information, facts or opinions about curriculum one at a time while others listen and provide support. This was formalized by Milwaukee Public Schools Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative (Milwaukee Public Schools SS/HS, 2008).

**Epistemology** - This is the study of the nature of knowledge and justification. There are many theories of epistemology. For example, empiricist epistemology argues that knowledge is derived from sense experience.

**Expulsion** – The act of removing students from the learning environment. This differs from suspension in that the removal due to expulsion may become permanent (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

**Interviewing** – A process of directing a conversation in a systematic way to collect information (Arum, 2003).

**Methodology** - The general approach the researcher takes in carrying out the research project; to some extent, this approach dictates the particular tools the researcher uses. Methodology is sometimes used synonymously with "method", particularly a complex method or body of methods, rules, and postulates employed by a discipline.

**Observation** – A tool of social inquiry in which the activities and relationships of people in the study community are perceived through the five senses of the researcher (Arum, 2003).

**Peace Keeping Circles** – A circle process that focuses on repairing harm and providing group feedback and suggestions for restoration by the offender. Peacekeeping circles were introduced under the restorative justice philosophy, which promotes including all those impacted by a crime

in a process of understanding the harm of crime and devising strategies for repairing the harm (Arum, 2003).

**Peer Jury** – Peer jury is one of four different program models that exist for Teen Courts where a youth or adult presents the case to a youth jury. The youth jury then questions the offender directly. Peer juries can take either a retributive or a restorative approach to justice. Those peer jury programs adopting a restorative approach discard the traditional court-based model with its prosecutor/defense attorney language. Instead, they use a collaborative conferencing model tending to the needs and issues of both the victim and the offender, with an emphasis of reintegrating both back into the community.

**Parameter** - Most broadly, a parameter is either (a) a limit or boundary or (b) a characteristic or an element.

**Reliability** – The extent to which one’s research findings can be replicated. If the study is repeated, it should yield the same results (Merriam, 1988).

**Repairing Harm Circles** – Another term used for peacekeeping circles.

**Research Design** - The science (and art) of planning procedures for conducting studies to get the most valid findings. Called “design” for short. When designing a research study, one draws up a set of instructions for gathering evidence and for interpreting it. (Experiments, quasi-experiments, double blind procedures, and correlated groups designs are examples of research design.)

**Research Question**- The problem to be investigated in a study, stated in either form of a question or a statement. A research question is usually more exploratory than a research hypothesis or a null hypothesis.

**Restorative Justice** – A philosophy that seeks to build community between and amongst people who have experienced conflict and harm. It is a victim-oriented, grass roots and community-based justice system. Victims and offenders come face to face for dialogue either through a

circle of victims and offenders or individually, with the help of facilitators (Harcarik, 2009). It is “a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible” (Zehr, 2002, p. 6).

**Restorative Practices** – A process that seeks harmony through the development of common understanding between people. Repairing harm caused by student or staff misbehavior and restoring relationships are the overarching goals of restorative practices. Restorative practices evolved as educators incorporated and expanded on strategies of restorative justice used in the criminal justice arena (Zehr, 2002). Restorative practices typically involve the use of circles (see definition) within the school setting for purposes of building a peaceful, safe and respectful school community.

**Soundness** – An argument that is valid and all premises are true (Creswell, 2007).

**Suspension** – The act of removing students from the learning environment for a specified period. This is typically done in response to an inappropriate behavior committed by a student (Morrison & Skiba, 2001).

**Triangulation** – Using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings (Merriam, 1988).

**Validity** – An argument in which the premises support the conclusion (Creswell, 2007). A measure of the degree to which a research finding actually demonstrates what it appears to demonstrate (Merriam, 1988).

## **G. Conclusion**

This introductory chapter provided a summary of the study through an explanation of the background, purpose, approach, significance, and vocabulary of the research. Chapter Two creates the theoretical framework of the study through a review of literature related to the various research questions.



## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Introduction

The term “restorative practices” was derived from “restorative justice,” which was used in the criminal justice field. Rather than punishing offenders, restorative justice held offenders accountable for their crime by bringing them face-to-face with people they have harmed (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2009). Restorative justice promotes deeper levels of problem solving in human relations. “The restorative justice paradigm widens our lens beyond the current legal system and reconnects us with a deeper sense of justice that resides within our own human experience.” (Boyes-Watson, 2008, p. 8).

Restorative practice is regarded as a philosophy (Zehr, 2002). Restorative practices seek to restore harm between people who have experienced conflict and to restore healthy relationships within the community. Moreover, restorative practices promote the process of community building through developing relationships and common understanding between people (Morrison, 2007).

When applied in an urban school, restorative practices are not focused on violations to rules from the student code of conduct. Restorative practices focus on the harm caused to other people in the classroom or the school building and how that harm to the relationship between the people can be repaired (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2001). The strong belief is that a restorative approach with all individuals involved in a conflict or incident will clearly improve trust and respect, so that children can learn in a safe and nurturing environment. According to Morrison & Vaandering (2012), the essence of restorative practices is to create safe spaces for dialogue through building communities of care. Storytelling and listening are valued and emotional understanding is developed. Individuals are given opportunities to build relationships and to take responsibility for the harm done, and to repair it (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

Analysis of restorative practices is the primary focus of this literature review. The idea of restorative practices in the educational arena derives from restorative justice in the criminal justice field. Currently, adequate availability of literature on restorative justice relating to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of restorative justice in the criminal justice system exists. In addition, although there is not nearly as much research in the educational realm, more literature is beginning to appear within the realm of restorative practices in an educational setting (Reyes, 2006).

In education, schools use restorative justice practices as a tool to shape communities and to address discipline as a way of reducing reliance on excessive suspensions and expulsions.

There are several methods of restorative justice:

1. ***Restorative Conference is one method.*** A *restorative conference* is a structured meeting between offenders, victims and both parties' family and friends, in which they deal with the consequences of the crime or wrongdoing and decide how best to repair the harm (Pranis, 2015).
2. **Circles**, is a second method, a circle is a versatile restorative practice that can be used proactively, to develop relationships and build community or reactively, to respond to wrongdoing, conflicts and problems. Circles give people an opportunity to speak and listen to one another in an atmosphere of safety, decorum and equality. The circle process allows people to tell their stories and offer their own perspectives (Pranis, 2015).

The circle has a wide variety of purposes: conflict resolution, healing, support, decision-making, and information exchange and relationship development. Circles offer an alternative to contemporary meeting processes that often rely on hierarchy, win-lose positioning and argument (Roca, Inc., n.d, 2015).

3. ***Family Group Conference (FGC) or Family Group Decision Making (FGDM),*** FGC/FGDM, is a third method, brings together family support networks — parents, children, aunts, uncles, grandparents, neighbors and close family friends — to make important decisions that might otherwise be made by professionals. This process of engaging and empowering families to make decisions and plans for their own family members' well-being leads to better outcomes, less conflict with professionals, more informal support and improved family functioning (Mirsky, L., & Wachtel, T. (2007).
4. **Informal Restorative Practices, is a fourth method**, the restorative paradigm is manifested in many informal ways beyond the formal processes. As described by the *restorative practices continuum* above, informal restorative practices include *affective statements*, which communicate people's feelings, as well as *affective questions*, which

cause people to reflect on how their behavior has affected others (Mirsky, L., & Wachtel, T. (2007).

A teacher in a classroom might employ an affective statement when a student has misbehaved, letting the student know how he or she has been affected by the student's behavior: "When you disrupt the class, I feel sad" or "disrespected" or "disappointed." Hearing this, the student learns how his or her behavior is affecting others (Harrison, 2014).

Alternatively, that teacher may ask an affective question, perhaps adapting one of the *restorative questions* used in the conference script. "Who do you think has been affected by what you just did?" and then follow-up with "How do you think they've been affected?" In answering such questions, instead of simply being punished, the student has a chance to think about his or her behavior, make amends and change the behavior in the future (Morrison, 2013).

Asking several affective questions of both the wrongdoer and those harmed creates a *small impromptu conference*. If the circumstance calls for a bit more structure, a *circle* can quickly be created.

The use of informal restorative practices dramatically reduces the need for more time-consuming formal restorative practices. Systematic use of informal restorative practices has a cumulative impact and creates what might be described as a *restorative milieu* — an environment that consistently fosters awareness, empathy and responsibility in a way that is likely to prove far more effective in achieving social discipline than our current reliance on punishment and sanctions (Wachtel, 2013).

In order for educators to release their existing biases, they must find a paradigm that works within their natural disposition. This can be accomplished through an impeding process of supportive efforts by implementing policies that transform punitive disciplinary functions to meet the educational needs of all students (Simmons, 2009).

Emerging practices in restorative justice continue to present themselves in shifts more toward culturally sensitive approaches within the field of learning. Teachers must exchange or adjust their own central concept of intolerable behavior, also known as the modification process (Kupchik 2012). At issue is the different ways traditional disciplinary measure such as office referrals, in school and out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, alternative school placement, and

a host of punitive regulatory frameworks effect the teaching techniques of educators, and how that paradigm should shift (Vavrus & Cole, 2002).

There is a consensus among researchers that positive behavioral and proactive approaches to discipline do more to foster student achievement than do punitive discipline approaches (Sharkey and Fenning 2012, Sugai and Horner 2012). Even with a stronger scholarly emphasis on dispelling beliefs in punitive approaches, pointed critiques at law enforcement perspectives of discipline, and increasing popularity of school-wide behavioral interventions and supports, numerous schools and districts continue to subject students to discipline policies and practices that do not align to students' educational best interests (Ayers et al. 2011; Casella 2015; Duncan 2010; Lewis 2013; Lipman 2013; Giroux 2012, 2013a, b; Saltman and Gabbard 2010; Simmons 2009).

## **B. Theoretical Framework**

Brenda Morrison (2012) researches restorative justice in the context of its implementation in educational settings. She noted the existence of several theoretical frameworks for restorative justice (Morrison, 2012); however, a key theory dominates the literature. John Braithwaite first articulated his **Critical Race Theory** in his groundbreaking work, *Crime, Shame and Reintegration*, in 1989. In the broadest terms, CRT developed in the 1980s as an intellectual project and movement of scholars of color who sought to critique and to explore the relationships between law, race, racism, and social power in ways that existing fields such as Critical Legal Studies or the liberal civil rights tradition could not or had not.

Over the two decades since, CRT scholars have continuously expounded core tenets of CRT such as the following: that race is a social construction and a performative identity; that racism is endemic and institutionalized in society; that social and historical context is very important in any particular analysis of racial issues; and that there is a need to "look to the

bottom" to gain a better understanding of the reality of racial discrimination and to develop potential solutions to the societal problems it creates (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Furthermore, CRT emphasizes its interdisciplinary approach to resolving and ameliorating the still-existing oppression of people of color. Probably the most important and influential claim of CRT is that race is not a natural, fixed, or biological concept, but instead a social and a legal construction.

Critical Race Theory provides context to the way we look at punitive discipline in schools, which captures in broad terms a highly complex and dynamic social process of categorization in which most people engage only instinctively (Carbado, 2013).

In construing this Theoretical framework, I address the notion of racial stigma as way to show how punitive discipline can be disproportionately used against African-Americans. Racial Stigma surveys the history of American race relations, with a particular focus on how African Americans were branded as inferior, not truly belonging to the American social fabric, and a threat to white privilege and to white control. It then examines how stigma interacts with the social psychology phenomenon of implicit bias and how both processes influence and create the troubling phenomenon those minority students, and especially African American youth, are disproportionately disciplined for subjective offenses such as defiance and disrespect authority (Braithwaite, 1989).

Sensing that the use of the word, inferiority, shame, may be evocative, Braithwaite (1989) acknowledges that the act of shaming people can be a dangerous endeavor. If overdone, the shaming can be toxic to an individual's self-concept and debilitating to one's spirit. On the other hand, if not utilized to any extent at all, anarchy may ensue where irresponsible citizens repeatedly and indiscriminately trample upon the rights of others (Braithwaite, 1989). Achieving a proper balance necessitates a common purpose to the shaming act, that being, achieving the omnipresent goal of reintegrating the individual into the greater community.

In his reasoning process, Braithwaite (1989) noted the power of labeling which leads to stigmatization. Stigmatization is counterproductive because it leads to out-casting (“dis integration” (p. 55)) which ultimately makes criminal subcultures more attractive to offenders. He argued that re-integrative shaming leads offenders in a direction away from criminal subcultures and more aligned with community values. As a crowning statement of his position on formal criminal punishment, Braithwaite (1989) declared it to be an “ineffective weapon of social control partly because it is a degradation ceremony with maximum prospects for stigmatization” (p. 14).

Punitive discipline creates an environment where students only think of themselves, rather than the consequences of their behavior. Rapid escalation to punishment makes students angry instead of thoughtful (Braithwaite, 1989). In the schools, restorative practices are used as an intervention to instill a sense of community and build relationships. Therefore, isolating students from the community through suspensions or expulsions is the worst way to handle discipline (Bowditch, 1993).

Conceptual change can only occur when community advocates become completely dissatisfied with the institutional policies systematically remediating educationally vulnerable student populations while not sustainably making schools any safer for the youth that remain (Braithwaite, 1989). In practice, it is very difficult for teachers to get students to set aside their differential experiences for more disparaging concepts of actions labeled by administrators to be most effective in establishing an equitable learning environment. Morrison and Vaandering (2012), in their article in support of restorative justice based disciplinary alternatives; argue that currently North American public school districts rely too heavily on punitive regulatory frameworks to maintain a sense of school order.

They suggest that educators should “engage behaviorally challenged students” interest differently, attitudes and beliefs; activate their existing mental models or representation systems;

encourage them to create their own reality within the guidelines of school order, explore alternative solutions to disruptive behavior, stimulate them to think independently while finding meaning in their learned experience. John Dewey (1938) found that students desire “to learn” activities such as reading, mathematics, and science exercises as a hands on experience. Conceptual change was made possible when teachers included alternative teaching methods that were real-world examples like what many students are faced with on a daily basis.

### **C. Review of Research organized by Variables – Discipline Across the Nation Zero-Tolerance Policy and Suspensions as an Approach to Discipline**

As a response to public fears of school safety, school suspensions have become a common disciplinary approach over the past 20 years. Many districts have adopted a zero-tolerance approach to discipline resulting in an explosion of students being suspended for not only violent offenses, but minor offenses as well.

The U.S. Customs Agency developed zero-tolerance in the 1980s to target the expanding drug trade. It was then introduced to school systems during the Clinton administration and the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA, 2004). This law was passed by Congress to address the issue of school violence, which required schools to enforce a minimum of a one-year expulsion to students who bring a firearm on campus. This law marked the first time that state legislation intervened in local school control and school discipline (Dickman & Cooner, 2007; Moran, 2010).

The question surrounding zero-tolerance policies remains whether or not punitive forms of discipline prove effective. A review of five articles focusing on zero-tolerance policies indicated a negative response to punitive approaches to discipline. Unintended consequences to zero-tolerance policies occurred within the school setting. Moran (2010) concludes that, “Zero-tolerance has no place in public schools.”

The purpose of this summary was to review the literature in the areas of zero-tolerance policies and school suspensions. Results of this review suggest that zero-tolerance policies do more harm than good. Zero-tolerance policies have the greatest negative impact on students of color and students of low socio-economic status.

Although often unintended, school administrators have misinterpreted the policy to include disciplining students with suspension for minor infractions rather than violent crimes (Moran, 2010). Based on the review of this literature, no clear understanding of positive effects of the zero-tolerance policy exists. Further research remains necessary to better understand if the zero-tolerance policy could have created safer conditions in the school community if it had been used as originally intended, to deter serious offenses of violence and school safety.

Soon after the zero-tolerance policy was introduced to the schools, school administrators took the liberty to misuse the policy for a quick solution to fixing discipline problems in their schools. The primary challenges with zero-tolerance policies include the overuse of suspensions, the racial disproportionality, students with disabilities disproportionality, the economic disproportionality and negative outcomes that result from the use of suspensions as the primary form of discipline. All of the reviewed articles included at least one of the challenges above, with the consistent common theme being racial disproportionality and negative outcomes resulting from the overuse of suspensions.

#### **Variables: Overuse of Suspensions**

Although the zero-tolerance policy was not originally intended to be used for common day disciplinary procedures, the result of a flaw in the law resulted in overuse of suspensions. Provisions of the GFSA allowed school administrators to consider each occurring incident independently. Thus, administrators were given freedom to interpret the law whatever way they chose (Moran, 2010). This resulted in misuse and abuse. The zero-tolerance policy was often used for students who previously had not demonstrated behavioral problems and were otherwise



classified as good kids (Moran, 2010; Skiba & Peterson, 1999a, 1999b). Administrators would frequently use suspensions for minor behaviors. In 1974, 1.7 million students were suspended from school. By 1998, the number of suspended students increased to 3.1 million (Moran, 2010; Wald, 2001).

Moran (2010) cites several examples of misuse of the policy, such as a 5-year old student who wore a firefighter Halloween costume to school that included a plastic axe (Moran, 2010; Skiba, 2000). However, Martinez fails to cite incidents where the zero-tolerance policy was used appropriately thereby preventing a breach to school safety. She does acknowledge one study by Axman (2005) that supports zero tolerance. Axman reported that violent crime declined by 50% from 1992 to 2002. Consequently, Moran points out that Axman never provided the source of this information nor indicated that the decline of violent incidents was the result of using zero-tolerance policies.

### **Variables: Racial Disproportionality**

Literature supports the fact that suspensions are applied disproportionately for certain subgroups of students (Raffacle-Mendez & Ferron, 2002). Suspensions are frequently used as a punishment for minority students. African American students are four times more likely to be suspended than white students for the same violations. Hispanic students are twice as likely to be suspended as white students (Ayers, Dohrn & Ayers, 2001). Suspensions are often used as the main form of discipline for students of color. Brenda Townsend (2000), shares “While suspect discipline practices have been used with students across ethnic backgrounds, they are disproportionately meted out to African American students, particularly males” (Verdugo, 2002).

According to Arcia (2006), the racial gap is clearly an issue in urban schools. Schools often rely too heavily on exclusion from the classroom as the primary discipline strategy and this practice often has a disproportionate impact on Black, Latino, and American Indian students. Evidence reveals that throughout the United States, minority students, particularly

Black and Latino, are subject to a disproportionate rate of school disciplinary sanctions, including, but not limited to office referrals, suspensions and expulsions (Krezmeien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; Wallace, Goodking, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). The overuse of exclusionary and punitive discipline with students of color, particularly Black and Latino is evident.

A similar finding resulted with Townsend (2007) and Skiba, Peterson, and Williams (1997). Their studies found that in urban school districts, African American children received more office referrals and more suspensions than any other ethnic group. Townsend (2000) extensively reviewed research on the disproportionate discipline of African American learners. She reviewed related literature and offered suggestions to reduce the school suspensions for African American students. She addressed the consequences and indicated the school factors that support this behavior. Townsend integrated a wide variety of sources throughout her article. She referenced Polite (1995) who applied chaos theory from physics to the circumstances facing many African American males.

Chaos theory suggests that small cumulative events can have important effects: The simple flutter of a butterfly's wings has a significant effect on events hemispheres away (Glesne, 2010). In the same way, outcomes experienced by African American males may not appear significant when considered independently of each other. In sum, however, phenomena such as overrepresentation in special education and remedial classes, suspension, expulsion, and other indicators of school failure can have cumulative and disastrous effects on African American males (Verdugo, 2002).

#### **Variables: Students with Disabilities Disproportionality**

Zero-tolerance policies may restrict access to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to which all students are entitled. One of the concerns is that by restricting access to education, students who have disabilities will fall further behind. It may also intensify the problems they already have and may increase the probability that students with disabilities

will not finish high school (Amber, Justinger, Pelischek, & Schulz, 2009; Indiana Youth Services Association, 2004).

According to Fenning and Bohanon (2006), students with disabilities make up only about 11% of the school population in the U.S., while they actually account for approximately 20% of school suspensions. This concern has put school disciplinary practices, such as zero-tolerance policies and school suspensions under scrutiny. Exclusionary discipline measures have been under investigation and litigation on behalf of students with disabilities has increased (Center & McKittrick, 1987; Townsend, 2000; Yell, 1990). The primary concern illustrated across the literature reviewed focused on restricting access to education. The learning or behavior problems of students may intensify.

Gastic and Gasiewski (2008) contend that by restricting access to education, many students with disabilities will not complete high school. The authors focus on a minimal amount of research to make several generalized statements, such as the aforementioned. One study, the Children Left Behind Project conducted by Indiana Youth Services Associations in 2004, acts as the primary source for findings by the authors. A wider range of research should be reviewed prior to sharing such generalized statements.

#### **Variables: Economic Disproportionality**

School discipline policies are often reflective of the values of the individuals who create them. As a result, numerous judgments about student disruptions remain embedded within cultural norms. Since Whites and middle-class, individuals occupy the majority of positions of power in educational settings, including administrators and teachers, decisions concerning behavioral expectations and consequences are set by this group and reflect their norms (Monroe, 2005). Individuals with White middle-class values often develop school policies and the assumption is made that all students are raised with similar perspectives and values (Nelson, 2008).

Fenning and Rose (2007) attribute high rates of school suspension and expulsion to institutional racism and classism. In their research, they found that minority students were more likely to be suspended for nonviolent issues, such as class disruption and disrespecting teacher authority. This led to the conclusion that the students, who were typically, students of color and living in poverty, appeared more likely to be punished because of teacher lack of behavior management, lack of connection with the teacher or the school, or unclear classroom rules. Students and teachers often feel disconnected because of their cultural, racial, and economic differences. This disconnect often creates biases held by teachers which often result in an increase in suspensions and exclusionary discipline methods (Denton, 2003; Nelson, 2008).

Immigrants and minorities tend to be the focus in terms of stereotyping violent behavior. “Common attitudes are often racist and classist. Many individuals believe that only minorities and the poor commit violent acts” (Nelson, 2008, p. 12). Nelson claimed that unequal distributions of educational funding and a curriculum that is intended to cater to White middle-class individuals is an instigator of the school violence. She argued that students are rebelling against their schools and each other in order to voice their feelings of injustice. This assumption was made without reference to research. Nelson needs to more thoroughly investigate this conclusion through research and study.

### **Variables: Negative Outcomes**

Research indicates that zero-tolerance policies are ineffective in the end and are often related to a number of negative outcomes (Morris, 2005). These outcomes include elevated rates of school dropout, poor school climate, low academic achievement, and discriminatory school discipline practices. Research also shows that suspension negatively affects the mental health and physical well-being of students (Gastic and Gasiewski, 2008). The American Academy of Pediatrics (2003) suggests suspension of school-aged youth with behavioral problems is associated with high rates of depression, drug addiction and home life stresses.

Removing students from school can be unsafe for students. When students are removed from school, students may be more likely to engage in or become victims of violent crimes. The U.S. Departments of Justice and Education evaluated school and criminal data of 2003-04 and determined that rates of serious violent crimes against school-aged youth including rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault are more than twice as high outside of the school as they are inside the school walls (Evenson, Justinger, Pelischek, & Schulz, 2009; Sundius & Farneth, 2008).

Evenson, Justinger, Pelischek, and Schulz's (2009) research suggests there are a number of specific strategies to reduce the negative outcomes of the zero-tolerance policies. The authors focus on a shift in discipline policies from a reactive and punitive model to one that places an emphasis on prevention, teaching competence, and altered response (Skiba, 2009). Schools should specify expectations and include examples of positive and negative behaviors in a variety of settings, such as the cafeteria, playground, classroom and buses. Then, students need to be specifically taught these expectations, instead of assuming that they know the expectations. Every school climate and culture is different, depending on school staff, student population, and administration. It is important to clarify expectations so students have an opportunity to uphold those expectations. Finally, school personnel must develop specific procedures to respond to problematic behavior. They need to avoid categorizing all behavior into a zero-tolerance policy and designate specific consequences for specific behaviors. There is a distinction between minor infractions, serious violations and illegal behaviors. Early intervention strategies and a strong emphasis on prevention techniques are critical in minimizing suspensions due to minor infractions (Zweifler & DeBeers, 2002).

### **Variables: The Roots of Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice is a process for repairing harm that has been done. Typical responses focus on punishing the offender, but restorative justice emphasizes restoration of well-being. Restorative justice includes not only those who offended or were harmed, but to the surrounding community members as well (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2009). Skiba, Nardo and Peterson (2002) explained that restorative justice originated from the American Indian and Alaskan Native cultures in the United States and the indigenous cultures of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

The premise of restorative justice is that when an individual does harm, it has an effect not only on the victim but also on the person who caused the harm and on the community. The restorative process works to repair the harm by giving the person who caused the harm an opportunity to restore peace with the victim and the effected community. Restorative justice became integrated into the criminal justice system as part of a reform movement that reconnected people with a deep sense of justice. “Restorative justice emerged within the criminal justice system largely as a response to punitive approaches to justice” (Dedinsky, 2012, p. 50).

According to BoyesWatson (2008), restorative justice has served as a guide to positive, systematic changes in the court system, correctional institution, and policing. The peacemaking circle process evolved as one of several practices that is currently being used as an alternative to traditional criminal justice sentencing (BoyesWatson, 2008).

### **Variables: Restorative Justice in the Correctional Arena**

The purpose of Bazemore’s (2007) qualitative study explores the essence of juvenile delinquency and recidivism, including its causes, its relationship to communities, the roles of families, and the role of residential treatment facilities in rehabilitating the delinquent youth. To effectively meet the goal of rehabilitating youth, the article recommends that correctional treatment must embrace a transformational leadership paradigm that maintains a mission that is

enduring, futuristic, and strategic. Old bureaucratic leadership paradigms must emerge with a new lens.

The study identified the lived experiences of juveniles who successfully graduated from juvenile treatment programs, to discover why juveniles succeed or fail in treatment.

This sample included nine young adults from Florida between the ages of 18 to 23 who successfully completed their court-ordered sanctions in different residential facilities as well as their aftercare supervisions. All young adults received some level of postsecondary educational experience or achieved gainful employment (Bazemore, 2007).

The research design and procedures included qualitative analysis that employed individual interviews with the young adults who were audio taped and transcripts prepared verbatim. The data was then compared to discover linkages and commonalities to develop categories and patterns. Peer examination, field journals, triangulation, code recode, qualitative analytic software, and reflexivity improved trustworthiness of the results.

The major findings included several over-arching themes, which grew from the collected data:

1) Overcoming patterns of poor behavior, 2) The ability to create inner self-worth, 3) Direct-file as shock treatments (waiver to adult court), 4) Stronger family ties, 5) Struggles with identifying successful outcomes, 6) The ability to recognize previous poor decisions, 7) Being able to remain resolute in spite of peer pressure, 8) Long term outlook, 9) Mentoring options, 10) Expressing vulnerability, 11) Able to avoid negative influences, and 12) Practices appropriate behavior learned through Restorative Justice.

All of the staff and students, having undergone a thorough interview process, shared experiences organized in the 12 themes listed above. It became clear that programs and services to help students and staff identify disparities was very much needed.

In conclusion, the youths in the study were all deemed significant and in many ways success stories with the ability to remain relevant in the harshest of circumstances. Therefore, because of their unique perspectives, instruction for the youth is really a practice to employ positive dialogue as a means of ingraining within the youth a new way of resolving issues. Students learned a practice that promotes growth, which is interpreted by educators as a learning surplus to the student and teaches the students about appropriate classroom behavior and reasonable expectations that are inspiring from an instructional standpoint. In essence, students were prepared to confront poor behavior with an accountability framework that was discussed and internalized through peacekeeping circles.

It is also important when we look at discipline in urban schools today we be more empathetic in our understanding of the problems these schools face. Jonathan Kozol as well as other social activists have spent many years documenting the inequalities and injustices found in urban schools, especially toward African-American males. Kozol is an educator and civil rights activist. In 2005, he published a book entitled, “The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America.” In this book, he talks about punitive discipline in schools. He was outraged to find that schools are more interested in a punitive approach than any other form of discipline. Not only are schools segregated by race, they are segregated by race as well. Urban schools are not only all Black, they are Black and poor. Suburban schools are not only White, they are White and wealthy. Kozol also uncovers the hidden curriculum found in these urban schools. It is a curriculum that perpetuates social stratification. It teaches students in urban schools to follow directions without questioning the usefulness of the information they are learning. It does not teach them critical thinking skills. He found that schools that educated people of color are not much different from the schools during Brown vs. Board of Education. Therefore, students in urban public schools are not able to learn from their mistakes. Whereas, in



Academy X students are establishing goals and successful transition programs through Restorative Justice.

The narrative that is created through restorative justice is an example of how changes can be made in the classroom. Moreover, although negative home environments contribute to failure, compassionate, competent, prepared treatment professionals who understand the dynamics faced by juvenile offenders contribute to success. Together, school dynamics, associations, communities, and academic backgrounds are all cited by the literature as positively influencing future recidivist pro-social behavior. A few criticisms appeared in this study. With a qualitative study such as this, the lived experiences of the subjects were captured. The study summarized results from the real world perspective of the youth.

Furthermore, it is important to note here that this research is based on the fundamental premise that youth living in a challenging world involves subjectively interpreting the world, whether trying to make sense of the complexities of everyday life or engaging in research inquiry that involves making sense of the lives of others (Kincheloe, 2005). Educators should know and openly declare that knowledge production and interpretation are inextricably linked and that constructing knowledge fundamentally involves an act of empathy. In this sense, educators are not neutral and they are not objective - they openly declare their bias as they strive to understand students (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Like everyone else, educators are part of the world that constructs them and the world that they construct. For this reason it is imperative that educators at Academy X are not only aware of restorative justice but demonstrate that awareness by openly declaring their beliefs, values and inherent biases which inevitably shape the inquiry on all levels and in multiple ways (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

This study provided some basic characteristics of the target population. Like whether or not the participants' male or female and their ethnicity? In the conclusion, the study revealed

that poverty remained a contributing factor to recidivism. The researcher was careful in providing this information so that the information gave a clear description of the targeted population.

The researchers was also able to explain how they got from point A to point B, in terms of their conclusions as to the qualifications of the subjects. Data was reviewed as to instructor's experiences with restorative practice. For example, an all-school training session happened twice a year where students and staff were trained in restorative practices. These practices lead the researchers to infer certain central attributes necessary for effective practices of a restorative school.

In addition, the interview-questioning route was provided and explained within the study. Along with stating that a high level of trust was sought between interviewer and interviewee, and an open-ended interview process was employed, the study provided detail pertaining to the actual questions. While some benchmarks of literature were cited to explain findings in the area of juvenile delinquency, the study was able to explain through a critical race theoretical framework, which guided the researchers in their methodology. The study provided a point of reference as it related to (a description of a hierarchical/bureaucratic juvenile justice system vs. a rehabilitative approach); however, the methodology linked to critical race theory provided the premise.

As a part of its many implications, this study recommends peer-influenced treatment modalities, collaboration, community involvement, and dialogue. All four of these recommendations for successful treatment programs can be addressed through restorative justice practices. Restorative justice was mentioned throughout the entire study. In addition, therefore, it is understood that restorative justice requires collaboration and dialogue between and among peers. Restorative justice relies on these principles in order to operate and as a means to drawing offenders back into the community, building upon respect and trust as key values. Urban school

and the criminal justice system still employs punitive strategies as its norm. Restorative justice approaches discipline differently.

The study showed overall success of treatment programming for students in an urban school. The study cited 12 themes that helped describe the lived experience of youth and what the youth maintained to be key reasons for their personal success. What caused change in the lives of the students and staff at the school proves to be significant.

As mentioned, replication of the study in several varying jurisdictions may offer additional insight as well as benefit the validity of the information. A quantitative scale may be developed because of the study. For instance, a survey might be developed, which further tests a large quantity of delinquent youth to provide some additional, measurable data (Glesne, 2010).

These qualitative measures offers insight into the lives of restorative justice practitioners. Such measures also provide discussions regarding program development and narratives to adapt to the needs of youth in other environments, which is the impetus of this research.

### **Variables: Restorative Practices Research in Education**

Schweigert (1999) investigated community-based restorative practices reforms, utilizing educational interventions to support the greater community. The study analyzed restorative practices reforms and arrived at three foundational principles for community based moral education. First, restorative justice brings the moral authority in personal communal traditions and the moral authority in impersonal universal norms together in a mutually reinforcing combination. Secondly, restorative justice processes focus on the "space between places" in social relations. This focus is not on individuals, families, or particular institutions, but on the space where these important social bodies intersect (Schweigert, 1999).

Thirdly, restorative justice coordinates the resources of whole communities to make changes that can successfully address the problems of crime, rather than continuing the criminal justice system's focus on individual offenders or individual victims (Kajs, 2006).

The results of this study demonstrated the importance of moral education within a community and how restorative justice coordinated efforts to focus on repairing the harm done within a typical community. The concentration focused on the whole community rather than the isolated pieces or the individual person (Schweigert, 1999).

Mirsky and Wachtel (2007) investigated six alternative schools for high-risk and adjudicated youth in Pennsylvania, sampling a population of 919 males and females discharged from the schools over a two-year span of time. While anecdotal evidence supported the school's positive reputation, little actual research supported their utilization of restorative practices. Utilizing a quantitative approach, the youth participating in the programming showed marked improvements in their pro-social values and self-esteem.

Students who participated for longer periods (up to two years in the restorative practices program) showed even greater gains. Six months following participation in the programming, youths discharged for misbehavior were nearly twice as likely to be charged with delinquent behavior. Length of time in programming acted as a major variable, showing proportional declines in charged delinquent behavior for youths who spent more time in the programming.

Mirsky and Wachtel (2007) concluded that restorative practices programming reduced recidivist delinquent or criminal behavior. The greatest decline in offending was noted for youth who spent four to six months in the programming, as opposed to youth who spent lesser period. Upon replication of the study, results continued to prove significant. This study showed dramatic reductions in offending behavior due to exposure to the programming in a restorative practices school, regardless of gender, race, age, offense type, or criminal history. Restorative practices programming significantly reduced offending behavior among at-risk and misbehaving youth (Mirsky & Wachtel, 2007).

Mirsky and Wachtel's (2007) study bolstered the credibility of restorative practices. The study showed overall success of restorative practices. The study, while occurring in a school

setting, still focused on at-risk and adjudicated youth, namely those who had already offended. Mainstreaming concepts of restorative practices for normal schools were not argued in the study. Nor did the study generalize its findings for mainstream practice. Consequently, despite the large sample population and its own replication, the study was somewhat limited in its generalizability to the general population (Mirsky & Wachtel, 2007).

Another recent study conducted reviewed restorative practices in a school setting. Michele Villarreal Hamilton's (2008) case study, focusing on the restorative practices of circles to address behavioral infractions of high school students, was conducted as part of a dissertation. The study remained limited to one public high school in the United States. The school site included a suburban, middle class school with primarily White students. Thirteen interviews conducted over a period of a week included three school administrators, two teachers, one staff member, five students, and two community members. The selection of participants was one of convenience, not of random assignment.

Circles were used as a complement to the traditional disciplinary procedures of dealing with serious offenses, such as suspensions and expulsions. Administrators at the public school used circles as another way to handle conduct referrals. The circles provided an opportunity for effective conflict resolution to occur through dialogue between the victim, the offender, and other members of the school community. As Hamilton (2008) concluded, the circles provided a forum for listening and understanding another person's point of view, which is not usually present in traditional disciplinary procedures because suspension, expulsion, and exclusion do not provide youth opportunities for introspection and dialogue.

Hamilton (2008) further analyzed the results of restorative practice circles used in the high school. The circle process led to the elimination of further conflicts between students and created a space for closure when conflicts arose. Although Hamilton acknowledged there was insufficient evidence of a direct correlation between the rates of suspension and the circle

process, the data suggested the circle process remained effective in reducing conflicts and improving student behavior among circle participants. Further indications of the circle process being an effective restorative practice at the public high school emerged in this case study.

According to Hamilton (2008), the concept of choice manifested in the circle process which allowed students to be active participants and decision makers at their school. The circle process also embraced a more humanizing experience compared to traditional disciplinary proceedings of adult driven consequences, because the student maintained intimate involvement in the process from conception to closure. Another explanation for the circle results included the criterion of a circle that required students to cooperate if they chose the circle option. Circle members, including the adults, were being held accountable and responsible for their actions and were part of determining a solution. The circle process also allowed for increased opportunities for learning conflict resolution.

The adults in Hamilton's study shared several obstacles to the circle practices. Time constraints, lack of student participation, and staff resistance captured the three obstacles revealed as part of this study. Appropriate training for staff was deemed necessary as well. The researcher only conducted the investigation of obstacles with the staff, which limited the results of this study. Hamilton could have added reliability to the study by asking students the same question regarding obstacles to restorative practices. Two themes not related to Hamilton's case study emerged. First, the circle process proved successful in solving conflicts between not only students, but students and adults as well. Likewise, the circle process addressed staff members who experienced conflicts. The circle also provided a process for deeper issues to emerge from the students' lives. The opportunity to dialogue provided them a safe place and a place of acceptance. Students acknowledged personal issues and sought help from the adults within the school community.

Hamilton (2008) concluded that instead of a consequence-driven approach to discipline, school personnel could utilize a restorative approach to discipline which instead values personal relationships and connectedness between people. Conflict should be utilized to teach appropriate behaviors and social skills used in everyday life. In addition, Hamilton recognized the necessity for students to be involved in the process of creating order and safety at school. When students are not included in the decision-making and are required to comply rather than cooperate, the schools often rely on zero-tolerance policies to remove the students who do not comply.

Generalizability was limited in Hamilton's study because of the small sample size and population studied (one suburban middle class high school). However, generalizability may occur when qualitative researchers study additional cases and generalize findings to the new cases. This requires effective documentation of qualitative procedures, such as a protocol for documenting the problem in detail (Yin, 2003). As further studies of restorative practices in the school setting are revealed, Hamilton's study may gain validity as determined by the results.

#### **Variables: Chicago Public Schools High School Peer Jury Program**

Chicago Public Schools, like many other large urban districts across the nation, has experienced an increase in suspensions and expulsions in the past decade (Olson & Viola, 2007). In 2004-2005, the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) started a restorative justice peer-jury program in 27 high schools across the city to reduce suspensions, decrease the amount of time devoted to discipline, and improve the school climate to promote learning. By 2006-2007, 41 high schools participated in the restorative justice peer jury program (Olson & Viola, 2007).

The study conducted by Olson and Viola (2007) maintained a mixed method approach. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected over a three-year period. The quantitative data collected at each high school included a referred student data form and a peer jury data form. The referred student data form included the date of the peer jury, the name, grade level, discipline history, gender of the referred student, the type of agreement finalized through the peer

jury, and the number of days of suspension avoided, if any. The peer jury data form included the date of the peer jury, the name, grade level, experience and gender of the peer jurors, and the number of cases heard. The qualitative data were collected through focus group interviews of the students at five of the participating high schools.

This study posed several challenges, which affected the results. Of 41 schools, only 31 schools submitted data and not all of the data was completed accurately or even returned. The study included a large number of schools to research in depth and the number of schools increased during the study so the data showed inconsistency. The data collected on the referred students proved limited because of the low number of referred students who volunteered to be part of the study. In addition, a limited number of students participated in the focus groups and no staff participated.

However, this study revealed several findings regarding the implementation of the restorative justice peer jury model in the Chicago Public Schools that displayed credibility. Schools that engaged in higher activity levels of restorative practices found more value in the program. The more peer jury circles conducted in a semester and the more students and staff actively involved, the greater impact restorative practices had in the school. According to Olson and Viola (2007), “About half (48%) of the students reported that they felt that the peer jury had a positive impact on the sense of community and safety at their schools” (p. 21). More research would benefit this study, such as observing the fidelity of implementation in a school, reviewing the discipline records, comparing the activity level to perceptions in effectiveness, and investigating if the leadership, including administrators, staff, and students, fully embraced the restorative justice peer jury program.

Another finding of the CPS peer jury program involved the impact of the suspension days avoided. It was concluded that students avoiding suspension attended school more and therefore, learned more. While this point is difficult to argue, the data did not include academic findings.



For instance, the test results and grades from the students who avoided suspension and who were referred to the peer jury program could have been reviewed. This triangulation of data could have further validated the researchers' findings.

While quantitative data results captured the focus of this study, qualitative research could have been utilized more effectively to study the results of the restorative justice peer jury program in depth. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2007), qualitative data is used to dig deep to get a complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Numerous forms of data are collected and examined from various angles to construct a rich and meaningful picture of a complex, multifaceted situation. The CPS restorative justice peer jury program could have been studied further in depth by interviewing both staff and students to reveal their perceptions of the program, school climate changes, leadership needed, peer effects, and to understand the impact of the program overall.

In summary, this study concluded that the Chicago Public Schools peer jury program helped students avoid suspension to remain in school. Students avoided over 1,000 suspensions at the high schools based on the data received (Olson & Viola, 2007).

The schools with a higher activity level of programming yielded better results in terms of program satisfaction. Referred students attending less active schools, perceived restorative justice as having less impact. This research did not focus on serious offenders in CPS, which limited perceptions of the effectiveness of the restorative justice peer jury program. Participants in the study still expressed concern regarding the school climate and their safety, although many perceived an improvement after the restorative justice peer jury program transpired (Olson & Viola, 2007).

### **Variables: Restorative Practices as an Alternative to Punitive Discipline**

As Howard Zehr (1990) concluded, those who planted the seed of restorative justice may not be the ones to cultivate it. Restorative justice initially began as an attempt to address the

concerns of justice professionals who expressed frustration with the criminal justice system. According to Zehr (2002), “Many feel that the process of justice deepens societal wounds and conflicts rather than contributing to healing or peace” (p. 3). Since the 1970s, restorative justice programs emerged in thousands of communities and various countries throughout the world (Zehr, 2002).

Restorative justice provides an alternative for the criminal justice system regarding wrongdoing. This shift to restorative justice in the criminal justice system may significantly alter the manner of governing and responding to crime (Johnstone, 2002).

Will restorative justice translate to the school system? As more school systems learn about restorative practices and understand how to implement these practices with fidelity, the more opportunities that will occur to move schools toward restorative rather than punitive philosophies. Restorative practices in schools provide a framework to support learning environments by modeling and encouraging responsible behavior and discouraging harmful behavior. Restorative practices, such as circles, are used to both prevent harm and mend relationships when they are damaged or broken (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005). Schools using conflict as a teachable moment and an opportunity for growth, rather than a punitive sanction, intentionally use restorative practices to build relationships and community.

Improving relationships improves student behavior and school climate, which positively influences academic performance (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2009). Frattura and Capper (2007) asserted when staff are successful with a student whom they would have typically removed, they will become more successful with other students over time. On the other hand, when a child is removed, it only promotes the removal of challenging students in the future. In such a case, teacher capacity does not grow but is inhibited.

There is no choice but for staff and students to grow through each other if we want to keep our children in school. Co-creating a positive school climate where adults are respected and

where this respect is in turn passed on to the students creates a context in which students with behavioral challenges can have the most hope for success. The success of students with behavioral challenges begins with adult behavior in the school.

(p. 89)

### **III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

#### **A. Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to exam the effectiveness of a punitive approach to discipline and determine the feasibility of restorative practices as an alternative to punitive discipline approaches for students. Should restorative practices be considered as a sustainable alternative to suspensions? Insights were revealed by gathering lived experiences of the 2017-2018 12th grade students and staff at one urban high school that implemented a program of restorative practices with fidelity as a way to address the overuse of suspensions and expulsions.

This study will use two types of data: documents and interviews. Documents such as suspension data, expulsion data, academic test results and attendance data for the school from the previous four years will be included in the study. Data will be reviewed and analyzed for trends. These data will also be compared to MPS district and when applicable, Wisconsin data. In addition, initial surveys taken by students regarding restorative practices during the first year of implementation of the model were reviewed. Content analyses of the responses were used to code common terms and find common themes.

This chapter will describe the research design of a single case study using a qualitative methods approach using, document analysis, survey, and interviews for discovering the meaning of restorative justice practices in the context of an academic course for 16 enrolled students and seven staff members at an urban high schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Academy X. This chapter begins with a description of the research purpose and approach as well as an explanation of a case study as a social scientific philosophy. Thereafter, the case study method is directly

applied to the context of this study, data collection techniques described and linked to the research questions, and data analyses methods will be enumerated and explained. This chapter will also discuss the possible limitations of the methodology generally and with this study in particular.

In this critical case study, no manipulation of variables to the population will be introduced. Instead, this study will maintain its natural state, which will include the location for data -collection, the high school. This intentional decision developed since restorative practices form a construct known for building community and/or restoring community. It will be an examination of a specific program, restorative practice as a process.

## **B. Research Design**

The methodology used to resolve the research question is a single critical instance case study that is deeply rooted in theory, which seeks to understand, explore, describe, a situation of unique interest or to call into question or challenge a highly generalized or universal assertion (McCarthy & Hodge, 1987). In this particular study, the assertion that African-Americans are disciplined disproportionately to other ethnic groups. Within the case study research methodology, this study will employ a specific data collection approach to generate data relevant to the research question (Creswell, 2007), including: Document analysis, interviews, and survey. In qualitative inquiry, three data-gathering techniques dominate, survey, interviewing, and document analysis (Gibbs, 2007). By adding the quantitative survey instrument of cross-tabulations, this study will utilize aspects of a mixed methods approach to gather the lived experiences of the students enrolled in the restorative justice course.

In *Designing and Conducting Qualitative Methods Research*, Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) identify within qualitative methods, a quantitative aspect that addressed the consideration of this proposal. “**Cross Tabulation**” (p. 67) best described as a tool that allows you to compare

the relationship between two or more variables (in this case, quantitative survey data) acts in a supportive role to the overarching qualitative data collection approaches. The underlying premise being: The researcher believes that the research question and sub-questions is best answered and the circumstances best described through methods that implicitly references quantitative and qualitative measures and sources of data collection. For this proposal, the quantitative survey is embedded within the larger qualitative case study.

Accordingly, to consider as an indicator, racial disproportionality in school discipline developed as a point of departure and sets forth concepts developed in the field of Critical Race Theory, which can help explain why such disproportionality exists. It argues that punitive school discipline policies serve as a tool that perpetuates, reenacts, and polices the boundaries of deeply engrained American racial hierarchies (Simmons, 2013).

Creswell (2007) recommends that single case studies discuss the philosophical assumptions of a group before explaining its scientific methods. The research question and sub-questions in this proposal all aim at the African-American enrolled students' experiences, understandings, and meanings they ascribed to their experience of the sub-jestorical unit (RJ Course). To more fully understand the case study social scientific methods employed to capture the students' experiences and the essence of the meaning they attached to their restorative justice practices academic course, an explication of case study origins as a philosophy follows.

“Case Study” is derived from a theoretical focus by Pierre Guillaume Frédéric Le Play in 1829 of a subject being viewed through an analytical frame (Sokolowski, 2010, p. 13). Case Studies involve in-depth explorations and descriptions of experiences and/or text to clarify their essences (Yin, 2017).

Case Study is not simply a social scientific research methodology. Case Study has a strong ethnographic component to it with roots in the writings of the French economist, who

considers cross-tabulation as a valued approach to quantitative research (Glesne, 2011). Pierre Guillaume Frédéric Le Play (1806-1882), often cited as the inaugurator of case study (Moran, 2010). As such, case studies seek to contact matter through “concrete living experience” rather than abstract philosophical musings (Moran, 2010, p. xiii).

Frédéric Le Play is oft considered an idealist because, unlike a realist who believes the world exists independently of the knower, an idealist believes that the world cannot exist independently of the mind, or of ideas (Dedinsky, 2012). As such, a case study researcher studies the reactions, interpretations, and understandings of a human (or a group of humans) to a specific experience and then, separating or bracketing himself or herself from his or her own experiences to whatever extent possible, the researcher interprets those reactions, interpretations, and understandings as expressed by the human subject(s) (Glesne, 2011).

Therefore, according to Glesne (2011), the case study researcher maintains an Interpretivist Approach to research. Interpretivist (social science), an approach to social science that opposes the positivism of natural science. Qualitative research, a method of inquiry in social science and related disciplines. Interpretivist (legal), a school of thought in contemporary jurisprudence and the philosophy of law (Myers, 2008). Unlike the Positivist Approach to research which maintains that social facts have an “objective reality” (p. 9), the Interpretivist Approach maintains that reality is constructed by the individual, or in the case of groups of people, reality is defined by broader “social constructions” (p. 8). These varying approaches, or theoretical frameworks, accomplish different purposes. Interpretivists would seek to understand, achieved primarily through qualitative methodologies that stress more localized interpretations and analyses (Glesne, 2010). Thus, case studies, inaugurated by philosophers like Frédéric Le Play, would be considered an Interpretivist Approach to research.

While many philosophers and scientific researchers have built upon and expanded Frédéric Le Play's origins, some common grounds persist: The study of the lived experiences of people; the belief that the experiences of people are conscious experiences; and research that describes the essences of the experiences of people, rather than explaining or analyzing the experiences (Creswell, 2007). From an epistemological standpoint, these common grounds root case studies within the constructivist paradigm (Denzin, 1998). Casted within the constructivist paradigm, as opposed to a positivist, post positivist, or critical paradigm, means that case studies research is apt to focus on emergent designs and emergent understandings (Yin, 2017) gleaned from these common grounds and mined as rich sources of qualitative data.

### **C. The Study's Research Questions and Sub-questions**

The following research questions will address:

#### **How does a restorative justice course in an urban school affect suspensions, referrals and expulsions for African-American Students?**

Additional Questions to be explored.

1. What part of the school's ideology shifted because of the use of restorative justice?
2. What kind of influence does restorative practices have on relationships both administrative and students?
3. How did school administration use restorative practices to create a more empathetic environment?

The first research sub-question relating to improvements in the enrolled students' understanding and learning of the restorative justice discipline approach links mainly to the interview and survey data collection technique.

First Research Sub-question: What are enrolled students' belief about Restorative Practices?

Gauging the students' level of mastery of the core concepts of restorative justice measured the students' perceptions of their learning; wherefore, the students' self-assessment of their knowledge and abilities became an integral focus of the study.

Answering the first research sub-question will be accomplished primarily through data obtained from the retrospective Likert survey, completed by all participants. The interviews will provide some additional information pertaining to what the students learned in the restorative justice academic course, serving as a secondary source of information to the survey. The first question in section two of the survey addresses this sub-question by asking what has the student learned by way of restorative practices. This question is asking for a reasonable response that consist of accountable actions similar to issues that students encountered during the course. Student will be challenged to comprehend each factual problem scenario and provide their understanding of the process.

The second research sub-question queries whether the enrolled students believed they were disciplined differently than other students in school. Keep in mind that the students who participated in the repairing harm circles were the central focus. These circles considered cases of individual misconduct of other referred students. While change as it relates to those referred students may be important, the research sub-question focuses on perception as it relates to the students enrolled in the course. Given their experiences in the course, did the students perceive differences in the way they were being disciplined? This research sub-question assumes that those in a position of examining and judging the actions of others might be so inclined to raise their own standards of personal conduct.

Second Research Sub-question: From the enrolled students' perspectives, what attitudes do the students hold toward a course specifically designed to be an alternative approach to discipline?



Research Methods: Enrolled students' behavior will be addressed, associated with the class and their responsibility in serving in a leadership role in the discipline referral circle process will be largely gathered through both survey and interviews. Results will be analyzed vis-à-vis the Trans theoretical Model of change (TTM) by Prochaska, Norcross, & DiClemente (1992, 1994). Survey responses, and interview results, will then be compared. The purpose of sub-question 2 is to determine the perceptions students held about why they were a part of the restorative justice course and whether or not they felt like they were being disciplined differently. Student perception will likely inform educators about students with behavior issues and the need for dialogue among student and teachers as well as the inclusion of professional development that addresses critical race in the classroom. Question 11 of the survey asked, in general, if you were to rate yourself in terms of discipline (how you act in relationship to the rules of the classroom and the school), how would you describe your behavior in school most of the time? This is particularly relevant in determining if students feel like they are being targeted or alienated from the school environment.

These various techniques will provide the students with an opportunity to express whether their participation in the restorative justice practices academic course influenced them to change their behavior based on perception. Secondly, the students will have an opportunity to express what specifically about their perception caused change in their behavior. Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente (1992, 1994), the originators of the Trans theoretical Model of Change (TTM), articulate several change processes. This process will identify which aspects of the restorative justice practices academic course are most responsible for influencing behavior modification.

Third Research Sub-question: The third research sub-question seeks students' perceptions of impact upon students referred to the class for misbehavior. However, for the restorative justice course, many would likely be suspended for their misbehavior. The referred

students submitted to the restorative justice conflict resolution process to address their misconduct. The third research sub-question seeks the enrolled students' reflections, analysis, and comparisons of differences between restorative and punitive approaches to discipline.

To answer Sub-question 3, analyses of the responses to Interview Question 12 of section one, Question 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 of Section 2 will give insight into understanding the impact of a punitive approach to discipline and how an alternative approach may provide greater success in managing behavior issues.

Restorative justice practices attempt to balance the control (limit setting, discipline, accountability) needed in a school building with the support (encouragement, nurturing) needed by students (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2009). In answering the third research sub-question, the survey and interviews aimed to collect the perceptions and judgments of the students as to the similarities and differences between punitive approaches to discipline and the restorative approaches and strategies espoused by participating in a restorative justice course.

By its highly interactive design, the restorative justice practices academic course encouraged participation of the class members, essential to the repairing harm circle process. The students named their restorative justice conflict resolution process "Repairing Harm Circles" where discipline referrals from the school's administration will be addressed. Once students received training and experience, the students, not by adults, will facilitate the repairing harm circles. This leadership opportunity suggests that it will empower students to help other students repair the harm resulting from their misconduct.

In effect, successful implementation of the philosophy of restorative justice means that, for students, problems in their school are not being solved for them. Nor are resolutions to problems being thrust upon, at, or to them. Instead, the teachers will actively engage students to become problem solvers and join with the referred students to address their discipline issues in a pro-social manner (Costello et al., 2009). The third research sub-question targets whether the

students will actually implement restorative justice practices congruent to its philosophy, and whether the students preferred restorative approaches to discipline to punitive approaches.

#### **D. Recruitment**

The recruitment of the sample will include both the students and staff involved with restorative practices at Academy X High School since its inception. The former 2014 2015 ninth grade students still attending Academy X urban high school four years later will be presented with the opportunity to be included in the sample. The current 12th grade students previously trained in restorative practices or who participated in a restorative practices circle will receive an invitation to participate in the interviews, and a survey of students participating in a prototypical circle process that occurs daily. Staff in this case study will include the lead teacher, who could be referred to as the Principal but the word Principal isn't a term used at the school, homeroom teacher, English teacher, program implementer, social worker, and safety assistant. All participants will or have participated in some restorative practices training, although the intensity of training varies depending on the individual.

At the time of this case study, approximately 75 students who attended the school as ninth graders in 2014-15 are still attending the school; approximately 15 or 20% of those students participated in training as circle facilitators. The sample-included students trained as facilitators of the circle process as well as those not trained, but who experienced participation in a circle.

The sample was a purposive sample because the students selected to be interviewed or observed included students with restorative practices experience. As Creswell (2009) maintained, "In qualitative data collection, purposeful sampling, more specifically, critical case sampling which is a type of purposive sampling technique that is particularly useful in exploratory qualitative research, research with limited resources, as well as research where a single case (or small number of cases) can be decisive in explaining the phenomenon of interest.

Will be used so that individuals are selected because they have experienced the central phenomenon” (p. 217). Students that volunteer to be part of the interview and survey process and final selection was based on the returned informed consent forms.

At Academy X High School, there were 24 staff members. Of those 24 staff members, there included 2 administrators, 14 teachers, 2 safety assistants, 1 secretary, and 5 support staff. In addition, the middle school shared three building maintenance and four educational assistants. Over 75% of the staff had been in the large urban school district for over five years. There were 9 males and 15 females on staff and over 85% were Caucasian. The school Restorative Justice lead facilitator and lead teacher received the majority of the restorative practices training, while the social worker and assistant lead teacher received training overviews of the process in order to be familiar with the process and support staff in their involvement.

All staff and student participants will receive a brief description of the project, the researcher’s interests, and an invitation to participate in the interview process. The researcher shared information in person with the Restorative justice lead facilitator/ teacher and she shared the information at a staff wide training. All interviewees who agreed to voluntarily participate in the research study were informed of their rights as research participants and will be asked to sign the informed consent documents prior to the interviews. When the student is a minor (age 17 or under), both the parent and the child will be required to sign the informed consent documents. Staff, students and parents were also be notified that participation in the study will be strictly voluntary and pose no risk or threat to them. Informed consent documents will be included in Appendices sections.

**E. The recruitment plan is as follows:**

1. The researcher met with the lead teacher and lead Restorative Justice Facilitator to explain the research project and determine what steps need to be taken to use the school

as a data-collection site.

2. The researcher completed the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Institutional Review Board (IRB) research protocols.
3. The researcher then took any other steps necessary to gain permission to use Academy X as the data collection sites.
4. The researcher started by interviewing the staff because the staff provided context that enabled the researcher to determine the comfortability of the interview questions.
5. The researcher asked for permission to attend Restorative Justices practices, held at different times throughout the day, to briefly explain the research project. The researcher left recruitment fliers asking any participants who might be interested to contact the number on the flier.
6. The researcher talked with all interested participants in person and in the presence of the lead restorative justice facilitator/ teacher to answer any questions they may have had and to make sure they fit the study criteria. If the potential participant agreed to take part in the study, the researcher scheduled an interview with the client.
7. All interviews took place in a designated room on the premises of Academy X as to maintain some level of confidentiality.

8. Once informed consent was obtained from the students, the researcher began organizing interview times.

## **F. Data Collection**

In order to answer the research questions, several separate data collection techniques were engaged. They are listed as follows:

- 1) Document Analysis. The researcher throughout the terms of the courses on approximately 10 days will analyze document Analysis of each student that participated in the restorative justice class. Each school's administration referred specific cases of student misconduct to the restorative justice discipline class for a resolution of the discipline referral. Field notes were prepared to record interactions. Document analysis will occur primarily through review of the teachers' course materials. The document analysis strengthened the ability to make recommendations about restorative justice class curriculum development for the purposes of internal and external application.
- 2) Survey. Gauging the students' level of mastery of the core concepts of restorative justice practices as well as their perceptions are important functions of the study. Therefore, a retrospective pretest posttest survey will measure the students' perceptions of effectiveness of these restorative strategies versus traditional, punitive approaches to student misconduct. The survey will also measure their perceptions about the process and its impact upon their behavior, their thinking, and their school community.
- 3) Interviews. Interviews will gauge the students' perceptions of their learning, the personal impact of the course, and changes in their own thinking and behavior. Where students will indicate change as it occurs, those changes were analyzed using the "behavior change model" of Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente (1992, 1994). The restorative justice repairing harm circles provided students with a leadership role in their high schools' respective disciplinary processes. Thus will empower, their perceptions of the effectiveness of restorative justice

practices as an alternative approach to traditional, punitive approaches to discipline were recorded during the interviews.

Surveys, document analysis, and interviews, were represented in the three data collection techniques utilized by this study. The design will seek to describe the phenomenon and capture the essence of its meaning to the students enrolled in the course. The researcher will transcribe, analyze, and code the audiotaped interviews for themes to ascertain the participants' perceptions and attitudes on student behavior, adult behavior, relationships, and school climate relative to student discipline because of restorative practices.

### **G. Analytic Strategy**

Data analysis is the process of making sense out of one's data. According to Creswell (2009), the process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data and preparing the data for analysis. The researcher moves deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the greater meaning of the data. In other words, data analysis helps uncover the "the bigger picture" (p. 183).

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process. The timing of analysis and the integration of analysis remains unique to qualitative research. Qualitative design is emergent because as one collects data, that analyzed data guide the researcher in a particular direction. Data analysis is recursive and dynamic. Although data analysis is done throughout data collection, once completion of data collection occurs, the analysis becomes even more intensive (Moran, 2010).

Data collection and analysis are ongoing processes that could extend indefinitely. "The potential sources of data are limited only by the researcher's open-mindedness and creativity" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 143). There is always another person who could be interviewed, another observation that could be done, or more documents to review. How does the researcher

know to stop the data analysis? There may be an exhaustion of sources, emergence of regularities, over-extension, or saturation of categories. In exhaustion of sources, although sources can be recycled and tapped multiple times, there comes a moment when no new information can be gained through resources. In emergence of regularities, there maintains a sense of integration and commonalities in data collection. Care must be exercised to avoid a false conclusion because of regularities. Saturation of categories occurs when the researcher has collected data yield only tiny increments of new information gathered in comparison to the effort expended to get them. Finally, over-extension occurs when new information being unearthed is very far removed from the core of any viable categories (Merriam, 1988).

Once the researcher determines that the simultaneous data collection and analysis is complete, the information had to be organized so that intensive data analysis can begin. All of the information collected about the phenomenon was brought together. The material is often presented according to the categories used to organize the raw data. The case study report becomes the cleansed, organized and summarized information that results in a conclusion (See Figure 2 adapted from Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995). The final case study report is the narrative structure used to present the data (Merriam, 1988).

The Case study data analysis cycle included categorization of data, interpretation of single instances, and identification of patterns, synthesis and generalization, and organization of details about phenomenon.

1. Categorization of Data, clusters data into meaningful groups.
2. Interpretation of single instances, specific data and relation to the study.
3. Identification of patterns, data was scrutinized for broad themes and meanings.
4. Synthesis and generalization, conclusions are drawn from phenomenon.



5. Organization of details about phenomenon, facts are arranged in a logical order.

Data generated by techniques previously described was subsequently interpreted through the analysis techniques/procedure of content analysis. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), “A content analysis is a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases. Content analyses are typically performed on forms of human communication...” (p. 142).

## **H. Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a brief description of the critical case study research design focused particularly on learning of restorative practices in an urban school over a number of years. It highlighted personal, social, political and educational experiences that have profoundly shaped my consciousness and that underpin my value system, assumptions and notions of truth as it pertains to schools ability to teach and learn restoratively. I have highlighted in a consciously subjective way aspects of the lived experience of the students that I believe have not only fundamentally influenced my interest in the research problem and how I have conceptualized the information, but also consciously and unconsciously framed the way that I have interpreted, conducted and reported this study. These underlying assumptions are deliberately declared as part of the critical race theoretical nature of this research project. The next chapter explores the data and the findings of the study will occur.

## **IV. Research Findings**

### **Introduction**

This single critical case study is based on a Milwaukee Charter School that I have been directly a part of for the last 3 years. However, I was drawn to the school after meeting its founder in 2005; she and I formed a friendship, began discussing ways to connect with the community, and therefore, started the process of informally collecting data that would later be analyzed for organizational purposes. I have continued to work with the school as a facilitator but I no longer collect data or provide research. This study is neither cast as a pastoral on the triumph of partnership work in resolving some of the most challenging problems in urban schools, nor is it meant as a grim tale of wide spread discrimination. This research seeks to determine if restorative practices are a viable alternative to punitive discipline approaches for African-American students in an urban school. Are restorative practices an effective alternative to retributive discipline? Perceptions were expressed by gathering lived experiences of the 2016-2017 12th grade students and staff at one urban high school that implemented a program of restorative practices with reliability in order to eliminate excessive suspensions and expulsions.

The study featured a literature review of related research and theory in the areas of change, restorative justice, and punitive disciplinary approaches to misbehavior in schools. Using a critical case studies methods design, the study engaged data collection techniques including, document analysis, survey, and interviews. Twenty-three individuals from one centrally located high school served as the research subjects for the study and participated in all phases.

My task in this chapter is to illustrate the way in which Academy X has been able to implement an alternative approach to punitive discipline. This task also entails describing the transition of traditional discipline practices to a realm of alternative practices, in the sense where punitive discipline is exchanged for an alternative approach that is far less punitive. In other

words, what was considered customary disciplinary practices in urban schools will have to be recast as a less aggressive and different way of looking at discipline. The question related to this research, which determined the relevance of this study included:

**1. How does a restorative practices course in an urban school impact suspension, referrals and expulsions rates for African-American students?**

Additional Questions to be explored.

1. What part of the school's ideology shifted because of the use of restorative justice?
2. What kind of influence does restorative practices have on relationships both administrative and students?
3. How did school administration use restorative practices to create a more empathetic environment?

The research approach was that of a single critical instance case study. The research purpose of studying a model of discipline, restorative practices, remains important in reproduction of the programming in other sites and ultimately in reducing suspensions and affecting the academic success of students. Data collection consisted of document analysis, surveys, and individual interviews.

The study also includes a literature review of interconnected research and theories in a wide range of areas where restorative practices are used heavily and implemented with fidelity to promote learning and development with students in special circumstances (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001). This is particularly important when the learner comes from a culturally different background to that of the teacher and there are cultural variations on how communication is structured or cultural differences on what is being learned (Krippendorff, 2004).

By means of a qualitative single critical case study design, this research involved data collection techniques including document analysis, observations, and interviews. Data, including

classroom surveys from students participating in a Restorative Justice Course, suspension history, attendance history and academic achievement were analyzed, multiple prototypical repairing harm circle was observed, and 23 interviews were analyzed (17 students and six staff) as part of this case study.

Chapter Four describes the various ways qualitative data is generated during the research of this critical case study through document analysis, observation, and individual interviews. It had the potential of becoming hostile when teachers and students failed to fully embrace the components of restorative practice in a restorative environment. The classroom surveys were studied as a way to inform the researcher. In relation to the district and school attendance data, suspension data and academic data occurred. Archetypal repairing harm circles were routinely evaluated at Academy X High School.

Specific individuals chosen for participation in the survey were randomly selected from list of participants provided by the school administrators at Academy X. Consequently, the advantage of this critical case study is that the respondents are crucial to the study. The most substantial set of data included the 23 individual interviews that included 17 students from the senior class and 6 staff members involved with restorative practices. Staff members included classroom teachers, a social worker, a program implementer, an administrator and a safety assistant. All individuals volunteered their time to participate in the study.

Data, including classroom surveys from a former Restorative Justice Course, suspension history, attendance history and academic success were collected on the behaviors and attitudes of a select group of individuals residing in the urban school, and 24 interviews were analyzed (17 students and eight staff) as part of this critical case study. Chapter Four provides a summary of the findings generated during the research by each of the qualitative data sets: document analysis, survey, and individual interviews. The classroom surveys requested information on the behavior

characteristics and life-styles of these students and their attitudes and opinions on school situations and institutional politics regarding restorative justice as a course.

Of the 17 students that participated in the research a designated student would sometimes act as the facilitator and the other students would serve as a peer participant. The two participants in the repairing harm circles also participated in individual interviews. The other two participants acted as sophomore students who had a problem they needed resolved. The most substantial set of data included the 24 individual interviews that included 17 students from the senior class and 4 staff members involved with restorative practices. Staff members included classroom teachers, a social worker, a program implementer, an administrator and a safety assistant. All individuals volunteered their time to participate in the study.

Historical data was collected from the school's unit scroll on June 18, 2018. The researcher compared the data in two primary ways: 1) District or state to school; and 2) annual Academy X High School data. District, state, and school data was compared in the areas of suspensions, attendance and state academic testing. Data review occurred based on the past three years.

Academy X High School showed a significant decrease in suspensions from the 2015-2016 school year to the 2017-2018 school year. In addition, comparing Academy X High School to other high schools in the district, there emerged a sizeable difference in the percentage of students suspended. For example, the district suspended over 20% or more of the student population compared to Academy X High School.

Attendance overall remained fairly consistent for Academy X High School over the past three years with a slight decrease in the 2015-2016 school year, but increasing again in the 2017-2018 school year. However, compared to the rest of the school district, Academy X High School typically achieved a 10% higher attendance rate or more in all grades. Notably, Academy X is a charter public high school with no admission policy and similar demographics to the other high

schools in this large urban district. It is quite remarkable that the attendance rate remained so much higher than the rest of the district.

Tables 2, 3 and 4 present the suspension data for Academy X High School. The first table compares year-to-year suspension data of Academy X High School before restorative justice was implemented, the second table compares year-to-year suspensions after restorative practices were implemented and the third table compares Academy X High School suspension data to district high schools.

Table 2  
Academy X High School Historical Suspension Data (Before restorative justice was implemented)

| School                                                  | # of suspensions 2012-2013 | # of suspensions 2013-2014 | # of suspensions 2014-2015 |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Academy X High School                                   | 74                         | 68                         | 71                         |
| % of students suspended based on # of students enrolled | 24.7 %                     | 22.7 %                     | 23.7 %                     |

Table 3  
Academy X High School Historical Suspension Data (After restorative justice was implemented)

| School                                                  | # of suspensions 2015-2016 | # of suspensions 2016-2017 | # of suspensions 2017-2018 |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Academy X High School                                   | 26                         | 11                         | 10                         |
| % of students suspended based on # of students enrolled | 17%                        | 5%                         | 4%                         |

Table 4

Academy X High School Compared to District Historical Suspension Data

| % of students suspended based on # | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 | 2017-2018 |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                                    |           |           |           |

|                              |     |     |     |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| of students enrolled         |     |     |     |
| District High School Average | 29% | 29% | 25% |
| Academy X High School        | 17% | 5%  | 4%  |

As of May 18, 2018, with 300 students, Academy X High School suspended five students during the current 2017-2018 school year. This calculates to 2% of the students enrolled. In 2015-2016, freshmen and sophomores were included for 161 students. In 2016-2017, freshmen, sophomores, and juniors were included for 219 students. In 2017-2018, Academy X High School included freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, totaling 290 students. Although the total number of students increased over the years as the high school grew to full capacity, the number of suspensions actually decreased. Perhaps this evidence indicated the school's deliberate decision to create a restorative environment.

Students at Academy X High School were expected to take the state exam in the areas of Reading, Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies during their 10th grade year in school. Student results have been compared between the district, state, and individual schools. Tables 4 represents the state test results for the past three years.

Table 5

December 2017 State Test Grade 10 Results Compared to District and State

| Academy X High School | # of Students Enrolled | Minimum | Basic | Proficient | Advanced | Proficient and Advanced |
|-----------------------|------------------------|---------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------------|
| Reading               | 58                     | 10.3    | 27.6  | 41.4       | 19.0     | 60.4                    |
| Language              | 58                     | 8.6     | 41.4  | 43.1       | 5.2      | 48.3                    |
| Math                  | 58                     | 31.0    | 22.4  | 43.1       | 1.7      | 44.8                    |

|                |                        |         |       |            |          |                         |
|----------------|------------------------|---------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------------|
| Science        | 58                     | 41.4    | 17.2  | 22.4       | 17.2     | 39.6                    |
| Social Science | 58                     | 29.3    | 24.1  | 32.8       | 12.1     | 44.9                    |
| District       | # of Students Enrolled | Minimum | Basic | Proficient | Advanced | Proficient and Advanced |
| Reading        | 4, 382                 | 25.0    | 24.1  | 30.0       | 17.9     | 47.9                    |
| Language       | 4,382                  | 19.8    | 37.4  | 33.0       | 4.7      | 37.7                    |
| Math           | 4, 382                 | 42.9    | 20.9  | 28.7       | 4.4      | 33.1                    |
| Science        | 4, 382                 | 48.3    | 14.4  | 21.8       | 10.4     | 32.2                    |
| Social Studies | 4, 382                 | 41.3    | 11.3  | 27.0       | 14.7     | 41.7                    |
| State          | # of Students Enrolled | Minimum | Basic | Proficient | Advanced | Proficient and Advanced |
| Reading        | 65, 165                | 7.8     | 12.8  | 29.6       | 48.6     | 78.2                    |
| Language       | 65, 165                | 6.9     | 21.2  | 51.4       | 18.7     | 70.1                    |
| Math           | 65, 165                | 14.3    | 13.4  | 46.0       | 25.2     | 71.2                    |
| Science        | 65, 165                | 15.7    | 10.2  | 33.4       | 39.2     | 72.6                    |
| Social Studies | 65, 165                | 15.9    | 6.9   | 30         | 45.3     | 75.3                    |

Data analysis of the 2017-2018 state test scores, administered at Grade 10, seven years after a restorative practice model was fully implemented, demonstrated that Academy X High School performed better than most schools in the district. The students scored highest in reading and language arts. Both the state and the district scored highest in reading and social studies. The students in the Advanced and Proficient category scored an average of 47.60%, whereas, the district students scored an average of 38.52%. The state students in the Advanced and Proficient category scored an average amongst the subjects of 73.48%. Academy X High School students scored an average of 9% above the district, but they scored an average of 26% below the state.



## Restorative Justice Course Survey

### **Section 1: First, I would like to ask some questions about you.**

1) Please circle what best describes your current year in high school:

Freshman     Sophomore     Junior     Senior

2) How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

3) Are you...?                       female                       male

4) Are you... ? (Mark all that apply)

Caucasian/White     African American/Black     Hispanic/Latino

Asian

Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander     American Indian/Alaskan Native

Other (describe) \_\_\_\_\_

5) Did your mother complete high school or obtain her GED?

No     Yes                           Don't Know

6) Did your father complete high school or obtain her GED?

No     Yes     Don't Know

7) Did your mother go to college?

No     Yes     Don't Know

8) Did your father go to college?

No     Yes     Don't Know

9) Did your mother graduate from college?

No     Yes     Don't Know

10) Did your father graduate from college?

No     Yes     Don't Know

11) In general, if you were to rate yourself in terms of discipline (how you act in relationship to the rules of the classroom and the school), how would you describe your behavior in school most of the time?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6  
*Quite well behaved .....badly behaved*

12) Have you ever been suspended from school?     No     Yes

If YES, how many times in the past have you received an out-of-school suspension? \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 2: Now, I want to know about your experience while enrolled in the Restorative Justice Course.**

1) Restorative Justice taught me (check all the that apply)?

Self-Awareness       Accountability       Respect for others

Self-Respect       Patience       Confidence

2) What is the most important thing or things you learned in the restorative justice course?

3) During this past semester while you have been enrolled in the restorative justice course, would you say that your behavior

1                                  2                                  3                                  4                                  5                                  6

*Has Improved .....Is About the Same ..... Has Gotten Worse*

4) Since participating in the restorative justice course I **now** take school...

1                                  2                                  3                                  4                                  5                                  6

*More Seriously.. .....About the Same .....Less Seriously*

5) When I think about what I learned in the restorative justice course, I now

1                                  2                                  3                                  4                                  5                                  6

Think More . . . . .About the Same . . . . . Think Less  
Before I Act Before I Act

6) After being in the restorative justice course, I **now** spend my time with

1 2 3 4 5 6  
People who do NOT.....No Difference ..... People  
who do get into trouble gel into  
trouble

7) After being in the restorative justice course,

1 2 3 4 5 6  
I more often avoid people..... No Difference ..... I less often avoid  
people who use drugs/alcohol who use  
drugs/alcohol

8) Because restorative justice is at my school, safety is...

1 2 3 4 5 6  
Better .. ..... No Different .....Worse

7) *When a student is referred to the school office for discipline, out-of-school suspensions are used*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6

*Very Frequently.....Only as a Last Resort*

8) *When students are removed from school due to a suspension, their academic learning time is*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6

*Hurt Badly.....Not Hurt at All*

9) *As an alternative to school suspensions, I find that the restorative justice is*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6

*More Fair..... About the Same ..... Less Fair*

**10) *When a student is referred to the school office for discipline, the school administrators view learning about the referred student's side of the story as***

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6

*Very Important .....Not Important at All*

11) *Does restorative justice course provide a better approach to school discipline than other approaches*

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6

*Much Better.....About the Same.....Much Worse*

**Section 3: What have you learned about Restorative Justice? Here, I want to hear about your familiarity with Restorative Justice concepts BEFORE you took the Restorative Justice Practices course compared to NOW.**

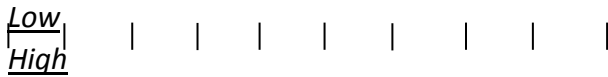
1. Familiarity with the basic vocabulary of Restorative Justice.

**Prior Knowledge Level:**



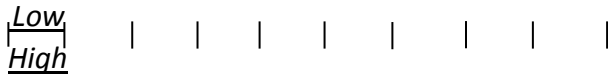

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**Current Knowledge Level:**




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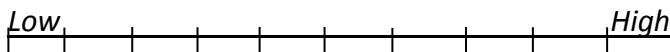
**Importance of Concept:**




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2. Familiarity with "assessing Harm" when trying to resolve conflicts.

**Prior Knowledge Level:**

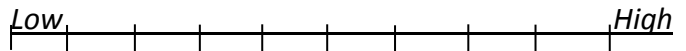



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**Current Knowledge Level:**

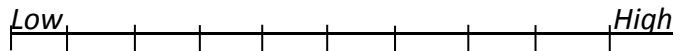
4. Familiarity with Restorative Justice's way of viewing discipline NOT as a rule violation, but as a violation to a relationship.

**Prior Knowledge Level:**



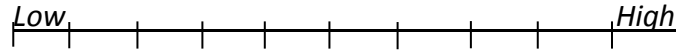

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**Current Knowledge Level:**

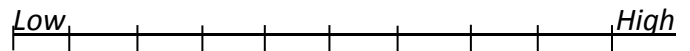



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**Importance of Concept**



**Importance of Concept:**



3. Familiarity with "empathy" in terms of understanding other people.

**Prior Knowledge Level:**

High

\_\_\_\_\_ | 1  
**Importance of Concept:**

Low \_\_\_\_\_ High

\_\_\_\_\_ | 1 |

Low \_\_\_\_\_ High

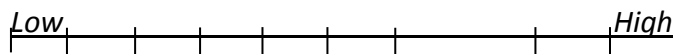
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Familiarity with the Restorative Justice concept that the purpose of discipline is to teach appropriate skills to the disciplined student.

Current Knowledge Level:

Low \_\_\_\_\_ Hi

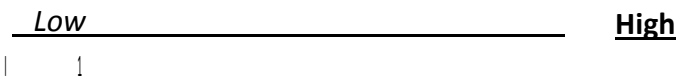
Importance of Concept:



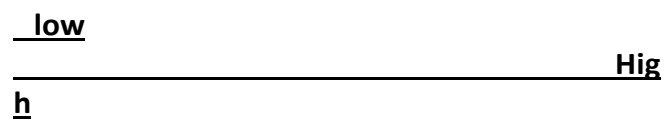
Section 4: Have you changed? Here, I want to hear about you *BEFORE* you took the Restorative Justice course compared to *NOW*.

**1. My listening skills.**

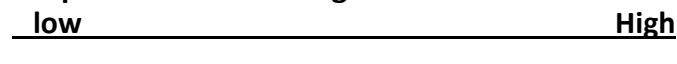
**Prior Ability Level:**



**Current Ability Level:**



**Importance of listening skills:**



**2. My commitment to helping other people resolve conflict.**

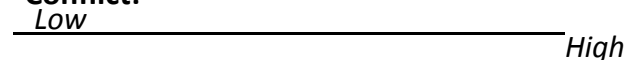
**Prior Commitment Level:**



**Current Commitment Level:**



**Importance of Helping Others Resolve Conflict:**



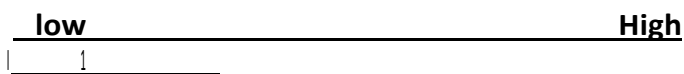
**3. My commitment to being a good student.**

**Prior Commitment Level:**



**4. My grades in school**

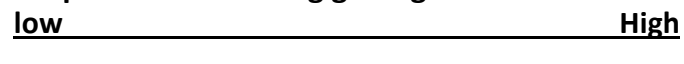
**Prior Grades Level:**



**Current Grades Level:**

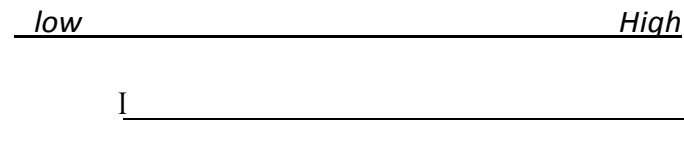


**Importance of having good grades:**

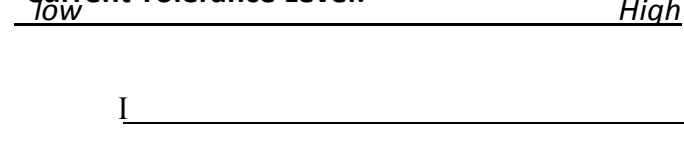


*5. My tolerance for other people's opinions.*

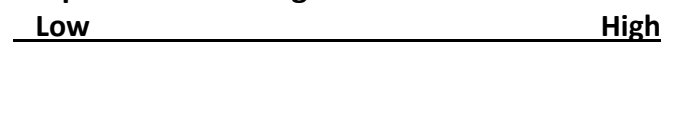
**Prior Tolerance Level:**



**Current Tolerance Level:**



**Importance of being Tolerant:**



**Current Commitment Level:**





6. How I treated other students.

**Prior Level:**

Low \_\_\_\_\_ High

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 1

**Importance of being a good student:**

Low \_\_\_\_\_ High

\_\_\_\_\_

Disresrct/11/ \_\_\_\_\_ Respectful

**Current Level:**

Disresrct/11/ \_\_\_\_\_ Respectful

\_\_\_\_\_

**Importance of being Respectful to Other**

**Students:** Not-ortant \_\_\_\_\_ Very Important

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|--|--|

|

7. How I treated teachers.

**Prior Level:**

Disrespectful

Respectful

**Current Level:**

Disrespectful

Respectful

Importance of being Respectful to Teachers:

Not Important

Very Important

Important

Very

1 1 1 1 1 1

8. How often I skipped classes.

**Prior Level:**

Often

Not At All

**Current Level:**

Often

Not At All

Importance of Attending Classes:

Important

9. How often I talked back to teachers.

**Prior Level:**

Often

Not At All

**Current Level:**

Often

Not At All

Importance of Not Talking Back to Teachers:

10. How often I drank alcohol or used illegal drugs.

**Prior Level:**

Often

Not At All

**Current Level:**

Often

Not At All

Importance of Not Using Alcohol or Illegal Drugs:

1 1 1 1 1 1

## Survey Summary

After reviewing all 23 surveys, it became clear that the overwhelming amount of subjects reported a positive response to the Restorative Justice Course. There were 17 of 23 respondents or 65% who felt they had improved their behavior or seen improvement in student's behavior directly because of the course. The other 35% felt their behavior improved marginally or not at all. None of the students interviewed felt their behavior worsened. Participants also felt like they had become better students and began to take learning more seriously after experiencing the course. Sixteen of the twenty-three responses (59%) stated they viewed school much more seriously and respected the role of the teacher. While 9.43 students (41%) stated that although slight, they felt better about school and the experience of learning after taking the Restorative Justice course. Students also responded favorably to the way the course challenged them to be more conscious about their actions. Sixteen of the 17 students (95%) reported that the course changed their lives for the better in that they were able to manage their frustration both in and outside of school.

In reviewing the questions regarding student's attitudes toward authority after participating in the restorative justice course, 11 of 17 students (64.71%) responded there was a considerable shift in their attitudes toward administration, while six students (35.29%) responded they felt somewhat different about administration. The question regarding my commitment to helping people resolve conflict revealed that 13 of 17 students (77%) responded they felt more comfortable helping to resolve conflict amongst their peers after taking the course. While four of 17 (23%) still felt unsure about getting involved in other students issues after the Restorative Justice Course. No students responded they were afraid to get involved in conflict resolution.

One question that stood out in the survey related to safety, "Because of the Restorative Justice course, safety is...better, no different or worse." All respondents (100%) answered "better" to some degree. This response indicated that students felt restorative justice had a direct impact on the safety at their school.

Another question related to the effects of a restorative practice course in the school. Question 4 asked, “Since participating in the restorative justice course I **now** take school.” Seven of 17 responses (41%) responded very seriously, seven students (41%) responded seriously, and three students (18%) responded not seriously at all.

Other questions focused on an array of topics related to the restorative justice course, but one of the reoccurring themes was suspensions and its impact on learning. In each of the questions, nearly 100% of the students rated restorative justice as a “much better” option than the overuse of suspensions.

After examining the documents, the information proved that students that participated in the Restorative Justice course were positively impacted by the experience. The data showed considerable improvement in behavior both inside and outside of the classroom. The overwhelming majority of students and staff felt a positive shift in the school after the class was implemented. Many of the student’s felt like the restorative justice course helped them manage their lives better.

## **B. Finding(s) Interrelated to Restorative Practices and the school wide Suspension Rate.**

The first research question discusses the suspension rate and in what way restorative practices has affected the suspension rate at Academy X High School. The suspension rate was mentioned in almost every student and staff interview. The word suspension, expulsion or referral was captured nearly a hundred times throughout the interviews. When the researcher asked a question about discipline or climate, the responses almost invariably included something about suspensions.

Each of those interviewed mentioned the link between restorative practices and truncated suspension rates. The perception that suspensions were viewed as ineffective as a form of

discipline proved evident based on the responses of both staff and students. For instance, Student I commented on his view of suspensions:

Seeing how restorative practices works; it's designed to reduce suspensions. Better yet, suspensions suck because once you get suspended that's it. You haven't really dealt with the issue. You're just more angry now and that frustration is usually directed at the teacher who suspended you. But the practices shows you a solution to your anger and then you're talking through things instead of storming out of the school because you got suspended. Man, it's easy to realize that schools that suspend students have a much more vicious environment. Everyone be ready to fight to so that they can get suspended and have a day off. I know if I'm getting suspended I'm getting to it. I mize well tear the school up or deal with who ever I got issues with. And they be knowing what they're doing when they suspend us. They just don't want to teach all of those students in the class. With restorative justice, you are more inclined to deal with the issue differently. By the time you sit down and talk things through, you ain't even mad no more.

Student J agreed with Student I regarding the ineffectiveness of suspensions. She felt that restorative practices taught students how to solve their problems and learn from their mistakes.

Student J asserted:

The whole school moves differently. When I was getting suspended before I got to this school I hated everyone that was a part of my suspension. I wanted smoke with whomever knew about my suspension, was a part of my suspension or learned about my suspension. I hated the teachers that were so quick to suspend us over the littlist thing. And it was always the cowardly teacher that didn't know how to talk to the students, and

they walked around with an attitude until someone checked them and then they would act like a victim. That use to piss me off!!

Student G expressed his thoughts on suspension:

Getting suspended isn't necessarily a bad thing because we get those days off. We go home and it's like "we're back on the block," doing what we do, sometimes for extended weekend. But the problem wasn't fixed. I'm still beefing with those that I had issues with, and when I see them after I return, it's on! We got smoke!

The staff also expressed their concern regarding the ineffectiveness of punitive discipline as it pertains to suspensions. As the student is stated, the problems are not addressed when the students are suspended and the issue is left unresolved as with the typical suspension procedures. The government studies teacher explained, "The suspension process seems ineffective. You have to write a referral; the student goes to the office and depending on the offense, but more than likely, a suspension is given, and during that time none of the issues were resolved and more often than not the student becomes more angry and withdrawn. His attitude toward the teacher is in jeopardy and he is angry at the administration. The student is angrier than he was before the suspension."

The math teacher expressed the same sentiment regarding the ineffectiveness of suspensions as a form of discipline:

Everyone knows by now that suspensions create more problems than they work. What we're learning is that kids become more disruptive once they've been suspended and they almost develop and "I don't give an F\*&k attitude toward authority. Once you start alienating students through suspension and creating a place in their mind that they're the

problem. You lose them and they lose trust in you as a teacher. It's very hard to have a relationship with them after you've suspended them, especially if you've suspended them more than once. Also, they're losing valuable instructional time when you suspend them, therefore pushing them behind and then they're playing catch up.

The staff and students commented on the absence of suspensions at Academy X High School. However, if students were suspended, they felt it remained important for students to have a circle to help repair the harm that was done to the victim and school community. They shared the impact that restorative practices can have on prevention as well. For example, Student Q stated:

Peacekeeping circles have worked in many different situations. Even if two students got into it and someone got hurt and the students got suspended. When they return from suspension an emergency circle would be formed and those issues would be dealt with. It's always about healing and fixing the situation so that there's no beef.

The school guidance counselor commented on the importance of circles as a follow up to suspensions. He argued:

It's working. Restorative Practices is transforming our school. Peacekeeping circles are making the school environment better, and even the students that come back from suspension they seem to appreciate the opportunity to sit in circle and be heard so that they're able to address the damage they may have caused and be allowed the opportunity to correct the issue and move past it. When the issue isn't addressed, it's left lingering and the school energy is tense.

Both students and staff at the school share similar beliefs about suspensions. Unless under extreme circumstances did they think suspensions or expulsions were an effective deterrent for students with behavior issues. Students who generally are likely to be suspended are often struggling either academically or socially. Suspensions tend to exacerbate the problem and create a whole set of additional problems.

While they understand that, some serious offenses may require a suspension based on district policy, the school administration and staff try to use circles as their means of discipline. Consequences may occur because of the circle, which the staff and students believe have a greater effect on the students. They learn from their mistakes and learn how to repair the harm that was done to the victim and community rather than getting pushed further away from the community by being suspended. The science teacher revealed:

What I've learned to appreciate about the school is that they've embraced a culture of healthy learning. The entire school thinks and acts restoratively and therefore much of the way the students learn is through a restorative lens, which is designed to eliminate harm and build the consciousness so that students recognize their pain and instead of setting the pain aside they are dealing with it in a peaceful manner. The thought of suspending a student for acting out is unhealthy. We want to build character in each of our students and that can only be done when you're working with them to understand their value. [Circles] have allowed us that place to heal.



Student Q maintained:

We're disciplined differently, but it's almost like you're disciplining yourself unless it's something serious. And I believe that's why we appreciate our school, because we don't have to worry about teachers turning their backs on us or kicking us out of class for simple s\*&t, chewing gum, cursing, talking out of turn. It's dealt with differently. Most minor things are dealt with in class and rarely do they even mention suspensions.

Restorative practices are also used as a form of prevention. One of the areas an administrator is held accountable for includes the school climate. Suspension data review occurs on a daily basis by Central Office staff and becomes part of the administrator's evaluation. The school administrator who dealt with discipline, described:

It's about correcting the issue. And I really wouldn't expect the staff to view the process any differently. I think our school has done a terrific job in creating a climate that is respectful to our children, and that has been done through listening to the children and allowing them to express themselves in a way that is clear and honest. They respect the circle process so much that often times they'll request a circle to deal with an issue..."We need to have a circle. This will only get resolved if we have a peacekeeping circle." By using circles we are able to get to the root cause, rather than turning to suspensions and relying on suspensions to correct the problem. By trusting the students you create a climate of respect and appreciation for every person in the building.

Over the past four years, charter schools are expected to create a certain typology of tasks that need to take place in order to continue providing services and remain licensed to educate, within which some certain guidelines are being enforced. During these four years, all charter schools were required to be part of this statewide licensing effort. Academy X High School staff

decided to wait until they were required to be part of the charter school reform initiative because they had been so successful using restorative practices. However, they found that restorative practices were not a part of the reform policies enacted by this new initiative. The school administrator described:

The program dovetails very nicely with other programs that have been used like Love and Logic. And now that our school has joined the rest of the district with the PBIS initiative, we find that restorative practice dovetails in with what they ask us to do.

The program lead facilitator also commented on the district initiative:

Initially I thought it was going to be a part of the process. I thought restorative practices would automatically be a part of the new direction of charter school policy because the impact it's had on learning, but it hasn't. Many of the statistics have shown the difference of schools that practice restoratively and those that don't. Not just in our school but in other schools that practice the restorative model. It works and we are seeing it work on a global scale. Once it's implemented you're able to see immediate changes in the school and the way students respond to one another. But I think I was very naïve to think that it would be fully embraced.

The centrality given to the Restorative Justice model at Academy X did not happen by accident. The initiative was written into the curriculum shortly after the school received its charter status and the rest of the school began practicing the model as alternative to punitive approaches to discipline. Restorative practices are also used as a form of prevention. One of the areas an administrator is held accountable for includes the school climate. Suspension data review occurs on a daily basis by Central Office staff and becomes part of the administrator's evaluation. The school lead facilitator who developed the curriculum, described: It is a common

sense issue. In addition, I really cannot see it any other way, it is a practical approach to dealing with students that have trauma and are not able to express themselves properly. Once we're able to identify some of the other issues that are preventing students from reaching their full potential then I'd be willing to hear something different, but until we've addressed the core issues that are causing kids to act-out then we should spend more time listening...I think the more that we can use [circles] to understand misbehavior and address it that way, you know, going at the causes, rather than the effects, then the more we avoid the reoccurrence of that behavior and so we have less students missing their instructional time. What I often find is that people who don't understand the benefits of Restorative Practice dismiss it as ineffective, but once you understand the nature of it, you are more appreciative of its benefits.

In conclusion, Restorative practices in the classroom created a certain tolerance that needed to take place in order to reduce suspensions and expulsions throughout the school. That tolerance is inscribed with some tacit assumptions and meanings about processes that were used by facilitators to improve the way students receive information and are disciplined. In addition, the Lead facilitator whose knowledge about the school suspension policies had a different framework to make that assessment about the antiquated systems of punitive discipline. Her scheme did not follow the lines of organizational task classification as envisaged in the proposal in the language of focal versus peripheral. In her framework, the approach and "attitude" was more telling than "knowledge" itself. If "Focal versus peripheral" was a frame used in the proposal to cast our work, which was dislodged and disrupted in the actual implementation, then "practice versus purpose", was a frame that emerged from our own framing of the work in the actual implementation.

### **C. Findings Related to whether or not the School Climate Changed because of restorative practices.**

The second research question concentrated on the change at Academy X High School because of the implementation of the restorative practices. A breakdown of the interview responses revealed that since the school's inauguration in fall 2004, restorative practices were eventually selected as the primary practice for resolving conflict in the school. The concept of "conflict" presented difficulty for the respondents because restorative practices were implemented during the initial structuring of the school; therefore, no change could be reported.

For example, the science teacher replied, "A focal point around which we support our mission is through the way in which we discipline restoratively. Everybody in the entire school understands that we are a restorative justice school and that is simply who we are. The direction of our school is contingent on how we practice restoratively and apply the principles of restorative practices even when it's difficult. You have to understand that when dealing with students through a restorative justice lens, everyone has to participate because it's a gradual thing. In our case, students have to be willing to trust the process and teachers and administration have to as well. It requires planning and a willingness from the entire school."

However, after asking the participant what kind of effect restorative practices had on school climate and culture, there were considerable positions regarding restorative practices' positive impact on the climate of the school. The participants claimed that the school was a positive place to learn and does a good job in preparing the students for post-secondary learning. They stated that due to limited disciplinary incidents and fewer suspensions, the implementation

of restorative practices has had a positive influence on school climate and culture. This led participants to express pride in their school. For example, one student stated:

Initially I thought this sh\*%t was going to be corny. I thought the idea of sitting down and talking through sh\*%t was for suckers and I didn't want to participate in telling anyone my business, but after sitting in on one session and seeing what takes place I realized that it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. I had no idea it was going to be like that, where we were going to talk and be comfortable sharing personal information, but it was. And, you know, I learned to like it, 'cause you know, you can say what you want to say, and if you don't want to say anything then you don't have to say anything. Everyone has the opportunity to share if they choose to, but if not you can stay quiet. After getting to know your fellow students and hearing their stories, you don't want any problems with them. And its' kinda how everyone in the school is, the way people talk is much more respectful.

The schools lead teacher also compared Academy X High School to other area schools that practice restoratively. She mentioned data that she had access to and shared with the researcher the relevant information. "In my opinion, we've captured a moment and if you look at the statistics of other schools in the district our suspension rates are very low because of our practices. It has changed the way in which the school functions and the students support the school. Then, and even then, all of that was really to support newer ways to create a better climate in the school. I think the obvious goal is to support the schools climate. When we applied to renew our charter status, we made an intentional effort to make RJ integral to our school culture; that is an easy way to create a healthy climate and we can see the changes, which is critical to our growth. The whole idea is to create a completely safe school where students can

learn in an environment free of petty conflict. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the suspension rate in the Milwaukee school district was amongst the highest in the nation for urban schools. Students, especially at the high school level, clearly understand the importance of being in a learning environment. One that is free from any major issue.

Another Student reflected: When you've been raised to deal with disrespectful situations one way and that way always ends in violence you become use to handling problems that way. In school you're fighting, out of school you're fighting, but Restorative Justice shows you a different way. I felt like it was a burden at first but I started to understand how it was changing me for the better, so that when I was out of school, I could handle problems differently. I'm not as angry as I use to be and I'm sure that is because I know how to deal with my frustration better. I'm able to solve most issues without wanting to fight or yell at someone. One good thing that I've learned from the peacekeeping circles is how to direct the negative energy and make it better. And mostly everyone in the school has that approach, making the school climate chill.

The perception that the students are not paying attention to the school climate and do not necessarily understand the nature of a healthy school is wrong. However, because of that false narrative, school administration often overlooks "the soul of the work" that goes into restorative practices and the nature of peace because of Restorative Justice. Resolving problems and conflicts was accomplished using circles at Academy X High School. Students realized they did not have to like each other, but they did need to respect each other in order to maintain the calm and peaceful climate they enjoyed. One student explained: The school is much better. I've been here since the beginning, before we had circles, and the school was working to build the culture around peace keeping circles and it was difficult, but since my freshman year, you can see the

difference...no ones' getting bullied and we speak up for each other. If you have a problem with someone, you have a circle. If a teacher is irritating you, you have a circle. Dealing with the issue is done through circles. Even if you absolutely dislike the person, once you get in circle your attitude toward that person softens.

The special education teacher also mentioned students “grasping the process.” She commented on the climate that Academy X High School is experiencing since becoming a restorative justice school and how restorative justice changed the attitudes of the students and they wanted a restorative school. The special education teacher revealed: It just makes Academy X High School a better environment. People are friendlier and we have a peaceful energy that exist throughout the school.

Of course, we have our issues, but rarely do we have situations that escalate to uncontrollable levels. The students often lead our circles and they are willing to address issues head-on. One good way of seeing the success of the circles would be to see how the students respond to the teachers. Throughout the school, you can see the interaction between the teachers and students. For the most part, the students are respecting each other, therefore you see them responding to the teachers in a positive way.

The teachers and students focus on building a better atmosphere through Restorative Justice. She described an atmosphere that allows students to be heard. She compared it to a high functioning organization, which was expressed throughout the process.

People's perception about urban schools and whether or not they lack a productive culture well enough to learn is half stated. We've been able to create an environment through restorative practices that allows students to learn in a calm atmosphere. If tensions rise it is immediately being addressed. Students want to come together to deal

with any substantive issues that may be causing the school to fall off balance. One good way of dealing with anything that doesn't support the school culture is to talk things out. And although intense situations don't occur very often, when it does happen the students are prepared to deal with it. They simply don't want to mess up the flow of the school's climate.

The schools lead teacher also described the school as a family and community and added, "Positive attitudes. The students really work to keep the school moving in the right direction. They uphold the policies and for the most part, they are able to redirect those students that are not accustomed to the way we do things within our school. And they really understand that it's not about one person, but it's about the entire body."

#### **D. Finding(s) Related to Restorative Practices on Student-to-Student and Student-to-Staff Relationships.**

The third research question refers to the concept of relationship building. What impact does restorative practices have on building positive relationships between the students and building relationships between the staff and students? This perception about relationships between the two groups created the notion of relationship building. Students and staff that continued to be apparent in their responses involving those relationships, such as used key words: relationship, community, friends, getting along, closer, family, bond, trust, and respect.

Restorative practices had a positive impact on student-to-student relationships. Students generally avoided conflict and worked toward having better interaction. The students communicated better with one another and developed mutual respect. Empathy and compassion for one another by listening and sharing viewpoints helped to nurture relationships between students. Understanding their differences toward each other provided clarity. Once students



participated in community building circles, they learned more about each other and began to perceive more similarities than differences.

According to Student A:

[W]e had one major situation, with two girls. They weren't sworn enemies. But they had issues with one another, and it was creating tension in the school because other students were taking sides, and we didn't want it to turn into something major where everyone in the school was at each other's neck. We just wanted the situation to be over so everyone could get back to being cool. We had a circle and each of them talked and realized that they were both wanting the same thing. Now, they just stay out of each other's way. They learned something from the circle. At the same time, they don't mean mug each other no more. They set aside their beef for the greater good. I see, how the circled changed the way they were – and that was a serious situation – because one of them could have gotten kicked out of school before they graduated. We were able to deal with that issue and heal the school as a result.

Student H added:

Initially I thought this was going to be some bull\*%t. I thought that I was going to become irritated with someone trying to mold me into something I wasn't. But after we met in circle a couple of times I started feeling more comfortable about addressing my problems and I realized that I wasn't only addressing my problems but I was watching others fix their problems as well. I had no idea what to expect but I grew more comfortable with the process as the semester went on and now that I'm experienced in the process I'm cool. Man, I got my whole family living "restoratively" as Ms. H calls it.

Student P described the environment:

We're working so hard at making the school a better place. I mean, it's like a family atmosphere, where at times we fight like a family but for the most part we are talking through our problems. I know, at least for me, I'm not angry anymore. I'm able to deal with my frustration better. And in other schools I attended I would get frustrated so easily, but this school has helped me deal with my personal sh&\*t differently because the entire school is on some peaceful sh&\*t.

The staff-to-student relationships were also strengthened by the implementation of restorative practices. Students reported feeling better about their interaction with teachers. They expressed a feeling of admiration and appreciation for administration. Staff members' willingness to embrace a school wide restorative model and build relationships with their students by being transparent proved to be effective. When asked, "What impact does restorative practices have on student-to-staff relationships?" The school administrator revealed:

People's perception as to how this thing works is in many ways incorrect. People from the outside think that we're not holding students accountable couldn't be more wrong. When in fact that's exactly what we're doing. By building relationships and allowing the student a voice, we are able to build trust. The students become more trusting and staff are more trusting of the students. They form a friendship as a result of restorative practices. Through the process they learn how to communicate beyond the student-staff relationship. It's powerful!

Students acknowledged the different level of interaction they had with staff. It was clear that a healthier relationship between student and staff had occurred at Academy X High School. Students appreciated the way staff treated them and therefore communication flowed more

easily. For example, Student H described: We appreciate our staff and the way they treat us. They treat us like their equal instead of talking down to us. They are there for us, and sometimes better than our own parents, they give so much of themselves and for me they have supported me emotionally and financially, in many instances. Moreover, I think our school does a better job at expressing that. They have helped me in so many ways. In circle, they share with us as much as we share with them, because “what is said in the circle stays in the circle, so for the most part everyone feels comfortable expressing their emotions. You are discussing your deepest feelings and they are actually listening to what you have to say and you are part of the story instead of being yelled at or them being critical of what happened.

Student L also compared Academy X High School to other high schools he has attended. He felt there was a different attitude at Academy X: I guess we kind of do things differently here. Because I have been to other schools and never did, we kick it like this. The attitudes are just foul at some of the other schools I have attended, but the students and teachers all seem to have the same kind of respect for each other. I know this may sound weird, but it does not seem like none of the teachers have favorites. I know how I used to get down, but none of the teachers seemed like they knew my past. They treated me as if I was one of the good kids.

#### **E. Finding(s) Related to Leadership and perceived ownership of Restorative Practices?**

The fourth research question focuses on leadership. How did leadership create the necessary conditions for ownership of the new restorative practices model? How was it implemented? What kind of leadership was used to ensure successful implementation of restorative practices at Academy X High School? For the purpose of this research, leadership was defined as administrative leadership, teacher leadership and/or student leadership. Participants often

answered based on their view of leadership. However, when asking the interview questions to students, “What type of school leadership needs to be present for restorative practices to be effective?” the researcher clarified the question by adding, “Principal, Dean of Instruction, teacher, and/or student?” This was done in order to familiarize the student on what is meant by leadership to the researcher.

The researcher viewed leadership as school administration and staff; however, when the student participant responded with student council or government, it expanded this researcher’s view of leadership. The bias the researcher had based on his own personal experience and background as a restorative justice practitioner was evident at that exact moment. Fortunately, the first participant was able to allow this researcher to see his bias and eliminate that bias by expanding the definition of leadership for the students. So, based on the researchers experience as a practitioner, “Principal, Dean of Instruction, teacher, and/or student” was added to provide clarity.

Regarding staff interviews, the concept of leadership was left up to the adult to interpret, as there was no apparent need to specify the definition of leadership. All staff respondents interpreted leadership as administrative leadership, as in principal or Dean of Instruction.

However, student leadership was also discussed when asking staff about implementation of the circle process and how students are involved in the circles.

In response to the question, “What type of leadership needs to be present for restorative practices to be effective? Principal, Dean of Student, staff, and/or student leadership?” student participants primarily focused on the teachers and the students.

There were a few answers that discussed administrators, but the students primarily focused on the importance of student leadership in this process. Regarding student leadership, Student H expressed:

For the most part, we're able to fix things at school without the interference of the staff. Before they're able to say anything, we're on it. Unless it's serious matter, the students are able to fix most of the problems. We just work with them until they're (students) are able to figure it out. Latter on for that nonsense because sometimes when the staff gets involved, it becomes something else so we just deal with the situation ourselves. Mostly everyone knows how to hold circle, so we are basically able to do exactly what staff is able to do. That's what we learn from the course. We learn about the different ways to deal with and address issues.

The school community embrace student P agreed that student leadership was the kind of leadership needed for restorative practices to work fully:

When it comes to certain situations, and you don't think people are watching, you get comfortable...The school staff understands the "way" as we call it in school. But the teachers knew that if something happened they were willing to let us take the lead. They didn't try to handle every situation that occurred. They were willing to allow us the opportunity to fix whatever happened. So, you essentially learn how to lead and didn't with problems right after they happen...something you wouldn't expect to gain after learning restorative practices. But because of the way they handle us you appreciate the staff. They're not on our necks every minute.

These varying understandings of leadership are important indicators of the way the school practices restoratively. What does it say about the different approaches to leadership between both student and teacher? Student C described student and teacher leadership in the following manner:

The word leadership is difficult to imagine, because that's just not the kind of language we use in restorative practices, but students do take an active role in building the program. We take pride in the work we do and those of us who take the course represent the whole school because the school is a restorative space. And I think the teachers appreciate those of us that are restorative justice practitioners because for the most part they can depend on us. The school has been able to basically get rid of suspensions. We deal with our problems inside of the school. The teachers might set up a circle but the students open the circle, discuss the matters and close circles.

Student E also discussed leadership between both teacher and student:

My attitude was terrible. I was very angry with everyone, mostly because of my situation, but Ms. H took me aside and started talking to me, and listening to me. I thought she was a weirdo at first but all she wanted to do was teach me and the only way I could be reached is by someone listening to me. And most adults always talked to me and expected me to listen. When Ms. H listened, it changed my response and I wanted to know if she was a real one. She then introduced me to circles and I started dealing with my frustration and she [Ms. H] would encourage me to open up more. That's all it took. Me seeing these students talk openly and hold space gradually made things better for me.

Her [Ms. H] facilitating the circle made me more comfortable at first until I started facilitating.

Some participants expressed the importance of restorative practices as the key to leadership. They maintained that leaders must believe in circles in order for them to be effective. Leadership was needed from both the staff and the students according to Student G:

What I've learned is that you have to live this way in everything you do and if the staff don't practice it then why should we. I mean, I've been on my own most of my life and I just can't be talked to any kind of way. I gotta know that you're interested in what I have to say because if you ain't then I ain't interested in what you're talking about. The teachers and staff have to believe in the process, just as we have to.

Student Q revealed: we have these school wide circles where staff are participating in the circles with us. They're learning about the different ways to deal with us just as we're learning how to deal with them. Most of the school believes in restorative practices and understands how important it is to the school. Imagine if they didn't have faith in the process, we wouldn't have faith in them. They are the adults so I believe they have to lead by example.

Student responses also included views on open-mindedness to the process and supervision of leaders. They interpreted leadership of restorative practices in the form of guidance and support.

Student I explained: The staff has to be willing to work with us. You can't tell us to do something and then trip when we don't do it. Sitting in this class I learned that we are all a part of the process and we have to be prepared to accept what is said in class by other

students. Sometimes it gets hard to hear some of the things that are being said but at the same time we are getting into it but it is always respectful and the lead teacher makes sure we are.

Student K responded: Ms. H is there for support. She often starts the circle and then the students take charge. It is the students that hold the space making, but we are usually supported by the staff. For example, if there's a situation about to pop off and the students are talking about what's about to go down. Ms. H might suggest a circle and we'll get right on it.

Student O concluded, that's what you have to do-that's what this whole thing is about. Each person has to practice and support the system because that's what it's about. You get into with someone everyone in the school wants the issue fixed so that it doesn't escalate into something bigger. But us and teachers have to support the work. That's what the practice is built off of, the entire school being down with it. Not judging us but committed to helping us move through school.

This explanation certainly broadens the view of leadership as it pertains to restorative practices and administrative support tasks into the realm of working with students and the direction of a course that is designed to heighten the practice and ability for students to grow. The description of Restorative Justice and the schools commitment to building a restorative environment have faced many challenges in a system where punitive approaches have been the norm. They need to understand that whatever they are used to [providing punitive discipline,



such as suspensions for misbehavior], restorative justice is probably the opposite of that. The program implementer described the leadership needed in this way:

It requires a commitment from the entire school body because staff have to be trained differently, conversations have to be had, and we have to get rid of the old mentality that has permeated the public school system. The attitude is to suspend students instead of hearing their position. And I understand that attitude to some degree because when you're trying to manage the class anything that prevents you from doing that can be a problem, but what we've learned is that the punitive approach isn't working, in fact it's doing far more damage than anything good, yet once we get everyone on board with this new way of doing things the entire school changes, and we see that by how the school has changed since creating a restorative justice environment.

Establishing trust in the school staff is critical. It is important for both teachers, students and staff in order to build the circle process. Leaders exhibit trust by letting go and empowering staff and students. The school administrator explained the role of leadership:

I think leaders showing up and taking over each situation creates tension, especially in the school setting. It kind of reminds me of when your parent disciplines you without having all of the information. It just doesn't sit well. And when managing competent adults they simply don't want to be controlled, they more so want to be a part of the process. And they're not quite as good at being forced orders as youth may be, therefore you have to show respect. Every message and every approach has to be handled with care and consideration for those that you are working with.

The English teacher added:

Yeah, I know it's difficult to allow others to handle important responsibility without checking to see if the job was completed, but you have to in order to build trust in the team. When I first started leading repair harm circles it was hard for me to trust that students would be able to handle the responsibility of repairing harm but the more trust I placed on them the more they exceeded my expectations. You have to learn to trust so that things can move forward and they can learn from the experience.

#### **F. Surprising Finding(s) not Reflected in a Research Question**

An additional premise was discovered that was not specifically related to any of the research questions. This theme focused on the transference of skills outside of the school building. Students often transferred what they learned through restorative practices to their home and community. Both staff and students learned skills from restorative practices that they could relate to other situations in their lives. However, only the students shared experiences of transferring those skills to their home and community. Eight of 17 (47%) students shared that they used restorative practice skills with their families (Dedinsky, 2012). For example, Student C described:

I think this [restorative practices] will work in any situation. Even at home when me and my brother are going at it, and most of the time I can't stand him, but I'm able to deal with him differently. I'm not so quick to "Jap" out and go up side his head. I compose myself first and sit with my frustration before I go there on his a&\*. These are the kinds of things I learned over the years of practicing restorative justice. You learn how to deal with the nonsense without letting it get to you too tough. But more importantly you learn how to talk things through and fix whatever is bothering you.

Another student revealed how she worked out issues with her entire family:

My whole family has embraced the idea of restorative practices. Both of my parents had anger issues, but before my mother goes off she ask, “Where is the talking piece?” And she’ll explain herself while holding the talking piece. She hasn’t gotten it down just yet, but she is definitely trying to work through it in her own way.

Student B talked about the use of patience with his family. He explained:

Man, it can be tough, because everyone in my family has this attitude like they’re always right and I should just shut-up. So I find myself getting frustrated with them more so than I do with the kids at school. But my patience is getting better. I am able to deal with things much easier. The circle helped me realize my triggers and avoid getting so frustrated that I can’t think clearly, and I react first without thinking. When I do that everything goes bad. I mean, I blackout and I be ready to go there. But I’ve learned how to deal with those emotions. Always think first.

Student Q also shared how she applied the skills she learned in restorative practices when describing her relationship with her mother:

It’s helped me a lot, especially when dealing with my family’s bulls\*%t. My mother is always complaining about my stepfather, but I’ve been able to sit with her and have calmer conversations with her about some of the choices she’s made that may have caused some of her problems. It’s really helped us build a better relationship. It’s different when we talk in a circle like setting. I think she looks at me differently now that I’ve learned how to deal with conflict in a better way.

Several students discussed the use of circles in the community. Student N, who was familiar with getting into trouble and consistently dealing with behavior issues at other schools, brought insight to this theme:

I'm learning how to be more mature in the things that I do. I recently got a job and during my first day, this customer was frustrated with me because I wasn't moving fast enough. Normally I would have snapped back on him and told him to piss off but I immediately thought about the [restorative practice] class and everything that I've learned in there and just apologized to the "buster" and explained to him that I was a new hire and kept it push'n. You learn other ways to deal with stress or stressful situations. Before taking that [restorative practice] course I was on one. You couldn't say nothing to me out-of-order without me check'n you. Now that ain't about nothen, you can have that silly talk. I'm just in a different head space than before. I hope the new me stays like this forever.

Students and staff worked together to embrace the model of restorative practices and the circle process. Students expressed their concerns regarding the practice that would make it useful in other settings. Additionally, students shared their ability to communicate and listen while trusting the process. That meant that the process fell entirely in the hands of the participants and their willingness to fully participate. Numerous students explained that they learned how to constructively engage and empathize with others. They revealed that by learning how to live restoratively they have been able to live healthier lives in their home and community as well.

Are restorative practices a viable alternative to punitive discipline? Are restorative practices an alternative to suspensions? The document analysis, circle observation, and individual

interviews provided the researcher answers to these questions. Insights were revealed through gathering lived experiences of the 2017-2018 12th grade students and staff at Academy X High School.

### **G. Conclusion**

The various ways the researcher has established the framing of the research between Academy X and the researchers work with the student's participation in restorative practices have revealed the benefits of restorative practice many of which have had life changing implications. Some of these ideas were revealed only when the researcher had one-one-one interviews with the students and staff, some of them were subtly expressed through participating in circles. Based on the gathered information and summary of data generated by the study, five specific conclusions follow:

1. Finding One: As related to the question, "What aspects of the school climate changed as a result of the adoption of the restorative practices model?" the data showed that the climate had been affected by the implementation of restorative practices. The climate was perceived as safe and positive. Students and staff agreed that restorative practices have supported a calm and peaceful environment with few fights and low suspensions. The findings also indicated that restorative practices prevented incidents from occurring to create a positive school climate.

2. Finding Two: As related to the question, "What impact does the restorative practices model have on student-to-student and student-to-staff relationships?" the data indicated that relationships were built amongst the entire school which created a strong sense of community. Staff and students got to know each other through the circle process by building bonds. The students empathized with one another and learned acceptance and open-mindedness.

They found out that they were more alike than different and built an understanding with one another. Both staff and students empathized with each other. Through restorative practices, they saw each other's viewpoints and figuratively put themselves in one another's shoes. They opened up their feelings and built a caring community at the school. Staff and students helped each other and learned to trust and respect one another through their communication in the restorative practices circles. Both staff and students learned how to communicate more effectively. They talked through their problems and learned how to solve conflicts through mediation in circles.

The students and staff listened to one another, provided advice, and reflected on their choices and decisions. Communication had a positive impact on building relationships from student-to-student and student-to-staff.

3. Finding Three: As related to the question, "What is the effect of restorative practices implementation on the suspension rate?" the data indicated suspension rates were lower than they would be without restorative practices. The discipline procedure at Academy X High School focused on repairing harm and preventing suspensions from occurring or reoccurring by using restorative practices. Providing an opportunity for students and staff to discuss their concerns or actions through the circle process typically eliminated the need for suspensions.

In addition to reducing the suspension rate, restorative practices influenced the climate and culture of the school. This resulted in students feeling safe at school and keeping a focus on their education. The high attendance rate and above average achievement data reflect the positive impact of restorative practices at Academy X High School.

4. Finding Four: As related to the question, "How did leadership implement the restorative practices model and create the necessary conditions for ownership of the new restorative practices model?" the data indicated that empowerment of both students and staff was

instrumental to the success of restorative practices. Leadership needed to express a clear belief that restorative practices worked and relate that message to the rest of the school community. All staff and students needed to be on the same page and build a sense of ownership.

Teachers were empowered to make decisions. They also had a key role in guiding students and implementing restorative practices with fidelity. Students recognized the importance of their leadership in the restorative practices model and felt they were equal to the staff when it came to the circle process. Students had a voice in decisions that were made. Staff held the students accountable and held each other accountable. Students held themselves and the staff accountable.

Leadership needed to create conditions for restorative practices by allowing for appropriate training and providing outside support, such as the District Attorney Liaison trainer. A main part of the training included circle practice and simulation circles. Specific rules, regulations, and use of the talking piece needed to be systematized and the circle process must be implemented with fidelity. Leadership also needed to support the development of the Restorative Justice Course and be able to trust others.

5. Finding 5: did not derive from one of the research questions. Rather, this unexpected finding resulted from analysis of data.

An unanticipated outcome of restorative practices included the transference of the learned skills and behaviors to the community and home. Life skills were developed through restorative practices and transferred outside of the school setting. Students began to use the circle process with family, friends, and community. They learned how to communicate with others and problem solve personal conflicts or issues. This unanticipated outcome of restorative practices skill transference and the impact on the community and family warrants further study.

## V. Conclusions, Discussion, and Suggestion for future Research

### A. Introduction

A large part of the school experience is to learn in a safe and supportive environment where each student progresses (Blankstein, 2004). This is an important part of the learning experience, especially in areas that have greater challenges. Some of these challenges include building healthy peer relationships, skilled administrative and school team leadership, a growing sense of student safety and security, and disciplinary procedures that focus on future learning rather than on punishment for past misbehavior. Particularly in urban schools with higher populations of at-risk students, restorative discipline practices are proving to be a more reasonable alternative. These school communities seek to create safe, caring environments while reducing exclusionary discipline policies that overly rely on suspensions and expulsions (Edwards, 2013).

This critical case study explored the lived experiences of 17 students and 6 staff members from an urban high school who experienced restorative practices in a course designed to teach an alternative approach to discipline. This study examines the types of restorative practices used in an urban school setting. The specifics of these qualitative processes included document analysis where I reviewed suspension, referral and expulsion records before restorative justice was fully implemented and thereafter, individual interviews, which helped shape the schools decision outcomes.

Chapter 1 introduced the research through a description of the background, research problem, purpose, approach, significance, delimitations and limitations, and different vocabulary terms. Chapter 2 revealed literature concerning theory and research related to the study in the areas of change, restorative justice practices, and the nature of punitive approaches to discipline. Chapter Three described the design of the critical case study through the explanation of data collection



techniques, namely: document review, survey, and interviews. Chapter 3 also described how the data would be collected, organized, and thoroughly analyzed. Chapter 4 presented and summarized the qualitative data generated by the study design in alignment with the study's primary research question and sub-questions, identifying the prominent themes developed through an analysis of the data.

This final chapter will discuss findings and conclusions related to the research purpose and reviewed literature. Chapter material will also discuss the conclusions and intentions of the study for practice and further research, as well as methods for the advancement of knowledge and implementation.

## **B. Summary of Findings**

The primary research question for the study provided the impetus for the purpose of the study, in order to understand the meaning of restorative justice practices for the high school students enrolled in the setting of an academic course. The findings provide a better understanding of the meaning that the students attributed to the critical case study.

Students participating in a repairing harm circle were observed. This circle was audiotaped and recorded by the researcher. The researcher utilized an observation form and took handwritten notes based on the actions of the circle participants. Results from this observation were coded for common themes.

Finally, individual interviews of students and staff using restorative practices occurred. The researcher interviewed 17 students and 6 staff members. Students who attended ninth grade during the 2013-2014 school year and remained at the high school as seniors received invitations to participate in the study. All students who agreed to be interviewed and completed the required parent consent forms participated in an interview.

These interviews provided a rich qualitative description of the experiences that occurred during the four years restorative practices had been implemented at the urban high school. The entire contents of the interviews were transcribed and coded. Review of the data illustrated a common theme that assisted in formulating responses to the research questions.

In Chapter 5, a summary and synthesis of the findings related to the research questions are presented and related to the literature review. This final chapter also contains conclusions and implications for further research and practice as well as implications for leadership, learning, and service.

### **C. Discussion of Findings/Conclusions**

This critical case study of the restorative practices evaluated in one urban high school resulted in a number of findings and conclusions related to the impact of restorative practices as an alternative to punitive discipline in schools. In this next chapter, the researcher responded to the research questions and compared the results of this study to the literature reviewed. Findings were discovered and conclusions were made based on the extensive data collected and analyzed throughout this critical case study. This all resulted in determining the efficacy of restorative practices as an alternative to punitive discipline approaches for African-American students in a specific urban public school.

### **D. Findings and Conclusions Related to Research Purpose**

The results of this research study generated themes linking to the value of personal accountability, mentoring, self-assessment, stereotyping, and positive influence. Class participation provided reliability for the participants. In this environment, the participants had the opportunity to communicate with other restorative justice practitioners, communicate with each other about their own lived-experiences, and compare their experiences and backgrounds with

each participant in the class. Based on the summary of data and findings generated by this study the information revealed that restorative practices are a viable option to punitive discipline.

Study results indicated a positive impact on school culture in urban communities.

**E. Finding One – The restorative justice theory and research provided background information for understanding the theoretical underpinnings of race and discipline.**

Given the nature of the disparity in discipline, restorative justice literature is highly relevant to this study. Education secretary Arne Duncan and Attorney General Eric Holder urged educators across the country to move away from punitive practices of discipline that suspend students for minor infractions and disproportionately affect minorities. Throughout the country, African-Americans are two to five times more likely to be suspended than whites who commit similar infractions (St. George, 2014).

Predictably, the restorative justice literature became a central focus for discussions related to the primary research question because of these concerns (pertaining to the meaning the students ascribed to the practice of restorative justice) and the first sub-question (pertaining to what the enrolled students learned about restorative justice).

School climate is safe and positive due to the relationships built through restorative practices. Students and staff perceived their school as a safe and positive environment (Dedinsky, 2013). Students and staff agreed that restorative practices changed the way race was viewed and therefore reduced tension related to their implicit biases. Findings also indicated that restorative practices prevented incidents from occurring, thereby improving the schools synergy (Dedinsky, 2012).

As Alan Blankstein (2004) attested, “Relationships are at the core of successful learning communities as well as student success” (p. 58). Healthy relationships are critical to establishing

a learning environment in schools. Students realize that they are similar in many aspects of their lives and once they fully understand those similarities they are less likely to harm one another. As Margaret Wheatley (2002) claimed, “It’s not differences that divide us. It’s our judgments about each other that do” (p. 47).

**F. Finding Two – Student-to-student relationships improved using restorative practices by building empathy and understanding for one another.** The basis of restorative justice models from the beginning is to see how relationships can build a strong sense of community. Students began furthering their comprehension of the circle process by interacting with one another and realizing their similarities. Through the conversations being held in circle sessions students connecting on a more meaningful level, they related to one another and each other’s experiences. Therefore, trust was formed and the ability to set aside apprehension toward the individual. Dedinsky (2013), who conducted a similar study in another urban school, found that “first and foremost, trust creates empathy. Through empathy, students listen to one another in order to build connectivity and a common sense of experience. Empathy does not discriminate or judge. Rather, students empathize in order to relate to, or identify with, their peers” (p. 440). These words describe succinctly how relationships determine the effectiveness of restorative justice. For a restorative justice course like the one at Academy X, the idea of creating a space for healthy relationships to grow by establishing school policy is beneficial to the school.

**G. Finding Three – Framing restorative practices by developing a shared level of trust**

**for one another.** Social awareness was a very strong point for the students. The power to overcome their pasts through a restorative justice course provided a shared perspective for students and staff to become familiar with one another's life experiences. Restorative practices provide a platform for bringing together adults and students that allows for equal voice and empathy, so trusting relationships can develop (Riestenberg, 2012).

In the use of restorative justice within a classroom setting, there is an implicit understanding that the relationship between student and staff that allows for trust. It also meant that the level of communication would be indicated in the way that students and staff resolved conflicts easier and created a trusting relationship. Communication had the same connotation of a collective space created out of mutual respect or trust. Porterfield and Carnes (2008) explained, "We believe that building good relationships through communication – one by one – with all school stakeholders is the only way to create the effective and sustainable trust that is the foundation of a great school or school system" (p. 9).

**H. Finding four – The application of Restorative practices decreases the over usage of**

**punitive discipline such as suspensions.** The gathered information revealed low suspension rates that remained low throughout the four years at Academy X High School. Participants recognized that other students and staff demonstrated positive behavioral changes at each grade level. The idea of having students in fear of suspensions proved unproductive for disciplining students. Restorative practices focused on repairing harm through peace keeping circles and preventing suspensions from occurring. It was important for students and staff to discuss their concerns or actions through the circle process. A frequent conversation occurred during Peacekeeping circles that eliminated

the need for teachers wanting to suspend students after sitting in circles (Dedinsky, 2012).

Restorative practices greatly improved the school climate. The lower suspension rate determined the positive nature of the school in that students could feel safe in a violence free school, and education could be the primary focus instead on disciplinary issues that would upset learning (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2010).

**I. Finding Five – Skilled leadership is necessary to develop a culture that ensures empowerment of staff and students to build ownership of the restorative practices model.** The autonomy of restorative justice participants may be perceived through their ability to see their issues as a means of gaining strength and having enough control to progress (Dedinsky, 2012). School culture is deeply rooted in leadership from both staff and students. Based on my findings the leaders of the school, specifically the school lead teacher and other administrators, were responsible for teaching staff and students in their roles of participating and practicing restoratively. The administration conveyed an understanding of restorative practices and applied the schools culture of restorative practices to the rest of the school community through routine restorative practice seminars. All staff and students were willing to share their understanding and ownership of the philosophy. Once the school fully embraced the philosophy, teachers engaged more, participated in furthering the schools missions, and regularly applied the principles of restorative practices (Dedinsky, 2012). They also supported students and implemented restorative practices with reliability. Students felt emboldened and felt as if they were a bigger part of the school community. Students became trained facilitators in restorative

practices and participated in supporting others in the community and partnership with Academy X.

- J. **Finding Six - Skilled leadership is necessary to develop a culture that ensures accountability of staff, students, and self. Leadership also developed a culture of accountability and trust.** A fair amount of accountability between staff members was spent discussing ideals and ways to improve the school environment while continuing to practice restoratively. The unstated assumption was that everyone was on board with the school being restorative and that everyone in the school would interpose something that would inform the schools restorative practices. This kind of accountability created opportunities for staff to be brought into the circle process to further establish a culture that is conducive to a successful restorative environment (Dedinsky, 2012).

The ability of students that participated in a restorative justice course may lend further credence to studies on the circumvention of race and class differences through increased engagement in a restorative justice course. According to Kiefer Hipp and Weber (2007), “School leaders work to develop purposeful school communities with high degrees of collective efficacy. The professional staff in high performing schools believe they can make a difference in spite of the magnitude of the issues” (p. 9).

- K. **Finding Seven - Skilled leadership is necessary to create the circumstances necessary for trustworthiness of restorative practices employment.** The data suggest that students and staff learned leadership skills through experiencing the repairing harm circle process. Students demonstrated leadership and derived personal satisfaction from providing useful, pro-social advice to their peers to restore relationships and repair harm, resulting from misconduct or misbehavior.

Based largely upon qualitative observations, the data suggested that students learned leadership skills through experiencing the repairing harm circle process, as noted by Pavlich (2002), by addressing community interests between and amongst staff who experience situations that need to be resolved. Students demonstrated competence and derived personal satisfaction from providing useful, pro-social advice to their peers to restore relationships by repairing the harm(s) resulting from misconduct or misbehavior. The students' sense of personal satisfaction, explains Geske (2005), could be partially due to a collective appreciation for serving others and encouraging transformation in others.

Leadership must induce meaningful purpose when implementing change in order for it to be sustainable. "You cannot move substantially toward sustainability in the absence of widely shared moral purpose... [Moral purpose] consists of raising the bar and closing the gap of student learning, treating people with demanding respect, and contributing to the social environment" (Fullan, 2005, p. 87). This level of maturity was also reflected in their recognition of respecting multiple perspectives and multiple ways of developing solutions to problems, exactly the type of leadership decision-making advanced by Zehr (2002) or democratic decision-making advanced by Braithwaite (2004).

**L. Finding eight – Skills learned through restorative practices were transferrable even outside of the classroom.** Students expressed a deep appreciation of restorative justice practices from their experiences in the course because they were able to use what they learned in the classroom in other settings. The pro-social behaviors learned in the course transferred outside of the school community. Based on the interviews, students learned how to resolve conflict without anger even outside of school.



This last finding was based on the qualitative observations, document review of student referrals, suspensions and expulsions provided by the school principal, and interviews, as well as the quantitative survey data (Dedinsky, 2012). The students expressed an ability to communicate more effectively beyond the classroom. Students described restorative justice in a positive light, even advocating for the adoption of their course in high schools throughout the district. Students further stated that they gained skills in interacting with other people more successfully. Premised on the fundamental aim of reintegrating disenfranchised persons back into their communities in a pro-social manner (Morrison, 2001), it is no surprise that students were encouraged to improve their communication skills.

Based mainly upon the qualitative observations and interviews, the structure and design of the course effected each student differently. Several students described themselves as “open books” when enrolling in the course. Some students anticipated that they would just be participating in a required class where they would disengage, only to later discover the problem-solving aspects of the repairing harm circle process was transferrable. Restorative justice promotes problem solving because, as Zehr (2002) notes, restorative justice seeks to address the needs of the circle members, inviting them to dialogue and explore different ways for students to address their frustration.

Engagement provided an additional surprise to many of the enrolled students. They were surprised to learn how much information they would learn and how involved they would be. Braithwaite (1989) promotes restorative justice mainly for its promotion of community engagement. Students were grateful of the skills they acquired as well as their ability to engage more, which improved their communication with others they encountered.

## **M. Findings and Conclusions Compared to Related Literature**

The findings have explained the various ways the researcher worked with students and staff to understand the nature of Restorative Justice and the discipline practices used in an urban school. Further, the researcher's experiences had the perspective of traditional practices that speaks to the core issues of punitive discipline that needed to be forwarded. This process, for the most part, was realized through the operation of peer mediation and conflict resolution as an alternative to the zero-tolerance policy and use of suspensions that otherwise would occur. In addition, the researcher scrutinized restorative practices to identify ways to discipline without retributively punishing students (Braithwaite, 1989).

Students linked developments in their classroom community to the relatedness between and amongst one another due to restorative practices. Based on survey data, students perceived their school communities to be safer, in terms of conflict, environments for learning. During interviews, students attributed these improvements in safety to the trust built in their classroom during course activities, including repairing harm circles where students tackled cases of referred student disciplinary matters (Dedinsky, 2012).

Restorative practices reviewed literature shared in Chapter 2 with insights learned during the process of a restorative practice course. This critical case study research will be compared to the literature findings involving school discipline. Subsequently, with an increased interest in building safer schools, minor research has been done on restorative practices in the school system as an alternative to punitive discipline that currently is the primary form of discipline in the public school system.

The conclusions describes an alternative influence to the punitive approach currently being used in urban school settings. There is some tendencies that prove restorative practices is

a more useful approach to discipline than the antiquated punitive model used in schools throughout the nation. Therefore, restorative practices should be used more often.

#### **N. Comparison of Findings/Conclusions Related to Restorative Practices to Literature Findings of National Discipline Policies and Procedures**

Structural organizational factors played a dramatic role in creating an environment that supported restorative procedures. Most of the literature regarding discipline in schools has been based on zero-tolerance policies (Riestenberg, 2012.) However, an effective school relies upon pro-social behavior. When conflict occurs in any situation, people may feel uneasy. Yet, restorative practices provides an opportunity to ease the unrest (Morrison, 2007). These feelings of discomfort must be dealt with in an appropriate manner; otherwise, fear and shame may intensify routine situations, leading to violence and physical altercations.

When challenges go unaddressed, a safe school cannot exist. Respect for authority lessens, and relationships become fractured. Issues and problems are ignored. Relationships stay broken. The literature revealed that zero-tolerance policies create an environment that is unhealthy, ultimately resulting in distrust. Thus, the first conclusion from the study relates to an over-used zero-tolerance policy that was introduced to the school systems during the Clinton administration and the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA, 2004). However, school administrators began over using zero-tolerance policies for minor offenses and the overuse of suspensions and expulsions was evidenced, especially with students of color and low socio-economic status (Dedinsky, 2012).

The findings in the literature concluded that zero-tolerance policies were tremendously harmful to students. More so, zero-tolerance policies had the greatest negative impact on students of color and students of low socio-economic status. Suspensions were overused and

there was a racial gap in urban schools. African -American students were four times more likely to be suspended than White students for the same violation, and Hispanic students were twice as likely to be suspended as White students (Amber, Justinger, Pelischek & Schulz, 2009).

Students with disabilities were also overrepresented in school suspensions. Students with disabilities accounted for approximately 11% of the school population in the United States, while they actually received approximately 20% of all school suspensions (Leone, Mayer, Malmgren, & Meisel, 2000). This prevented students from learning at an equitable rate, forcing them to fall further behind in their learning. The findings also revealed that zero-tolerance policies were ineffective in the end and were often related to a number of negative outcomes, such as school dropout, poor school climate, low academic achievement, and discriminatory school discipline practices (Dedinsky, 2009).

This critical case study also suggest that suspensions established a negative attitude within the school toward administration. The students stated that suspensions only made them angrier and less willing to comply with school protocol. The staff indicated that suspensions only made things worse because the students had even less respect for staff and administration (Based on the perception of those interviewed). The mission of the school promoted restorative practices as the primary form of discipline within the school. It was significant that 100% of those interviewed commented positively on the impact of restorative practices Academy X High School (Lewis, 1999).

It can be easily argued that restorative practices provide an alternative to punitive discipline often used in urban schools. Yet the restorative justice model used in Academy X high school reflects the consideration of the student body. Peacekeeping circles is age

appropriate and respects the contributions of each of the individuals that contribute to the work (Kafka, 2008).

This critical case study demonstrated that zero-tolerance policies and suspensions hurt students in many ways. Instead, restorative practices provides a better alternative to resolving issues. Students were thought of when deciding on operational policies with an opportunity to provide feedback that would help the school move forward. Students and staff spoke openly about things to consider in order creating a better environment. Restorative practices provided students and staff with a strategy to resolve any underlying problems that caused tension in the school (Kupchick, 2009).

The use of restorative practices as an alternative to punitive discipline empowered students to become a part of the school community. Based upon all observations and data sources, the 23 individuals participating in this study regarded their responsibilities with utmost respect, sincerity, and seriousness. The students viewed the process as an opportunity to further develop their lives. The now took pride in their conduct and the perception of their maturity. These given opportunities improved their outlook, resulting in a broader understanding of society and how it functions.

#### **O. Comparison of Findings/Conclusions Related to Restorative Practices to Literature Findings of Statewide Discipline Policies and Procedures**

The research revealed that the state of Wisconsin, although appeared progressive in many educational initiatives still grossly abused punitive approaches to discipline. According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2015-16), public education has been the foundation for economic prosperity in Wisconsin. The state of Wisconsin has followed the national trend of zero-tolerance policies hoping to create safer schools. Over the past 20 years, there has been a

considerable increase in suspensions and expulsions statewide (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2015-2016).

In Wisconsin, behaviors related to alcohol and other drugs were the most common reasons leading to expulsions in 2016. Approximately, 40% of expulsions were related to drug and alcohol violations. Repeated violation of school rules accounted for approximately 20% of expulsions, weapons possession accounted for 15% of expulsions, and assault was approximately 6% (DPI, 2016). Students were expelled without being provided support services to assist them in overcoming behavioral, drug or alcohol addiction, or mental health problems. Recently, districts in Wisconsin have been encouraged by the state to reduce the use of zero-tolerance policies and to start using more proactive measures, such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), virtual schools, community programming, Response to Intervention (RTI), and restorative practices.

This critical case study concluded that well intended methods, specifically restorative practices, positively influenced school culture and climate. The experience, according to the students and staff, shaped the entire school. The students that participated in the course perceived change both in thinking and personal behavior.

School administrators realized that students needed space to develop their perspectives and various points of views. Restorative practices improved students ability to communicate effectively both verbally and nonverbally. Restorative justice processes played an important role in the student's decision-making. Thus causing circle members to reflect on their strengths and minimize their weaknesses.

**P. Comparison of Findings/Conclusions Related to Restorative Practices to Literature Findings of Other Discipline Approaches Such as Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution**

Research shows, that an effective school-based discipline practice should support participants in all areas of participation. This support ultimately pushes them forward into a function environment (HB 47, 2007; Kemp & Johnson, 2003; Ogletree, 2009). The impact positively affects those that participate by increasing their ability to interact, creating the need for more practice in restorative spaces, ultimately raising communities' consciousness (Hale, 2008; Nissenbaum, 2006; Reinhardt, 2007).

Understanding what an effective school-based discipline practice should look like and do is important because it seems reasonable that some schools might be more likely to engage in these efforts if they had a better understanding of how to go about it (Dedinsky, 2012). Certainly, many discipline researchers view punitive discipline in schools as an important precursor to peoples' future civic participation, commitment to education reform, and helping create safer schools (Berman, 1997). Yet with a substantial research base designed to effectively manage conflict like peer mediation and conflict resolution students were able to take ownership of the process.

This study influences the way schools practice restorative models of peer mediation and conflict resolution programs. The majority of restorative justice practitioners possess a desire to learn differently, which may result in increased academic performance. At Academy X, 60% of the students are reading below grade level and 20% are reading at grade level. Peer mediation acknowledged the external efficacy of student engagement. Authentically dealing with issues related to conflict resolution. However, the results were mixed and there were so many differing

elements of each program that it was difficult to reliably assess their effectiveness (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

One finding of this critical case study was that staff trained in restorative practices is necessary to create a fully embraced restorative school model. The observation of the repairing harm circle and interviews with staff and students demonstrated the importance of very specific procedures for implementing restorative practices. The limitations in peer mediation and conflict resolution models formed nuisances with the implementation of restorative practices (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). At Academy X High School, administration and students train in restorative practices together. Indication of empowerment and accountability prevailed to ensure that restorative practices was a real part of the institution.

The data show that students perceived changes in their behavior, demonstrated most markedly in their commitment to helping others resolve conflict, in their tolerance for other people, and in improved listening skills (Dedinsky, 2012). Students reported skipping class less, becoming more committed to being better students, treating other students more respectfully, using alcohol less frequently, improving grades in school, and treating teachers more respectfully after learning how to resolve conflict through course. Students perceived that peer mediation affected the school climate and limited the number of suspensions and discipline referrals (Liston, 2018).

Urban youth in the public school system seem increasingly sophisticated in how they interpret discipline and in their articulation of the structural barriers to implementing a model of discipline that is more conducive to a healthy learning environment. In restorative practices, there are specific questions to ask, every circle has a talking piece and centerpiece, circles have a facilitator and specific outcomes are anticipated. Students and staff know when a circle should



be used to resolve conflicts or repair harm. This suggests that educators need a more effective discipline model for addressing behavior issues in their schools like restorative practices.

**Q. Comparison of Findings/Conclusions Related to Restorative Practices to Literature Findings of Restorative Justice in the Correctional Arena**

This finding was based on data regarding juvenile delinquency and recidivism, including its causes, its relationship to communities, the roles of families, and the role of residential treatment facilities in rehabilitating the delinquent youth was reviewed. While the study has shown that juveniles who successfully graduated from juvenile treatment programs and examined why juveniles succeeded or failed in treatment are still effected by communities that employ restorative practices (Dedinsky, 2012).

Youth offender's participation in restorative practices has proven to enhance their emotional, spiritual, and psychological well-being. Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) for example showed that by utilizing a restorative practices model with youth and by paying particular attention to the relationship between student and staff, youth participating in the process of school reform, and as a result, a more positive alternative to punitive discipline occurred.

Based mainly upon the findings of this critical case study, students learned communication skills, listening skills, problem solving skills, and peace keeping skills, often transferring these learned skills to the home and the community (Dedinsky, 2012). Restorative practices helped students adopt communication and listening skills, which assisted in their ability to problem solve and make appropriate choices. The Bazemore study (2007) recommended peer-influenced treatment modalities, collaboration, community involvement, and dialogue. Some students that participated in the study anticipated that they would just be selecting

punishments for referred students, only to later discover that there were additional findings in this case study, not included in the Bazemore (2007) study, such as the importance of leadership to ensure empowerment, accountability, and fidelity of implementation, amongst others.

#### **R. Comparison of Findings/Conclusions Related to Restorative Practices to Literature Findings of Restorative Practices Research in Education**

**Due to the limited research surrounding restorative practices in education, three specific studies became the primary focus of restorative practices impact in education.**

The study by Mirsky and Wachtel (2007) investigated six alternative schools for high-risk and adjudicated youth in Pennsylvania, sampling a population of 919 males and females discharged from the schools over a two-year time span. Anecdotal evidence that supported the school's positive reputation and use of restorative practices surfaced. Students who participated for longer periods in the restorative practices program showed greater gains and a decrease in delinquent behavior. This quantitative study concluded that restorative practices programming reduced recidivist delinquent behavior. While this study did not focus on a typical school setting, rather it focused on at-risk and adjudicated youth; it heightened the credibility of restorative practices in the educational setting.

Another study by Michele Villarreal Hamilton (2008) was a qualitative study that explored the effects of a restorative justice peer jury model implemented in a suburban high school where restorative practices had been utilized since 2001. Hamilton (2008) interviewed staff and students and found that providing opportunities for students to discuss their differences, be responsible for their behavior, and be accountable to others was a better tool for resolving conflict than suspension or expulsion. Students owned their behavior through dialogue and

became active participants in the resolution of the conflict. They had time to reflect on their behavior and used that knowledge to transform and modify their actions (Hamilton, 2008).

A more recent study by Dedinsky (2012) explored the experience of restorative practices within the context of a high school academic course. This phenomenological mixed methods study focused on two separate urban high schools that implemented a Restorative Justice Course as part of the curriculum. The research questions addressed student perceptions of learning, student perceptions of change to their thinking and personal behavior, the meaning of restorative disciplinary approaches compared to punitive discipline approaches, and student perceptions of impact on school climate and their lives.

Through a document analysis, observations, surveys, and interviews with 23 high school students, Dedinsky analyzed data with a focus on behavioral changes. The high school Restorative Justice Course changed student perceptions of personal behavior, peer behavior, school climate, and disciplinary practices. Students noticed improvements in empowerment, respect, equality, responsibility, accountability, and leadership. Students also identified an improved skill set in problem solving and conflict resolution.

In Dedinsky's (2012) study, students immersed in restorative practices improved their personal behavior and promoted pro-social thinking. Their ability to speak out and be heard captured the trust of the adults in the school. Relationships and a sense of community improved through students participating in the restorative justice classes, changing their behaviors, and learning how to show empathy to others. The students found restorative practices to be superior to other forms of school discipline, such as suspensions and expulsions. As Dedinsky (2012) reiterated, "Greater respect, borne of trusting relationships, enabled the students to exert greater confidence in their capacities to positively influence others" (p. 457).

This critical case study properly corresponded with the findings above. At Academy X High School, students and staff utilized the circle process to create a more harmonious environment. Restorative circles manifested itself in many ways beginning with active participation in problem solving processes (Maloney, 2007). Some other notable variables included: The use of circle processes; the ritualistic use of the centerpiece and the talking piece to guide communication (Bazemore, 2007; Ryals, 2004); enabling students to create their own guidelines for classroom behavior; enabling students to lead group processes; and enabling students to participate in, problem solving, and even facilitate actual cases of discipline in their school.

Academy X High School students reflected on their behaviors and used that knowledge to modify their actions, as the students in the other studies did. Dedinsky's (2012) research specifically detailed the problem solving that occurred within the circle process, which was an integral part of the process identified in the case study. Students communicated with one another and built relationships in order to problem solve and identify solutions for their peers. This proved especially true in repairing harm circles in which students supported each other in fixing the harm that occurred in the school community. One of the students at Academy X High School concluded, "Students learn the practice by being in class and participating in the course." Another student commented, "Having a good attitude is half the battle. If I learn how to treat someone better, then they will treat me better. And that's what I learned in the course."

## **S. Comparison of Findings and Conclusions Related to Restorative Practices to Literature Findings of Chicago Public Schools High School Peer Jury Program**

This bold study reviewed data from 31 schools in the Chicago Public School that used a form of restorative practices. The study was a mixed methods study that included data from a survey and focus group interviews. The major findings of this study showed that the peer jury reduced suspensions and allowed students an opportunity to remain in class. Some schools considered more successful, had a Peer Jury Program. Students from schools that did not use the Peer Jury Program consistently tended to perceive the program as having less control over their school climate in general (Dedinsky, 2012).

The findings of this case study concurred with the importance of restorative practices in a school setting. At Academy X High School, restorative practices is an important part of the schools culture. The more opportunities staff and students had to implement circles and restorative practices, the more positive results occurred. Restorative practices became a way of functioning for the school. The nature of restorative practices positively created a healthy culture.

## **T. Comparison of Findings and Conclusions Related to Restorative Practices to Literature Findings of Restorative Practices as an Alternative to Punitive General Comparison of Study Findings and Conclusions to Reviewed Literature**

Generally, this critical case study provided pragmatic reasoning for the use of punitive discipline in a school setting. From the national zero-tolerance policies to the local overuse of suspensions, there was a consistent concern of the ineffectiveness of punitive discipline.

Other research was studied regarding less punitive discipline processes that yielded more positive results, such as the Restorative Justice Course in Milwaukee (Dedinsky, 2012), the peer jury program in Chicago (2007), and the Mirsky and Wachtel (2007) study on adjudicated youth reform.

This literature review gives an overview of the use of punitive discipline in public schools and the juvenile system. This review also looks at the zero-tolerance disciplinary method. Zero tolerance excludes students. Zero tolerance forces those students that need the most attention out of the school community. These individuals need more schooling, not less. It has been proven that Zero tolerance creates more documented disparities amongst students of various ethnic groups, forcing students in the lowest socio-economic status towards a continuous life of poverty (Dedinsky, 2012).

However, things are shifting. The public is demanding that punitive approaches to discipline are inhumane and therefore the stakeholders are considering restorative approaches as viable alternative. This critical case study concurred with the positive findings of restorative practices implementation in a specific school located in an urban community.

#### **U. Limitations**

The research study produced several limitations, including methodological limitations due to the small sample size and widespread concerns. There was also the limitation of research bias. Most of these concerns were effectively addressed in the current research study, while others remain as limitations within the design. The researcher is the primary instrument used to collect, analyze, and measure the phenomena in qualitative research, researcher bias is a tangible challenge to overcome (Neuman, 2003). Each participant was allowed the opportunity to review the findings to ensure that the researcher represented them correctly.

Qualitative research methodology can possibly have another issue related to the research participants. This issue would be when participants might be reluctant to share their learning experiences during the interview. The researcher openly acknowledged the challenges of speaking openly about any sensitive topics before each focus group. However, the open-ended interview questions were structured so the participants had the flexibility to answer questions in a manner that served their comfort and security. The participants were at ease and comfortable through the entire focus group sessions.

Closeness to the subject matter was an anticipated limitation that did not surface as expected. Being a product of punitive discipline was an issue but not in the sense expected. All participants appeared comfortable and none seemed intimidated by their experience. Quite the contrary, limiting the amount of shared information became more of a problem than the reluctance to share. We had only one student unwilling to share out of all the participants, the others did not seem to mind, and provided more than enough information. The groups were all congenial and very relaxed. By using, a critical race lens this research study was limited to understanding the focus on the lived-experiences and the perceptions of those that were aware of the racial dynamics that go into analyzing school discipline.

The size of the sample might be considered a limitation. The limitations were due to the lack of qualified potential participants willing to participate in the interviews. There were many phone calls from potential participants. A great number of these participants wanted to be compensated for their time. While the researcher knows time is valuable, the funds were not available. Another limitation to the sample size was the criteria set forth to qualify. Many students had to be in their third or fourth year of high school in order to participate. Freshmen and sophomores seemed anxious to participate, they just did not qualify.

To recognize participants of this qualitative critical case research study, participants were screened during the observation of a peacekeeping circle, making sure the specific criteria were met and defined the parameters of the following qualifications: the individual must have attended Academy X for the entire four years, the individual must have been a part of the restorative practice course, and the individual must have been able to reflect on their experiences.

The limitation of objectivity is perhaps one of the most commonly scrutinized reviews of critical race theory. This issue may be because it is difficult to set aside race when analyzing punitive discipline. The ability of the methodology to provide a rich and meaningful description of the experiences of students that are being targeted, to replicate the results of this study, to expand and support the current knowledge base, and provide human service providers with a deeper understanding of what it takes to provide students that are labeled as behaviorally challenged with an improved sense-of-self and not experience the negative impact of punitive discipline present a set of challenges that researchers have struggled with. Therefore, through a description of the approach those limitations were lessened.

## **V. Summary of Conclusions**

Over the past 20 years, the use of punitive discipline in schools has reached epic heights. The overuse of suspensions and expulsions has resulted in students being isolated and left out. With the erosion of free public school education students have grown weary, especially students of color that have been negatively affected by punitive discipline policies, but this epidemic has created dialog that has led to change.

This critical case study examined an alternative discipline model that placed a high value on developing safe schools and pro-social behavior in an urban public school. The restorative practice process stresses equality amongst the students who practice, and facilitate restorative



practices. Rather than punitive discipline, a course in restorative practices has shown more hopeful and promising results. Restorative practices advocate keeping students in school, rather than excluding students from school. Students learn how to communicate more effectively, build relationships with their peers, embrace empathy, and solve problems.

Urban schools in particular, deal with a set of socio-economic issues that can present other challenges like poverty, stress, and violence. These schools sometimes lack opportunities and often face greater challenges. Restorative practices have the responsibility for creating safer and healthier school cultures that will ultimately affect academic outcomes. As school administrators and teachers improve educating all students, this will positively affect society as a whole.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin also continues to struggle with racial dynamics, yet it continues to build a legacy in the area of restorative justice. Marquette University Law School, through the leadership efforts of Distinguished Law Professor and retired Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Janine Geske and visiting University of Minnesota Professor Mark Umbreit, offers a restorative justice course to law students and a restorative justice clinic to willing participants in the community and in Wisconsin state prisons. Law students ideally become “agents for positive change” and “servant leaders” (Geske, 2012, p. 328, 329), helping to coordinate restorative justice community building circles in settings such as Milwaukee Public Schools.

Repairing harms in conjunction with the community (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2014) is the reason why restorative justice has taken root within MPS system. Through the Milwaukee Public School District, the school system offers a community conferencing program, serving both “at-risk” and traditional students. As a corollary to traditional forms of learning in the Milwaukee Public School system, Milwaukee’s community conferencing program is based upon

principles and practices of restorative justice. These restorative approaches empower victims to become active participants in the process (Maloney, 2012).

Many criminal justice professionals would agree that some crimes, especially ones involving egregious and heinous acts of violence, necessitate incarceration. However, the incapacitation of individuals through incarceration as the sole means of resolving crime will not work (Basile, 2012). That is because one area often remains unaddressed by the criminal justice system: The destruction of trust between people from the commission of criminal acts. Where low concern is shown for people and their communities, a sense of disconnection will invariably result (Rodman, 2016). Loss of trust leads to fear. Fear leads to isolation and disconnection. Moreover, the disconnections weaken the bonds that weave a community together. Crime numbs the sensibilities of the community, squanders its financial resources, and erodes its social fabric (Basile, 2010).

Braithwaite (2015) maintains that societies that honor values such as forgiveness and respect, while taking crime seriously, have low crime rates; societies that “degrade and humiliate criminals have higher crime rates” (p. 282). While no victim of abuse or crime should ever be forced or coerced to reconcile, forgiveness often occurs in the context of a restorative experience. However, it must always be the choice of the participants, without outside pressure (Zehr, 2016).

As an Associate Director with **Peacemaker Charitable Services**, this study’s author has concurrently served as a restorative justice practitioner with the Milwaukee Public School district, as well as a restorative justice coordinator with Milwaukee’s division of Restorative Justice in America, furthering collaborations between the Milwaukee District Attorney’s offices.

Proponents of restorative justice believe that *change* can occur through restorative acts, connectedness (Harrison, 2012), and community engagement (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2014)

rather than solely punitive approaches to criminal behavior or school misconduct. Presently, Milwaukee garners continued growth and expansion of restorative justice practices to further engage community collaborations, supported by many community efforts, including Marquette University Law School, the Milwaukee District Attorney's office, and the Milwaukee Public School district.

The goal of restorative justice is not simply conflict resolution, although the circle processes of restorative justice often achieve that purpose. Repairing harm caused by criminal behavior or student misbehavior and restoring relationships, in terms of relational rehabilitation (Bazemore, 2013; Karp & Breslin, 2014), are the overarching goals of restorative justice. Restorative justice includes every action primarily oriented towards achieving justice by repairing the harm caused by the conduct (Bazemore & Walgrave, 2012). Zehr's (2014) description of the restorative approach recognizes harm as the central prism through which wrongdoing must be viewed.

When a criminal offense or misconduct in a school occurs, restorative justice views it as not simply a violation of a rule or law (Johnstone, 2012). Rather, the offense is a violation against a relationship (Bazemore & O'Brien, 2012; Coetzee, 2015; Harrison, 2014) and wider school community (Cameron & Thorborne, 2012), now in need of repair (Bazemore & Walgrave, 2012), and perhaps healing (Geske, 2015; Sullivan & Tifft, 2012). Focusing upon harm, rather than on rules violations, allows people to repair that harm (Zehr, 2012). When repaired, the conflict actually becomes an opportunity for learning (Wachtel, 2013; Harrison, 2015) and an opportunity to restore confidence in the relationships, which in turn, builds a stronger sense of trust within communities of people (Lerman, 2012).

Restorative approaches intentionally aim to rebuild weakened informal networks of community social control and support (Kraft, Muck & Bazemore, 2013). Incorporating goals of community safety, accountability, and competency, restorative justice desires a balanced approach to the needs of the community, victim, and offender (Maloney, 2014). Community safety includes a person's right to live in peace and feel power to control and prevent crime. Accountability includes not only taking responsibility for offending others, but also taking the action required to repair the harm (Ryals, 2014). Competency refers to an offender gaining a pro-social value, as defined by community standards, to successfully reintegrate into society (DeVore & Gentilcore, 2012).

Restorative justice seeks not to replace the legal system, nor do its advocates claim it as an answer to every instance of criminal behavior (Zehr, 2012). However, occasionally, different or innovative strategies such as restorative justice can aid the process of resolving conflict in a complementary manner. As restorative justice has gained momentum in the past few decades in the criminal justice system, so, too, has it begun to find a home in educational settings (Karp & Breslin, 2012). Schools utilize restorative justice practices to hold offending students accountable: To face up to their wrongdoing, to understand the impact of their misbehavior and the resulting harm, and to put things right as much as possible (Zehr, 2012).

When used in a school setting, restorative justice is not focused on violations to rules from the student handbook, although certainly responsibility for respecting people and rules is a strong component. Restorative justice focuses on the harm caused to other people in the classroom or the school building and how that harm to the relationship between the people can be repaired, thus reframing the concept of "behavior management" as "relationship management" (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2011, p. 193). At the heart of successful restorative

practices is commitment and emotional engagement (Braithwaite et al., 2012). The strong belief is that a restorative approach involving all parties to a conflict or incident will demonstrably improve trust and respect (Schubert, 2014), so that children can learn in a safe environment (Hopkins, 2012).

Restorative justice practices share the common feature of recognition and discussion of the harm done. The wrongdoer works towards acknowledgment and commitment, if not obligation, to make amends to injured person(s). With all humans capable of hurting others at any time, restorative justice practices seek to affirm human dignity through recognizing each person as a valued member of the community, able to make amends and achieve reintegration, often through forgiveness (Braithwaite et al., 2012). Promoting reparation and redemption builds community, in the sense that the quality of life and common good are enhanced (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2014).

The Critical Race Theory can explain why such disproportionality exists. It argues that punitive school discipline policies serve as a tool that perpetuates, reenacts, and policies that boundaries of deeply engrained American racial hierarchies. In construing this Theoretical framework, I address the notion of racial stigma. Racial Stigma surveys the history of American race relations, with a particular focus on how African Americans were branded as inferior, not truly belonging to the American social fabric, and a threat to white privilege and to white control. It then examines how stigma interacts with the social psychology phenomenon of implicit bias and how both processes influence and create the troubling phenomenon that minority students, and especially African American youth, are disproportionately disciplined for subjective offenses such as defiance and disrespect authority.

In short, students have safe learning spaces. As keepers of their school communities, the students that participated in this research appreciated the opportunity to be heard while contributing to the concept of equality through practice. Therefore, the results of this study should challenge administrators in school districts to empower their students to assist in resolving misconduct, violence, and other toxic issues and problems they may face even outside of school.

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Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Applications of case study research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

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# Troy D. Washington

## Curriculum Vita

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### Education

Ph.D., Urban Education, School of Education, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 2018

Minor in Nonprofit Management and Leadership, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, 2017

Certificate in Conflict Management and Restorative Justice, the Alliance Group, Milwaukee, 2017.

Graduate Certificate in Nonprofit Management and Leadership, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Helen Bader Institute for Nonprofit Management, 2016

Master of Science in Educational Policy and Community Studies, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 2013

Master of Science in Business Management, Cardinal Stritch University, 1998

B.A., Organizational Communication, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 1995

### AREAS OF EXPERTISE

My research, teaching, and service focuses on inner school discipline; zero tolerance; school safety; and alternative approaches to retributive policies; urban school leadership, organizational leadership and management, and non-profit leadership and management in community-based institutions.

### Research and Teaching Interest

Educational Policy Implementation  
Public and Nonprofit Management  
Nonprofit-Led Community Based  
Movements and Political  
Advocacy

Financial Services for Vulnerable Populations  
Policy Analysis and Program Evaluation  
Nonprofit Sector Institutional Identity  
Public and Nonprofit Leadership

## ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

- 2017-Present Doctoral Fellow, Helen Bader Institute for Nonprofit Management, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI
- 2016-17 Behavior Specialist, Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI.
- 2013-14 Adjunct Professor of Business Management, Department of Business Leadership - School of Business Management  
Bryant & Stratton College, Milwaukee, WI  
Supervisor: Dr. Tracy Kelly
- 2007-08 Adjunct Professor of Leadership Communication, Department of Business Communication-School of Business  
Concordia University, Mequon, WI  
Supervisor: Derrick Cornelious

## SCHOLARSHIP

### Publications

#### Accepted

Washington, T. (submitted March 2016). Using Mentoring as a leadership component of Restorative Justice to resolve conflict in a Nonprofit Organization. *RJ Restorative Justice for All*. (Accepted with revisions)

#### On-Going Work

Washington, T. (Submitted February 2018). Leading Without Indignation: The nonprofit sectors response to leadership in a restless society.

Washington, T., Ihrke, D., Cherry, B., Grasee, N. (2016) Decision-making, Satisfaction and the Council: The Case of Michigan Municipalities. *Public Personnel Management*.

Washington, T., Ihrke, D., Cherry, B., Grasee, N., (Under Review) Compensation Satisfaction and Department Heads: The Case of Michigan Municipalities. *Public Personnel Management*.

Washington, T. (submitted May 2015). Kempo-Goju: Way of the Empty hand. *Tuttle Publishing*.

## Professional Presentations

### Conference Presentations

Washington, T. (2018). Presenter: Leadership and Governance; Executive Director Perceptions of Board Chairs and Their Performance on Nonprofit Boards in Two Countries. Midwest Public Affairs Conference (MPAC). Chicago, IL. June 2018

Washington, T. (2018). Presenter: Leadership and Governance; Executive Director Perceptions of Board Chairs and Their Performance on Nonprofit Boards in Two Countries (Helen Bader Institute Colloquia). Milwaukee, WI. April 2018

Washington, T. (2017). Panelist: Post-Doctoral Round Table. Midwest Public Affairs Conference (MPAC). Omaha, Nebraska, May 2017

Washington, T. (2016). Presenter: Compensation Satisfaction in Smaller municipalities (Southeastern Conference for Public Administration). Raleigh, NC. Oct. 2016

Washington, T. (2016). Presenter: Understanding Gender Differences in Ranking the Causes of Local Government Conflict (Midwest Public Affairs Conference at John Glenn College of Public Affairs at the Ohio State University). Columbus, Ohio. June 2016

Washington, T. (2015). Panelist: Diversity Scholars and Leaders Professional Development Section. Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA). Chicago, Illinois, November 2015

Washington, T. (2015). Videographer: The Road to Full Professor Section. Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA). Chicago, Illinois, November 2015

Washington, T. (2015). Presenter: Technology Tools for Disaster Relief, Recovery and Community Strengthening. Midwest Public Affairs Conference (MPAC). Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 2015

Washington, T. (2015). Panelist: Understanding and disseminating valuable theories in Urban School Professional Learning Communities. Multicultural/Multiethnic Education for Social Justice SIG Symposium. AERA 2015 Annual Meeting. Chicago, IL. April 2015.

Washington, T. (2015). Chair: Multicultural/ Multiethnic SIG. Deconstructing Outdated Models of Punitive Discipline in urban schools. *Safe Schools and Communities Initiative*. AERA Annual Meeting 2015, Chicago, IL, April 2015.

Washington, T. (2014). Paper: Restorative Justice as an alternative to punitive discipline: A broader perspective on the impact of retributive policies and the effects it has on minority students. *Faculty and Student Research Forum*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin. May 2014.

### Invited Presentations



Washington, T. (2018). Panelist: Exploring the Impact of Historic Charitable Giving and Approaches, Current Critiques, and Visions for the Future. Funding & Social Change Conference. Madison, WI, April 2018

Washington, T. (2016). Presenter: Discussing the Importance of Inclusive Leadership in Non-profit Organizations (Helen Bader Institute Colloquia). Milwaukee, WI. March 2016

Washington, T. (2016). Panelist: Graduate Students Entering the Job Market (Nonprofit and Community Empowerment Summit). Milwaukee, WI. August 2016

Washington, T. (2015). Panelist: New Graduate Student Forum. Panel discussion addressing The future of Doctoral Students. The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Milwaukee, WI August 2015.

Washington, T. (2011). Panelist: The Critical State of Urban Youth. Panel Discussion Of *Societal shift toward over criminalizing youth* by Samuel Williams. The Boys and Girls Club Annual Conference. Milwaukee, WI, February 2011.

Washington, T. (2014). Panelist: “Communication and Politics of the Doctoral Application Process,” School of Education’s Ph.D. Research Forum 2014. University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, W.I., October 2014

Washington, T. (2014). Session Organizer & Panelist: Summit on Black Male Youth, “Building Opportunity for Boys and Men of Color in Milwaukee: Changing directions in a Distressed community,” University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI, December 16, 2014

### **Book Reviews**

Washington, T. (2015). The importance of minority leadership in urban institutions and community inclusion in school leadership: A review of Tom Payzant and Janice Jackson’s *Urban School Leadership*. [The Urban Education and Policy Annuals](#).

### **Research and Evaluation Projects**

#### **Under way**

2018 Non-profit Entrepreneurs: A look at the many reasons Social entrepreneurs start non-profit organizations. Sponsored by: Helen Bader Institute for Nonprofit management and the Department of Public and Nonprofit Administration at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

2016 Wisconsin Small City Research/ Survey of Elites. Sponsored by: Helen Bader Institute/ the School of Public Administration at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the League of Wisconsin Municipalities

2015 Measuring the Effect of Mentoring in the School Discipline Policy Process: An Instrument Development Project. Sponsored by: *University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee*

## TEACHING

### University Teaching

|                            |                                                                                                                                                                              |             |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>Asst. Prof</b>          | Multicultural America<br>History Department<br>University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee                                                                                           | Summer 2019 |
| <b>Lecturer</b>            | Seminar in Public Administration-Managing<br>change in public and nonprofit organizations<br>University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee                                               | Fall 2018   |
| <b>Visiting Asst. Prof</b> | History and Theory of Leadership Ethics<br>Dept. of Public Service<br>Marquette University-Milwaukee, WI.                                                                    | Spring 2018 |
| <b>Lecturer</b>            | Executive Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations<br>Helen Bader Institute<br>University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee                                                              | Spring 2018 |
| <b>Lecturer</b>            | Seminar in Public Administration-Managing<br>change in public and nonprofit organizations<br>University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee                                               | Fall 2017   |
| <b>Instructor</b>          | Governance of Nonprofit Organizations<br>Public & Nonprofit Administration<br>University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee<br>Teaching Assistant for Dr. Douglas Ihrke                | Spring 2017 |
| <b>Instructor</b>          | Social Entrepreneurship in the Nonprofit Sector<br>Public & Nonprofit Administration<br>University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee<br>Teaching Assistant for Dr. Fredrick O Andersson | Spring 2017 |
| <b>Instructor</b>          | Organizational Theory and Practice<br>Public & Nonprofit Administration<br>University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee<br>Teaching Assistant for Dr. Fredrick O. Andersson           | Fall 2016   |

**Instructor** Social Entrepreneurship in the Nonprofit Sector Spring 2016  
Public & Nonprofit Administration  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
Teaching Assistant for Dr. Fredrick O Andersson

**Instructor** Taught English Abroad Summer 2004  
University of Santa Ursula/ Brazil  
PeaceXchange Program  
Peacemaker Social Services

**Instructor** Taught English Abroad Summer 2014  
O & M University/ Santiago DR  
PeaceXchange Program  
Peacemaker Social Services

## **K-12**

**Behavior Modifier** Project Development: Social Studies and Science Equity 2003-08  
Wings Academy High School (MPS), Milwaukee, WI

- Taught core courses to behaviorally challenged students with a focus on social sciences.

**Program Instructor** Instructor/ Consultant: GED English, Reading, and Writing, 2012-Present  
Urban Studies, Life Skills, Diversified Community Services Provider.

- Taught MPS students technical skills in preparation for the GED/High School equivalency exam.

## **RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCES**

2008-2017 Associate Director, Peacemaker Charitable Service/ Division of Children's Service Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI  
Executive Director: Gary Bellamy II. Funding Director: Rebecca Cleary

2016-Present Educator (Restorative Justice Facilitator), the Alliance School, Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI.  
Chief Principal: Tina Owens. Restorative Justice lead teacher: Heather Sattler.

2015-2016 Campaign Manager (Alderman), Michael Bonds, Inc. Milwaukee, WI.

2003-08 Educator, Wings Academy, Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI.  
Chief Principal: Dani Laporte

- 2002-05 Program Director, St. Charles Youth and Family Services, Milwaukee, WI  
Youth Behavior Modification Program. Supervisor:
- 1995-02 Program Coordinator, Private Industry Council. Director: Earl Bufford,  
Executive Director: Gerard Randall

### **PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

Advisory Board Member for the Midwest Public Affairs Conference (MPAC), 2017  
National Association of Youth Workers-NAYW, 1998-present  
Milwaukee's Juvenile offender Intervention Network, Member 1994-present  
Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), Member 2008-present  
Restorative Justice Partners (RJP), Member 2013-Present  
Restorative Justice For All-Research Associate, 2014-Present  
Pi Lambda Theta Honors Society, 2014-Present  
Nonprofit Center of Milwaukee, 2015-Present  
Midwest Public Affairs conference affiliate, 2016  
Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Associations (ARNOVA),  
2016  
American Society for Public Administration (ASPA)  
Urban Affairs Association (UAA)

### **RELEVANT PROFICIENCIES**

Microsoft Word  
Excel  
SPSS Social Science Statistics software  
Blackboard  
Desire to Learn (D2L)

### **AWARDS**

- 2017 Amy Tessmer Boening Scholarship Fund, University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee  
2016 HBI Doctoral Fellowship, Department of Political Science, University of  
Wisconsin-Milwaukee (2016-2017)  
2016 Thomas Cheeks Scholarship, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
2015 Thomas Cheeks Scholarship, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
2014 Chancellor Scholarship, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
2014 Dean Award, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
2009 Omega Psi Phi Educational Chapter Award, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity

## COMMUNITY/PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS, SERVICE, AWARDS

- Featured guest on “The Talk,” McCray Mass Media, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bU\\_5sLxNKvY&app=desktop](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bU_5sLxNKvY&app=desktop), Milwaukee, July 2018
- Board Member and Grants Committee Chair, Above and Beyond The Playground, The Milwaukee-Wisconsin Chapter.
- Board Member, Louie M. Adams Foundation, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Annual Initiative.
- Advisory Committee, Fortunate Futures Academy.
- Committee Chair and Scholarship Administrator, Achievement Week Initiative, Milwaukee Public Schools. 2015
- Board Member, We Share Resources, [weshareresources.org](http://weshareresources.org). Phoenix, AZ
- Community Organizer, Social Action Initiatives, Milwaukee, WI. 2015
- Lecture given to the graduating class of Milwaukee Youth Enterprise Academy, Milwaukee, WI. 2015