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Influence of Restorative Practices on the Middle-School Classroom, As Reported by Teachers: A Qualitative Case Study

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This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the College of Graduate and Professional Studies of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my entire village, who has supported me over the last 3 years. To my parents, James and Charlotte Andrews, thank you for believing in me and encouraging me along the way. Next, I dedicate this to my dog son, Carter James; without you by my side, I would have given up a long time ago. Lastly, I dedicate this to my former students; the experiences you have taught me are priceless; thank you for making me the educator I am today.

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"'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jeremiah 29:11). To God be the glory! I would first like to thank God for ordering my steps; without his guidance, none of this would be possible. Thank you, Jesus, for keeping me when everything seemed impossible; I am forever grateful.

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine middle school teachers' perceptions of the influence that restorative practices have on the middle school classroom environment. For the purpose of this study, seven middle school teachers were selected who have implemented restorative practices in their middle school classrooms to provide feedback. Findings suggest that overall restorative practices have a positive influence on the classroom. The findings from this study can be used with teachers, administrators, counselors, parents, and school and district support staff to help create a positive campus culture between students and adults in middle school classrooms. The implications from this study suggest resources for school educators looking to successfully implement restorative practices on a middle school campus.

Keywords: restorative, practices, justice, discipline, restorative practices, mental health, disproportionality, behavior, culture, climate, classroom, middle school, students, relationships, professional development, strategies

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Racial inequalities in how students are disciplined are increasingly becoming a priority in school districts across the United States (Brooks & Erwin, 2019). Researchers noted that students of color, and particularly Black ones, are more prone to be referred for disciplinary action than their White peers, especially for subjective infractions such as being defiant or disrespectful; frequent referrals are associated with an increased risk of involvement in the criminal justice system (Milner, 2015; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). Siwatu (2011) suggested a connection between an instructor's classroom management style and students' feelings of self-efficacy; he went on to assert that the uneven application of discipline directly impacts the educational gaps between Black and White students. Gopalan and Nelson (2019) noted that racial inequalities in student discipline are substantial and unexplainable, and school district policies may violate civil rights laws. Numerous educators have recently reported an increase in student behavior problems, beginning with the return to in-person instruction (Kurtz, 2022). This is a serious issue for teachers and learners alike; according to Will (2022), 44% of district leaders reported receiving more threats of violence from students in 2020 than they did in the fall of 2019.

Background of the Study

Student discipline and competent classroom management are the foundation of a safe school environment (Kafka, 2011). Ideally, these elements support learners behaviorally and academically; unfortunately, draconian disciplinary policies became popular after the 1999 mass shooting in Columbine, Colorado, fueled concerns about school safety and gun violence (Skiba, 2000). According to González et al. (2018), this shift has resulted in the increased involvement of law enforcement with on-campus behavioral issues; as noted by Payne and Welch (2017), the punitive nature of zero-tolerance measures enacted both by school districts and state legislatures

has often led to exclusionary discipline, which separates referred students from the rest of the school community and imposes mandatory penalties such as suspension, expulsion, and even referral to the police for any number of rules infractions. The U. S. Department of Education (2015) suggested that these exclusionary practices disproportionally affect minority students, who are much more likely to be suspended during their school years.

The process of restorative practice (RP), a framework created to address students' relationships and response to harm, was introduced in Australia, the United States, and other countries in the early 1990s (Queensland Department of Education, 2021). Zehr (2002) reported that the RP approach, adopted in several school districts, has resulted in shifts in how school discipline is applied, increasing student perceptions about educators being fair and creating a thriving learning environment. Smith et al. (2015) noted that RP, when used correctly, focuses on repair and reconciliation. RPs have improved the classroom environment, positively affecting student academic performance, increasing school attendance, and improving emotional and physical safety.

According to Nance (2016), the pipeline to prison begins in the classroom. Nance also noted that 60% of Texas students are suspended or expelled at least once during a student's school career. This pipeline shifts students out of school and into the juvenile justice system. Thus, researchers have suggested that the prison pipeline could be reduced once RPs are implemented in the school system (e.g., Braithwaite, 2004; Morales, 2019; Morgan, 2021). A U.S. Department of Justice (2017) report stated that in 2015 there were 48,043 adolescents held in juvenile detention centers across the county; moreover, Sickmund et al. (2021) approximated that 44% of that population were Black adolescents. Augustine et al. (2018) found that throughout the country, school districts, stakeholders, and legislators have expressed growing

concern over suspensions, particularly those involving minority students. Current zero-tolerance rules exemplify systems that employ punitive and exclusionary measures (e.g., suspensions) to monitor student conduct. For instance, Augustine et al. (2018) found that suspended students have a reduced chance of graduating due to excessive absences and loss of instructional time.

Statement of the Problem

Owens and McLanahan (2019) suggested that Black students were more prone to disciplinary consequences, such as expulsions, than their White counterparts, regardless of the school district's demographic makeup. Additionally, students in their early adolescent years have a difficult time transitioning throughout their middle school years; consequently, middle school is commonly noted as one of the most difficult levels for educators because of student behavior problems and additional challenges (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Schools are increasingly using restorative justice and RPs, which could aid in creating safe school communities that promote well-being and enhance the environment of middle school classrooms (Sprague & Tobin, 2017).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study explored how RP implementation influenced the middle school classroom environment as perceived by teachers. Classroom environment is defined as a blend of the social, emotional, and instructional elements of the classroom (Ambrose et al., 2010). For the purpose of this study, influence was defined as the affect or change in how someone or something develops, behaves, or thinks (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). This qualitative case study utilized open-ended interviews, artifacts, and field notes to explore ways that middle school teachers perceive the classroom environment has been influenced by

implementing RPs. Participants included seven middle school teachers teaching in Southeast Texas schools that have implemented RPs.

The following research questions were used to guide the study.

RQ1: What do teachers perceive to be the influence of RPs on the middle school classroom environment?

RQ2: What challenges do teachers encounter when implementing RPs in the classroom?

Significance of the Study

The growing understanding that punitive measures such as detention, suspension, and expulsion exacerbate issues such as bullying, violence, poor academic performance, and parental apathy has motivated researchers to investigate RP methods to create safe, supportive educational experiences (Fronius et al., 2019). Lodi et al. (2022) suggested that RPs could be an option and solution for educators. RPs are geared toward resolving inappropriate and violent behaviors, such as bullying, and promoting prosocial behaviors through the development of social and emotional skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, and responsibility), with the overarching goal of fostering safe school communities that promote well-being.

Exploring the influence of RPs on the classroom environment could be helpful to middle school principals, assistant principals, teachers, lead teachers, and students. Therefore, implementing RP in the learning environment could create a learning environment that supports teachers in helping students cultivate appropriate skills when responding to adversity using RP strategies.

Definition of Key Terms

To enhance the reader's comprehension of the subject matter, key terms used throughout this study are defined as follows:

Circle. Wachtel (2016) noted that the circle's guiding principles are to acknowledge the presence and dignity of each member and to cherish their contribution, to emphasize the interconnectedness of people, to encourage emotional and spiritual expression, and to allow everyone an equal voice. Confidentiality is also critical to maintaining an atmosphere of openness and emotional safety.

Empathy. Empathy is the ability to share and relate to another person's emotional state and well-being (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008).

Juvenile justice center. A juvenile justice center is a secure facility operated by municipal or state authorities (Visible Network Labs, 2022).

Middle school. Middle school is an intermediate school for children in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades (Texas Education Agency, n.d.-b).

Restorative justice. According to Martin (2019), the theory of restorative justice emphasizes repairing the harm caused by criminal behavior. It is best accomplished through cooperative processes that allow all willing stakeholders to meet, although other approaches are available when that is impossible. This can lead to the transformation of people, relationships, and communities.

Restorative practice. According to Wachtel (2016), RP is a social science that examines ways to develop social capital and social discipline through collaborative learning and decision-making skills. RPs include restoration, rehabilitation, cooperation, and communication as alternative disciplines (Daly, 2016; Goldys, 2016; Mansfield et al., 2018). These practices have their origins in the criminal justice system and aim to increase a student's awareness of the consequences of their behavior while also improving it in a nonjudgmental manner (Mansfield et al., 2018; McNicol & Reilly, 2018; Ortega et al., 2016).

Social and emotional learning. Social and emotional learning is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020).

Teacher leader. Teacher leaders are teachers who have responsibilities beyond the classroom while teaching, who model strategies and influence others, and individuals who share pedagogy and classroom management strategies to help improve classroom and campus climate and culture (Angelle & DeHart, 2016; Collinson & Tourish, 2015; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

Trauma. Trauma is an experience that threatens life or physical integrity and overwhelms an individual's capacity to cope (Coffey et al., 2010).

Trauma-informed practices. Trauma-informed practices consider the influence of traumatic events on individuals and the application of knowledge to the organization of systems of services that meet the needs of trauma survivors (Butler et al., 2017).

Trauma-informed school. A trauma-informed school is a learning environment where stakeholders identify and respond to the academic, behavioral, and emotional impact of stress on those in the school community (Chafouleas et al., 2016).

Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study

This qualitative study's purpose was to explore how RP implementation influences the middle school classroom environment as perceived by teachers. In Chapter 1, I introduced the study. The literature review in Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive view of RPs. In Chapter 3, I present the methodology and research design. In Chapter 4, the study findings are presented. In

Chapter 5, I present the study summary, suggest conclusions, implications for practice, and future studies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This qualitative study's purpose was to explore how RPs implementation influenced the middle school classroom environment as perceived by teachers. For this study, classroom environment was defined as a blend of the social, emotional, and instructional elements of the classroom (Ambrose et al., 2010). Additionally, for this study's purposes, influence was defined as the affect or change in how someone or something develops, behaves, or thinks (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). This chapter contains the following topics: literature search methods, conceptual framework discussion, student discipline and disproportionality, overview and history of zero-tolerance policies, types of RPs, implementation of RPs, RPs and school environment influence, and 21st-century middle school student obstacles and challenges.

Literature Search Methods

A comprehensive search was conducted to examine prior studies that provided critical insight into this study's subject. For this study, I searched through various publications from a range of sources, including Abilene Christian University's (ACU) Brown Library, ResearchGate, ProQuest Digital Dissertation and Thesis databases, the written work of Wachtel (2016), Nathanson (1992), and others. Keywords and phrases used to conduct the search included *restorative practices and implementation*, *restorative justice*, *classroom climate*, *circle*, *conference*, *school discipline*, and *zero-tolerance*. These keywords were specifically chosen to facilitate the discovery of studies that would expand on the wide subject of restorative practices, implementation, and middle school classroom settings.

Conceptual Framework Discussion

According to Wachtel (2016), RP is a social science that examines ways to develop social capital and social discipline through collaborative learning and decision-making skills. In the

past, Wachtel (2016) has found RP to have several benefits, such as contributing to the reduction of (a) crime, violence, and bullying; (b) the improvement of human conduct; (c) the strengthening of civil society; (d) the provision of effective leadership; (e) the restoration of relationships; and (f) the repair of harm. However, RP originated from restorative justice, which Zehr (1990) reported is a perspective on criminal justice that emphasizes repairing harm done to individuals and relationships rather than focusing on punishing offenders.

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice (RJ) originated in North America through four distinct sources: indigenous practices of justice, other faith communities, the prison abolition movement, and the alternative dispute resolution movement. RJ was first implemented in the United States criminal and juvenile justice systems (Leung,1999). RJ is practiced in various ways around the globe (Shapland, 2013). The word "restorative justice" has been used in academic discourse in England, Ireland, and the United States of America since the 1830s (Gade, 2018). Furthermore, Wachtel (2016) suggested that RJ is considered a relational approach to fostering safe and caring school climates through the use of a structured set of practices that places importance on engaging stakeholders to identify and address their harms, needs, and obligations. Zehr (2002) maintained that RP is needed to facilitate healing and make the environment as peaceful as possible. In fact, when implemented as a whole-school strategy, RJ has the potential to reshape school communities through its preventive and instructive capacities. RJs three guiding concepts are (a) repair harm, (b) involve all stakeholders, and (c) rebuild community relationships (Augustine et al., 2018).

Wilson et al. (2017) reported that RJ is a process in which the major stakeholders collaborate to choose the best course of action for repairing any harm caused by a violation. The

core elements of RJ are stakeholders, victims, offenders, and their communities of care. Each of the foundational components requires reparation, accountability, and reconciliation. Moreover, the extent to which all three components are engaged in meaningful emotional interchange and decision-making determines the extent to which social discipline approaches and restoration take place.

According to McCold and Wachtel (2003), interaction is important to meeting the emotional needs of all parties involved. Thus, RJ practices require the active engagement of all three key stakeholders to be fully impactful. This procedure requires the active engagement of all three key stakeholders. Figure 1 demonstrates an overlapping that illustrates the importance of engagement between the three stakeholders. The three primary stakeholders in restorative justice are victims, offenders, and their communities of care.

Figure 1

Stakeholders of Restorative Justice

Note. Adapted from *In Pursuit of Paradigm: A Theory of Restorative Justice*, by P. McCold and T. Wachtel, 2003, August, presentation at the World Congress of Criminology, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (https://www.iirp.edu/news/in-pursuit-of-paradigm-a-theory-of-restorative-justice).

Wilson et al. (2017) noted that when an infraction is committed, RJ requires a hearing before a hearing officer or a volunteer board comprised of students, teachers, and staff. Although this is not a criminal trial, it bears some resemblance to a courtroom procedure. The technique is centered on generating truthful communication and social support, which promotes personal commitment in the healing process (Government of Canada, 2021). Moreover, as Wilson et al. (2017) noted, the overall objective is to evaluate the facts objectively following a discussion of the evidence to establish responsibility for the situation. The impact the offenses have on people involved in challenging situations is the focus and is examined in the RJ process to develop a resolution that appropriately meets the victims' needs.

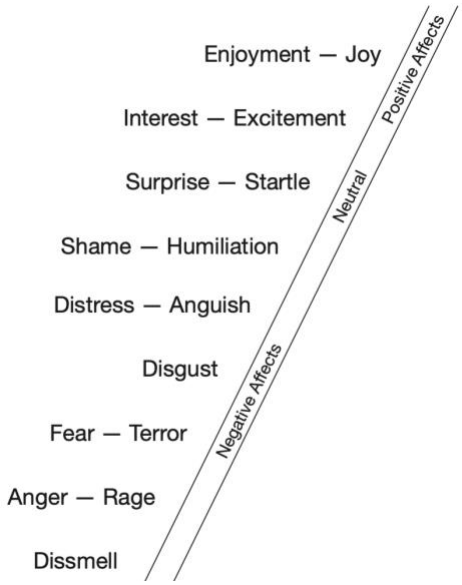
Restorative Practices

Wachtel (2016) noted that several RP principles are gaining traction globally in education, criminal justice, social work, counseling, juvenile services, the workplace, and faith communities and can be utilized to explain RPs. As one of the leading researchers in RP, Wachtel's (2016) study showed that there are various ways to support students using RP and various strategies students can implement to improve self-awareness skills. Moreover, RPs are characterized by doing things *with* people rather than *to* them.

RPs' primary function is to reconcile and rebuild relationships; therefore, in Nathanson's (1992) book, *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self*, the author stated nine effects that are an RP, which examines how implementing RP influences socioemotional and physical safety in a middle school setting that can impact the learning community. Nathanson (1992) identified nine distinct effects (see Figure 2) to explain the expression of emotion in all humans.

Figure 2

Nine Effects



Note. Adapted from *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self* by D. Nathanson, 1992, Norton. Copyright 1992 by Norton.

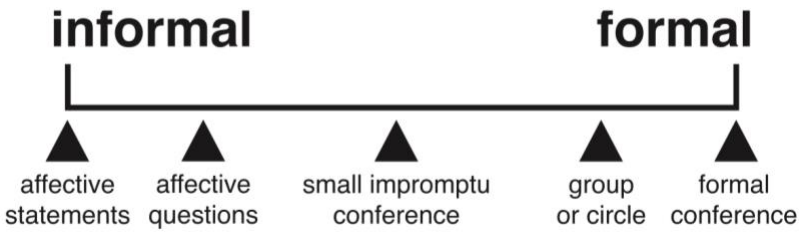
Korbey (2017) pointed out that human connection and social connection for middle school children are vitally important and improve the classroom environment. Tomkins (1962, 1963, 1991) argued that the best and healthiest human connections occur when affect or emotion flow freely, minimizing the negative, increasing the positive, yet allowing for expression. Nathanson (1998) also suggested that RPs, such as conferences and circles, create a space for people to express and exchange emotions in a safe atmosphere.

Several strategies have been found useful for the classroom and school environment. Restorative practices continuum (RPC) is also a community-building practice that includes affective statements that communicate people's feelings and affective questions that cause people to reflect on how their behavior has affected others (McCold & Wachtel, 2003). Consequently, the flow of discussion moves from left to right (informal to formal), and RP

becomes more formal as it progresses from left to right on the continuum; it involves more people, and according to Tomkins (1962, 1963, 1991), becomes more structured. For example, the RPC provides a space for students to share openly without judgment. McCold and Wachtel (2003) suggested that RPC is appropriate for school environments because it is an informal practice geared toward building relationships daily (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Restorative Practices Continuum



Note. Adapted from *Affect Imagery Consciousness: Volume I: The Positive Effects*, by S. Tomkins, 1962, Springer. Also adapted from *Affect Imagery Consciousness: Volume II: The Negative Effects*, by S. Tomkins, 1963, Springer and *Affect Imagery Consciousness: Volume II: The Negative Effects: Anger and Fear* (1st ed.), by S. Tomkins, 1991, Springer. Copyright 1962, 1963, and 1991 by Springer.

Recent events and environmental changes in schools emphasize the critical need for developing positive relationships in our classrooms and resolving disputes more constructively, according to Kehoe et al. (2018). A study conducted by Silverman and Mee (2018) mentioned that RPs are now being considered a viable alternative to building positive classroom relationships and changing the classroom climate. Another study by Smith et al. (2018) agreed and proffered that "a climate of trust is essential for learning—but is quite fragile among the complex interactions of many humans each school day" (p. 75). How humans interact is just as important as the interaction itself. For this reason and others, the International Institute for

Restorative Practices founder and president, Wachtel (2016) stated, “The social science of restorative practices offers a common thread to tie together theory, research, and practice in diverse fields such as education, counseling, criminal justice, social work, and organizational management” (p. 2).

The overall objectives of RP are to foster healthy connections and restore those relationships when a community suffers harm (Restorative Practice Consortium, 2017). In a study by Kehoe and colleagues (2018), the researchers found that RP affects student conduct by strengthening social skills like compassion, responsibility, and respect for others. Creating an environment where students can be respectfully expressive is essential to creating a thriving learning environment for teachers and other students. Kehoe et al. (2018) reported that students felt more comfortable sharing in a restorative environment, and students described teachers as calmer and more open to listening to their feelings and thoughts while using RP strategies. Additionally, this resulted in teachers and students listening with a greater capacity for empathy for all community members participating.

Wachtel (2016) noted that RP skills help students foster several skills that will be beneficial to the learning environment. Figure 4 displays the social skills students focus on while practicing RP, which includes (a) encouraging understanding of the results and the impact on the school community and all individuals involved; (b) building healthy relationships between teachers and students; (c) conflict resolution and accountability for individuals and groups; and (d) decrease, prevent, and enhance harmful behavior and repair harm and rebuild positive relationships.

Figure 4

Restorative Practices

Note. Adapted from "Developing Student Social Skills Using Restorative Practices: A New Framework Called H.E.A.R.T." by M. Kehoe, H. Bourke-Taylor, H., and D. Broderick, *Social Psychological Education, 2018,* 21, 189–207 (https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11218-017-9402-1).

Student Discipline and Disproportionality

Because of the increase in student infractions and student referrals, student conduct and discipline practices have been studied across the United States for decades (Gordon, 2018). Stakeholders have discussed possible solutions to addressing student behavior issues. Van Wyk and Pelser (2014) emphasized the original intent of the Student Code of Conduct was to enforce and regulate student behaviors and encourage positive student behavior. Thus, school districts

have rules in place to address student misconduct, which have been based on zero-tolerance based practices in the past (Joubert & Serakwane, 2009).

Educators should enforce discipline policies to ensure that students who break the rules experience consequences (Yerace, 2014). Yet, Amstutz and Mullet (2015) suggested that off-task student behavior in the classroom should be met with compassion and teaching strategies to re-correct and address that behavior instead of creating more separation. Yet, Wang et al. (2022) found that students in the United States are suspended for minor infractions and receive exclusionary consequences. The harsh punishment has motivated leaders to become more involved. The U. S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014) wrote a letter to school districts encouraging school personnel to consider alternative consequences that kept students in school rather than suspending students or expulsion. The objective of this request was to provide policies and practices that established a culture of safety and inclusion. Thus, Hasan and Bao (2020) suggested that the focus should be on keeping students in school and avoiding missing classroom instruction time at all costs.

According to the Texas Education Agency (2019), meeting the needs of the student while addressing discipline and behavior without the loss of instructional time became the primary focus for school leaders. To combat the issue of children missing school, Texas created an initiative that responded to the Department of Justice by creating a joint venture between the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialog (IRJRD) at the University of Texas School of Social Work (Texas Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing, 2018). This collaboration resulted in a training series with IRJRD that focused on teaching teachers about RPs, focusing on 10 of their 20 service centers and the exclusionary disparities within the regions (Texas Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing, 2018).

Disproportion of Student Suspensions

Black males are disproportionately suspended from school compared to their non-Black peers (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2019). This type of disproportionality can be harmful to a school community. For context, Bryan et al. (2012) stated that disproportionality has been described as "a phenomenon in which students relative to their proportion in the population experience overrepresentation or underrepresentation" (p. 177). Voulgarides and Zwerger (2013) noted that the root causes that contribute to disproportionality are beliefs, practices, and policies. Moreover, Fabelo et al. (2011) agreed and pointed out an inequality for students who receive out-of-school suspensions due to a first-time violation. However, Green (2015) noted that White students receive the least suspensions and expulsions, which is a display of inequitable discipline practices.

Gordon (2018) noted that disproportionality is not a new problem; consequently, for decades, disproportionality in student suspensions has been an issue in the United States. In fact, the overrepresentation in classification, placement, and suspension has been a national concern. One study found that students of color and students enrolled in special education programs faced greater consequences, such as out-of-school suspensions, more than other students (Barshay, 2019). Voulgarides and Zwerger (2013) found that underserved students are underrepresented in receiving resources and services and are also more likely to face a lack of services and resources and may not have access to programs, which impacts students' learning experience. As a result, equity has become a focus and major concern for educational leaders.

Student discipline disparity has also been a national concern for school districts across the United States (Gordon, 2018). Minority students face significantly harsher discipline than their peers (Puckett et al., 2019). Nguyen et al. (2019) concurred that research on school

discipline disparities had demonstrated an increasing awareness of minority students' disproportionate influence. However, a lack of alternatives to replace the inequitable practices has caused the problem to be neglected for decades. As a result, school leaders have used suspension to remove students from the classroom environment for less serious violations (Morgan et al., 2019).

Blad and Mitchell (2018) reported that in 2015–2016 over 2.7 million students were suspended, which is about 100,000 fewer than the year prior. African American males accounted for almost 25% of those suspended. Meanwhile, African American females contributed to the remaining 14% of students being suspended even though they accounted for only 8% of the student population. School discipline has been utilized to punish African American students, particularly males, consequently widening the gap between African Americans and other ethnic groups in terms of discipline (Gopalan & Nelson, 2019). Unfortunately, instructional time is lost for these students; consequently, it is critical for educators to understand their role in the disciplinary referral process, as most of these instances occur in the classroom (Nguyen et al., 2019).

COVID-19's Effects on the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The impact of COVID-19 has emphasized a number of the nation's systematic disparities, including educational inequities; consequently, many students across the country are experiencing increased levels of stress and anxiety as a result of the pandemic (Schiff, 2018). Kantamneni (2020) suggested that COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted students from vulnerable groups, including minority students, low-income students, and students with disabilities.

Chafouleas and Iovino (2021) noted that recognizing the impact of COVID-19 and how educators discipline children, the United States Senate and House of Representatives introduced the Counseling Not Criminalization in Schools Act in July 2021. The act prevents federal funding from being used to support "law enforcement officers" (LEOs) in preschool, elementary, and secondary schools. The act was also established as a federal grant program to assist schools in reforming school safety and disciplinary practices. Chafouleas and Iovino (2021) noted that the grant program's objective was to shift schools away from focusing on punitive consequences and focus more on evidence-based and trauma-informed practices.

Overview and History of Zero-Tolerance Policies

Despite considerable criticism, zero-tolerance measures have been used to address school safety for nearly 3 decades (Bell, 2015). A study conducted by Huang and Cornell (2021) discovered that few empirical studies had examined the relationship between zero tolerance and school safety. More significantly, the Government Accountability Office's report on school shootings emphasized the importance of conducting research on the relationship between school punishment and student safety. Unfortunately, in 3 decades, school climate and discipline have gotten worse since the implementation of zero-tolerance policies; in fact, Mowen and Freng (2018) contended that students and teachers at schools with a higher level of support for zero tolerance reported worse perceptions of school safety, even after accounting for school and student factors linked with safety.

In the 1990s, schools implemented zero-tolerance policies in an attempt to combat school violence (Skiba & Peterson, 1999b). Moreover, initially implemented to address gun-related violence in schools, zero tolerance has grown to include both weapons and illicit narcotics, as well as violent and nonviolent violations (Welch & Payne, 2018). In 1994, the Gun-Free Schools

Act was passed and intended for schools to adopt zero-tolerance legislation regarding weapons in schools (Cerrone, 1999). The legislation was passed with the presumption that enforcement of this policy would deter students from engaging in disruptive behavior (Skiba, 2014). Before this 1994 act passed, similar policies avoided weapons, drugs, and gang activity on school campuses (Skiba & Peterson, 1999a, 199b). Ashford et al. (2008) emphasized that the purpose of zero-tolerance legislation was to allow schools to function effectively and prevent violence in schools. Moreover, Petrilli (2020) acknowledged that some believe that students receive unfair consequences due to poor behavior and that better policies should be considered.

According to Skiba (2014), zero-tolerance legislation encouraged school administrators to enforce consequences for less severe disruptions with the same force used for more significant infractions to teach students a lesson that poor behavior would not be tolerated. For instance, a middle school student accused and found guilty of pointing a gun sketched on a scrap of paper toward classmates might be expelled from school. Furthermore, Morgan et al. (2019) conducted a study and completed the School Discipline Consensus Report that advocated for the complete removal of zero-tolerance policies to prevent the use of suspension and expulsion after receiving advice and research on school discipline from national experts in education, behavioral health, law enforcement, and juvenile justice. The report condemned zero-tolerance practices for encouraging the adoption of detrimental, punitive measures for minor infractions and putting the most vulnerable populations at a greater risk. The National Association of School Psychologists (2018) advised implementing disciplinary techniques that minimize the use of suspension and other forms of exclusionary discipline. Borrego and Maxwell (2021) emphasized that zero-tolerance policies had significant, long-term effects on student behavior for years to come. According to Steinberg and Lacoe (2017) the graduation rate was impacted based on students

with no suspensions achieving a 75% graduation rate, whereas students with only one suspension had a 52% graduation rate.

Exclusionary Practices

Exclusionary practices have potentially done more harm than good (Luster, 2018). In practical terms, disciplinary exclusion is frequently referred to as a punishment method; however, from a behavioral standpoint, these practices do not achieve the practical objective of punishment, which is to deliver a consequence that decreases the future likelihood of a behavior problem (Sprague, 2018). One study by the National Clearinghouse on Supportive School Discipline. (n.d.) argued that exclusionary policies and practices result in emotions of alienation from school and impressions of an intractable educational system. Though the original intent of exclusionary practices was to improve the learning environment by penalizing students with behavior issues, the outcome has been making this a greater problem. Thus, Sprague (2018) stated, “Office discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions are considered exclusionary disciplinary practices because they remove and exclude students from schools and classroom learning time as a punitive consequence to an infraction of school or classroom rules or expectations” (Sprague, 2018, p. 196). Therefore, no one learns when a student is punished by being removed from the classroom.

Exclusionary practices pose a problem for several reasons (Luster, 2018). For example, a study by Gee (2013) found that suspended or expelled students, frequently disciplined, are at risk and more likely to be held back a grade or drop out than students who do not face such discipline. In addition, Riddle and Sinclair (2019) suggested that African American and Latino students are impacted by exclusionary practices such as suspension and expulsion at higher rates than Whites, and Asian Americans have a lower punishment rate than Whites. The effects of

ongoing out-of-school suspensions have a compounding impact year after year. Consequently, the quality of learning is impacted, academic progress is hindered, and racial gaps in accomplishment are increased, particularly for minority students. Consequently, Kennedy et al. (2017) pointed out that pairing students with other students who have discipline problems increase the likelihood of struggling students being accused of guilt and being isolated from the learning environment without justification. Sprague (2018) argued that administrators and teachers must understand the distinction between retribution and effective punishment.

Expulsions and Out-of-School Suspension

Over the last 40 years, exclusionary discipline measures, such as suspension and expulsion, have grown by roughly 50% in schools (Owens & McLanahan, 2019). Expulsions are widely referred to as part of the school-to-prison pipeline (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], n.d.). Martin et al. (2016) reported that suspension and expulsion could cause children to drop out of school and enter the criminal justice system. Compared to White students, the U. S. Government Accountability Office (2018) found that Black students are 3.2 times more likely to be suspended or expelled, Native American students are 2.0 times more likely, and Hispanic/Latinx students are 1.3 times more likely.

Huang and Cornell (2017) noted that teachers' attempts to regulate student conduct using various strategies designed to cease disruptive actions and dissuade other students from misbehaving are often unsuccessful. Out-of-school suspension is commonly a result of teachers' strategies to reduce behavior problems; however, the consequence has negatively impacted students academically. Huang and Cornell (2017) argued that though proven ineffective and a problematic method, students who engage in inappropriate behavior face an out-of-school suspension, despite the fact that the practice is inefficient and has negative repercussions.

In-School Suspension

In-school suspensions (ISS) are exclusionary practices that negatively impact minority students (Gopalan & Nelson, 2019). In the United States, African American and Latino students are more likely to be suspended from school as a result of a punishment than their White counterparts (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Despite the lack of evidence that ISS procedures are beneficial, teachers continue to use disciplinary referrals as a behavior strategy that results in ISS for students, which greatly impacts minority students (Marchbanks & Blake, 2018). According to the literature, minority students are overrepresented in school suspensions, which also impacts their academic future (Huang & Cornell, 2017). Meanwhile, researchers have questioned the grounds for the harsher judgment because research shows no significant difference in the behavior of White students and minority students; however, African American students receive harsher levels of punishment for less serious behavior than other students (Skiba, 2014).

According to Steinberg and Lacoe (2017), ISS practices remove students from class and place them in a setting that resembles a prison. Moreover, this type of punishment has been found to be mentally and emotionally traumatizing to some students. A study conducted by Lindsay and Hart (2017) found that the discrepancies in discipline have raised significant concern about the possibility of a school-to-prison pipeline in which suspensions and expulsions serve as the primary entry point for an overwhelmingly disproportionate number of African American kids entering the nation's penal system. School disciplinary practices triggered a downward spiral in the lives of students inside and outside of school and led to what Steinberg and Lacoe (2017) referred to as the "school-to-prison pipeline epidemic" (p. 49). The impact of these consequences and practices should no longer be ignored.

Alternative to Suspension

Originally, with zero-tolerance policies, administrators often included exclusionary consequences to deal with student misbehavior (Skiba & Peterson, 1999b). Skiba and Peterson (2000) stated that "harsh and punitive disciplinary strategies have not proven sufficient to foster a school climate that can prevent the occurrence of school violence" (p. 335). Kohn (2006) and Maguire et al. (2010) suggested that early on when teachers felt a student's behavior was inappropriate, there was a lack of attention to the factors that might have contributed to the negative behavior. Teachers often felt the need to find a consequence for the behavior, regardless of the impact (Sullivan et al., 2014). In 2006, one out of every 14 students was suspended from school at least once during the school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008).

Sullivan et al. (2014) suggested providing professional development focused on empowering teachers to be problem solvers and more conscious about how they interact with their students. This approach would allow teachers to create environments that support students in their learning. Addressing behavior using alternative methods was important because it impacted all areas of the school, such as attendance, climate, and instruction. With significant funding tied to student attendance, school educators need to choose behavior support programs that decrease their suspension rates and provide students with more opportunities to be responsible.

Discipline Alternative Education Placement

Across the country, school districts and campuses have used a range of resources to conduct successful disciplinary measures; however, the outcomes have not been effective. In reaction to the Safe Schools Act, Texas enacted a zero-tolerance policy in 1995 (Gershoff & Font, 2016). Alternative school disciplinary tactics seek to address the underlying reasons for

misbehavior by fostering strong and healthy connections with students and increasing their engagement in the learning environment (Education Commission of the States, 2018). Statewide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SW–PBIS), RPs, and trauma-informed practices are now highly regarded strategies (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, n.d.).

Gershoff and Font (2016) noted that discipline alternative education placements (DAEPs) was established according to the Safe Schools Act for students who violated local and state-mandated conduct rules. However, these programs were designed to offer a supportive temporary setting where suspended or expelled students may achieve their educational and behavioral goals. Mandatory disciplinary measures differed by state. Additionally, the act empowered each school district to choose whether a student's punishment should be enforced or optional depending on the nature of the behavioral offense (Tefera et al., 2017).

In middle school, Welsh and Little (2018) noted that disciplinary consequences are mostly reactive and exclusive in nature rather than proactive. Middle school is a time of tremendous change and adjustments for adolescents, sometimes increasing discipline concerns and behavior issues (Bonnie et al., 2019). Researchers discovered that between 38% and 41% of students received at least one office discipline referral and that these children were frequently reported for disobedience, behavior, disrespect, and inappropriate physical contact (Predy et al., 2014). Thus, providing more support in the middle school setting would be beneficial in recognizing the most prevalent problematic behaviors in identifying targeted areas for teaching and intervention (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, n.d.). Martinez and Zhao (2018) argued that alternative options to office punishment referrals could alter the course of student misbehaviors and potentially change the outcome of their life.

As a result of these growing concerns, RPs are developing rapidly as a viable alternative to traditional zero-tolerance rules (Anfara et al., 2013; Fronius et al., 2019; Haymovitz et al., 2018). Educational communities, researchers, and psychologists have started comparing traditional practices and RPs to find a better solution for children. Table 1 contrasts the traditional practices and restorative approaches.

Table 1

Traditional Practices Versus Restorative Practices

Traditional practices	Restorative practices
▪ There are violations of schools and norms.	▪ Justice establishes obligations and identifies needs.
▪ The goal of justice is to establish guilt.	▪ Accountability is described as recognizing the consequences of an offense and resolving any resulting harm.
▪ Punishment is described as accountability.	▪ The offender, the victim, and the school all play an active role in the justice system.
▪ The offender receives justice, but the victim is neglected.	▪Offenders are held accountable for their actions and are required to make amends for any harm they have caused and work toward a positive outcome and are given opportunities to express regret or make amends.
▪ The rules and goal are more important than the outcome.	
▪ No chance for repentance or atonement is provided to the offender.	
▪ Individuals and relationships are harmed.	

Note. Adapted from "The Next Step: Developing Restorative Communities" [Paper presentation], by T. Wachtel, 2005, Seventh International Conference on Conferencing, Circles and other Restorative Practices, Manchester, UK, November 9–11, 2005 (https://www.iirp.edu/news/the-next-step-developing-restorative-communities).

Types of Restorative Processes

Zehr (2002) suggested that the RPs approach, adopted in several school districts, has resulted in shifts in how school discipline is applied, increasing student perceptions about educators being fair and creating a thriving learning environment. There are several RP processes which include the following: circles, restorative conferencing, informal RPs, and fair processing.

Circles

As noted by Wachtel (2016), circles are an essential part of RP that have been used to help students share their opinions and feelings and voice their concerns about a certain subject. Wachtel purported that a circle conference is an interactive restorative exercise that can be utilized to foster relationships and community building, or responsively, to address wrongdoing, conflicts, and difficulties. Wachtel (2016) conferred that this part of the process gives stakeholders an opportunity to be heard openly without interruption. RP circle conferences allow individuals to communicate and listen to one another in an environment of safety, respectfully with dignity. Additionally, the circle allows individuals in the circle an opportunity to share their stories, feelings, and perspectives and offers a range of resolutions for dealing with problems.

To use this RP circle strategy effectively, Wachtel (2016) suggested assembling in a circle gives students a chance to interact successfully by establishing mutual understanding to address their concerns before their grievances progress. Even the most difficult student has a voice when the circle is used effectively because the goal of “equality” is one of the aims.

Restorative Conferences

Wachtel (2016) noted that a restorative conference is a structured gathering where the family of the offenders, victims, their families, and friends discuss the implications of the crime or wrongdoing and determine the best way to repair the harm. Approaching conflict in this

manner gives everyone a voice and an opportunity to be heard. For example, in a restorative conference, offenders are asked the following restorative questions during the conference:

- "What happened?"
- "What were you thinking of at the time?"
- "What have you thought about since?"
- "Who has been affected by what you have done?"
- "What do you think you need to do to make things right?"

Victims are asked these restorative questions:

- "What did you think when you realized what happened?"
- "What impact has this incident had on you and others?"
- "What has been the hardest thing for you?"
- "What do you think needs to happen to make things right?"

Wilson et al. (2017) suggested that conferences are essential to the RJ process. RJ has been used in a variety of settings, most notably in the juvenile justice system and schools. As a result of the growing interest, RJ has evolved into a framework for justifying strategies for enhancing both victim and offender justice. According to O'Connell et al. (1999), a restorative conference is a structured meeting between offenders, victims, and both parties' families and friends, in which both parties deal with the consequences of the crime or wrongdoing and decide how best to repair the harm.

O'Connell et al. (1999) reported that a restorative conference was originally created for RJ and created as an organized gathering between offenders and victims. Both parties' families and friends would discuss the repercussions of the wrongdoing and determine the best course of action to repair the harm. However, O'Connell et al. (1999) also described conferences as a

conversation that allows victims the opportunity to converse with the offender and share their feelings, ask questions, and suggest resolutions and options that will lead to peace. Moreover, a common RJ practice in school is family group conferencing, which can be an informal or formal practice (Fronius et al., 2019).

Informal Restorative Practices

Wachtel (2016) reported that informal RPs are low-key approaches for educators and other school personnel to contribute to a constructive learning environment. The author further stated that informal practices involve methods such as using 'I' statements to communicate feelings and focusing on how the actions of others can affect one person or group; the emphasis is on the behavior and not the individual. Additionally, Wachtel (2016) suggested that affective questions can be used to encourage the person who committed the harm to pause and consider who was harmed and how they were harmed. Further, proactive interaction with students and families, mentoring relationships, community service, and lunchtime table discussions are all informal methods.

Fair Process

Wachtel (2016) noted that fair process allows students to participate in issues that affect them, explain the rationale behind decisions to students who are impacted, clarify expectations to ensure that students understand the choice's implications, the precise expectations for carrying out the decision, and the penalties for failing to fulfill expectations. The three principles of the fair process include the following:

• Engagement: Incorporating individuals in decision-making that affects them by listening to their viewpoints and really considering them.

• Explanation: Expressing the rationale for a decision to everyone involved or who will be impacted by it.

• Expectation clarity: Ensuring that everyone understands a decision and the expectations for the future (Kim & Mauborgne, 2003).

Implementation of Restorative Practices

The Dignity in Schools Organization (2013) noted that implementing a school-wide RPs program includes hiring a restorative coordinator to lead and support the implementation efforts. The RP coordinator works with stakeholders to establish a school-wide plan incorporating the RP framework. The key to successful implementation includes teacher buy-in and ongoing training for teachers, students, and parents to ensure the principles of the program are being implemented correctly. Lastly, according to the Dignity in Schools Organization (2013), creating a system to collect data and monitor the outcomes based on implementing this practice is vital to measuring success.

Researchers suggested that implementing RP successfully on a secondary campus could be incorporated into a school's multi-tiered support system (Katic et al., 2020). Multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) refers to proactive interventions that schools might implement to assist students in achieving academic success (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, n.d.). For example, the two most commonly used approaches are MTSS, formerly known as response to intervention (RtI), and positive behavior intervention support (PBIS; James & Cobanoglu, 2019). However, implementing RPs requires planning for questioning, connecting, and interactive healing circles that involve organizing groups of people (van Woerkom, 2018).

RPs are flexible and sometimes ambiguous, which frequently leaves practitioners perplexed about which practices qualify as RPs (Wachtel, 2016). As a result, Wachtel (2016) defined a *continuum of practice* to help make RP more understandable by illustrating specific restorative strategies (see Table 2). On an RPC, the informal practices include affective statements that communicate people's feelings and affective questions that cause people to reflect on how their behavior has affected others (see Table 2). However, the suggested approach could be a whole campus approach or a grade-level approach. The continuum of practice established a connection between incidents, issues, and appropriate restorative responses that schools can use as a guide for implementation. On a campus level, the practices can be used with affective statements, restorative questions, small impromptu conferences, responsive circles, and proactive circles informally throughout the campus (Morrison et al., 2005).

Table 2

Continuum of Practice

Minor Incident or Issues		**Major Incident or Issue**
Affective statement relational conversation restorative 'chat'.	Class meetings and problem-solving circles. Mini conferences.	Restorative or community conference restorative mediation healing circle. Class conferences (serious dysfunction).
Informal	**Becoming More Formal**	**Formal**
Requires skill and little preparation.	Requires reasonable skill and more preparation.	Requires high-level skill and comprehensive preparation.
Informal Follow-Up	**Formal Follow-Up**	**Formal Follow-Up**

Note. Adapted from *Implementing Restorative Practice in Schools a Practical Guide to Transforming School Communities*, by M. Thorsborne and P. Blood, 2013, August 28, Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Copyright 2013 by Jessica Kingsley Publisher.

RP in the classroom varies significantly (Riley, 2017). Krenek (2019) suggested that RP social strategies develop and nurture student behavior in the classroom setting. The strategies range from informal to formal, depending on the situation. Moreover, the statements are teacher-driven affective statements, involve several people, and are defined by the International Institute of Restorative Practices (Wachtel, 2016).

Informally, the use of RP begins with affective statements and questions (see Table 3; Wachtel, 2016). Effective communication is the starting point of healing in RPs. Moreover, Augustine et al. (2018) identified the International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP) definition of affective statements as the "personal expressions of feeling in response to specific or negative behaviors of others" (p. 26). When teachers utilize affective statements in advance, McCold and Wachtel (2003) insist that students are given a chance to express their feelings about an issue or circumstance. Thus, giving students an opportunity to be heard is essential to healing and creating a safe learning space. Wachtel (2016) suggested that teachers employ affective statements by utilizing a range of 'I' statements to target and personalize the student's conduct. Additionally, Krenek (2019) acknowledged teachers' timely and deliberate use of affective remarks to inform students of the positive or negative impact their behavior has on the teacher or another student.

Table 3

Restorative Practice Strategies

Practice	Description
Affective statement	Personal feelings expressed in response to others' specific positive or negative behaviors.
Restorative questions	Questions chosen or adapted from two sets of standard questions aimed to address the wrongdoer's undesirable behavior and to

Practice	Description
	engage others who have been mistreated.
Small impromptu conferences	Questioning practices designed to handle minor incidents involving two or more persons.
Proactive circles	Meetings in which participants sit in a circle with no physical barriers that allow students t discuss their thoughts, ideas, and experiences in order to foster trust, mutual understanding, shared beliefs, and shared actions.
Responsive circles	Meetings with participants seated in a circle with no physical barriers that engage students in managing conflict and tension by mending relationships and reestablishing connections in response to a moderately significant incident or pattern of conduct affecting a group of students or an entire class.
Restorative conferences	Meetings held in response to serious occurrences or a pattern of less serious incidents in which all parties involved (often including friends and relatives of all parties) gather with the assistance of a trained facilitator who was not involved in the incident and who follows a defined process.

Note. Adapted from *Can Restorative Practices Improve School Climate and Curb Suspensions? An Evaluation of Restorative Practices in a Mid-Sized Urban School District*, by C. H. Augustine, J. Engberg, G. E. Grimm, E. Lee, E. L. Wang, K. Christianson, and A. A. Joseph, 2018, by RAND Corporation (https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2840.html).

RP and School Environment Influence

McCluskey (2010) noted that several benefits had been identified with implementing RP in teacher–educator programs and schools. These benefits include a decrease in bullying, a greater capacity for all stakeholders to show compassion, and staff and students to cultivate positive attitudes. Social and emotional awareness has also been noted to increase as a result of

restorative practices (Wachtel, 2016). According to research, RP can help close discipline differences based on race or ethnic origin, gender, and special education status, which impacts teachers' quality of the learning environment (Mansfield et al., 2018). For example, when students understand how to integrate appropriate social and emotional skills into the classroom, teachers trained in RP are able to focus on teaching and spend less time on discipline issues (Zulkey, 2017).

Smith et al. (2015) stated, "There are many benefits of a positive school climate as it informs how we work, teach, learn, and live" (p. 17). The benefits of RP have gained national attention. The U.S. Department of Education (2015) created a guiding principles document "to describe three key principles and related action steps that can help guide state- and locally controlled efforts to improve school climate and school discipline" (p. 15). These guiding principles will help school stakeholders work to improve school climate and discipline while promoting academic excellence. The principles include:

- Create positive climates and focus on prevention.
- Develop clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors.
- Ensure fairness, equity, and continuous improvement.

Campus climate and culture impact student success; however, improving school campus climate cannot be done successfully in isolation (Showers, 2019). Therefore, the success of implementing RPs on a campus level must have the support of administrators, the campus leadership team, and support provided throughout the process (DuFresne, 2021). The school environment is determined by the interaction of school norms, objectives, values, interpersonal

connections, instructional and learning techniques, and organizational structures (Smith et al., 2014).

Undesirable student conduct can disrupt a school's climate, and many school leaders may turn to RP to create positive change on their campus (Augustine et al., 2018). Additionally, Hinson (2020) emphasized the importance of invested administration in implementing RP and the allocation of resources to train teachers. Adopting RP as a whole school could potentially create a positive campus culture instead of pockets of good scattered. For instance, Alger (2018) found that inconsistencies and discrepancies between administrators and teachers develop during the implementation of RP, and the practices' implementation and sustainability fail, which makes partnership and support from leadership vital for a successful implementation.

Jessell (2012) found that the classroom climate improved due to RP with a reduction in bullying and observed that students were generally less angry. Jessell also noted that teachers reported that students' academic performance and attendance improved. In a more recent study, Vargas (2022) explored the use of RPs in the school environment to determine the effectiveness of RPs and the outcomes. Vargas (2022) found that teachers at an Oregon school reported improved student academics and classroom discipline in a K–8 classroom. The study found that mediation activities improved attendance.

21st Century Middle School Students, Obstacles, and Challenges

Today, approximately nine million children in the United States attend public middle schools, schools that serve as a transitional phase between elementary and high school, often comprising grades 6–8 (Bouchrika, 2021). The middle school years are a vital period in the lives of young adolescents. Adolescence is a time of significant change—biologically, cognitively, psychosocially, and emotionally (Bonnie et al., 2019). Additionally, personal interactions and

environments also shift throughout this period, as peers, boyfriends, and girlfriends gain prominence, and the adolescent enters and eventually leaves secondary school (Arduini-Van Hoose, 2017). For instance, Foulkes and Blakemore (2018) found that individuals build an increasingly complicated network of relationships with their peers during adolescence. While the need to be accepted and liked by others becomes increasingly crucial throughout this time, it is also a time when teens' minds and bodies undergo significant changes (Barendse et al., 2021).

Moreover, social pressure and peer pressure today have drastically increased and impacted how children respond to living in general (Yelishala, 2022). Anderson and Jiang (2020) noted that teenagers are even more vulnerable and susceptible to peer pressure that is no longer reserved for only their friends. Today's teens and adolescents experience peer pressure from various sources such as social media, television, advertisements, and others. Indeed, outlets such as social media are essential for connection and self-expression during this phase of a teenager's life. However, a study conducted by Anderson and Rainie (2018) reported that teens admitted experiencing the unpleasant sides of social media, including drama and bullying, and feeling pressured to show up in a particular way.

As a result of the increase in cyberbullying, school safety has become an additional priority on middle school campuses today (Espelage & Hong, 2017). However, physical safety is no longer the only concern (Vector Solutions, 2019). The National Conference of State Legislatures (2021) emphasized that schools, parents, and community leaders want to make sure students have emotional safety and protection. The students in middle school want to feel safe and comfortable, but they also want the freedom to take chances to progress.

Foulkes and Blakemore (2018) conducted a study and reported that most middle school students lack the social skills and awareness needed to manage their changing hormones, social

pressures, academic expectations, and the additional responsibilities common to their group. Pascoe et al. (2019) purported that middle school students must have the skills to respond appropriately during times of pressure and stress to achieve academic success. For instance, a teenager may not have the appropriate skills to address how to disagree with an adult or another classmate respectfully. However, with the proper support and awareness skills, a middle school student would be able to apply self-management skills appropriately (Sullivan et al., 2014). To this end, Bailey et al. (2019) suggested that approaching the rising concerns about middle school behavior and discipline from a social and emotional learning (SEL) perspective will impact school discipline rates and suspensions. In addition, Lodi et al. (2022) suggested that RPs address student behavior, socioemotional issues, and equity in disciplining minority students.

Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the literature regarding RPs and middle school. In Chapter 3, I present the research design and methodology. In Chapter 4, I report the findings, and in Chapter 5, I review the study, make conclusions, discuss implications for practice, and recommend future studies.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how RP implementation influences the middle school classroom environment as perceived by teachers. This chapter includes a review of the research questions, discussions of the research design, methodology, the research site, the research population, and sampling procedures. Moreover, additional information is provided to describe the data collection and analysis methodology and processes and procedures to ensure the validity of the research is not compromised and sustains trustworthiness. Chapter 3 concludes with research assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and a summary.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how RP implementation influences the middle school classroom environment as perceived by teachers. The research questions that guided this qualitative study were:

RQ1: What do teachers perceive to be the influence of RPs on the middle school classroom environment?

RQ2: What challenges do teachers encounter when implementing RPs in the classroom?

Research Design

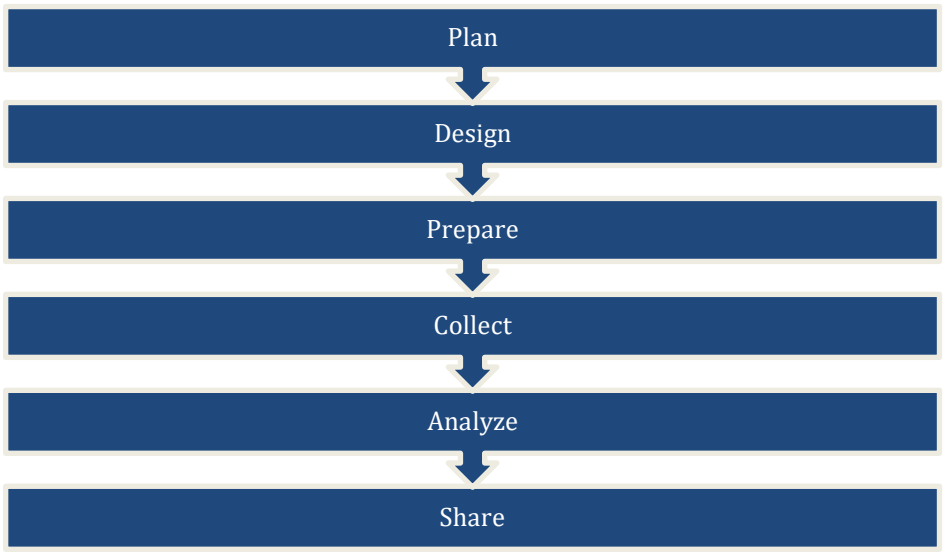
This study utilized an exploratory instrumental case study design. Leavy (2017) encouraged using exploratory research to investigate problems that are not clearly defined and gain new insights. Creswell (2014) noted that qualitative case study research is designed to investigate and interpret the meaning of entities or individuals attributed to the problem. According to Creswell (2014), an instrumental case study is a study on a selected case that aims to understand a specific issue, problem, or concern. Case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more

individuals. Case studies are bound by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. I selected this design to explore the influence RPs have in the public middle school classroom environment in Texas from teachers' perspectives.

The case study approach is appropriate for this study because, as Yin (2018) noted, case study research entails an in-depth examination of an individual, a community, or an organization. Yin purported that case studies enable the researcher to develop a comprehensive view of the study problem and can aid in describing, comprehending, and explaining a research problem or event. Yin (2018) noted that the case study method consists of six interdependent steps (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

The Case Study Process



Note. Created from information adapted from *Case Study Research and Applications* (6th ed., p. 1), by R. K. Yin, 2018, SAGE Publications. Copyright 2018 by SAGE Publications.

Population and Sample

The study participants were middle school teachers in Southeast Texas who teach in schools that have implemented RP. According to the Texas Education Agency (2019), there are approximately 213 public middle schools serving 162,487 students in the Southeast Texas region. There is no reporting data at this time on how many middle schools in Southeast Texas have implemented RP. The study sample included seven middle school teachers on campuses where RP is currently implemented to reach data saturation. Saturation is used to determine when there are adequate data from a study to develop a robust and valid understanding of the study phenomenon (Hennink et al., 2019). The study criteria were that participants must (a) be trained in RPs, (b) have worked as a middle school teacher in a school that has implemented RP for at least 1 year, (c) have worked at that school prior to implementing RP for at least 1 year, (d) be middle school teachers from different schools, and (e) be a middle school teacher who previously has worked in a middle school that did not implement RP. To obtain a variety of in-depth responses, I selected participants who represented a variety of different school districts.

Participants were selected using the snowball sampling method. Creswell (2014) noted that snowball sampling is also known as chain-referral sampling, where research participants recruit other participants for a test or study. It is used where potential participants are hard to find. This is a sampling approach in which existing individuals refer new subjects to be recruited for a research study. To identify participants, I contacted potential participants by e-mail and telephone who met the stated criteria. The recruited participants were recommended by other teachers who met the criteria.

For this study, seven teachers who teach middle school in Southeast Texas were selected, had been trained in RPs, and had previously worked at a middle school campus where RPs were

not used. Participants for this study were from seven different middle schools in seven school districts across Southeast Texas. Table 4 represents the participants interviewed. The participants that were selected came from various school districts. The participants selected were chosen because they offered a variety of knowledge about RP. I selected participants of all ages with a minimum of 5 years of teaching experience. I wanted to be sure I captured the opinion of middle school teachers who teach students from different ethnicities and a variety of socioeconomic statuses.

Table 4

Participants' Information

Participant	Gender/Ethnicity	Years teaching	School demographics
1	Male/Black	13 years	It is located in a large suburban setting. The student population serves 900 students, and the school serves grades 6–8. Thirty-one percent of students scored at or above the proficient level for math, and 29% scored at or above that level for reading. The school's minority student enrollment is 99%. The student–teacher ratio is 13:1, which is better than the district. The student population is made up of 51% female students and 49% male students. The school enrolls 95% economically disadvantaged students. There are 67 equivalent full-time teachers and four full-time school counselors.
2	Female/Hispanic	8 years	The population is 900 students, and the school serves grades 6–8. Thirty-five percent of students scored at or above the proficient level for math, and 32% scored at or above that level for reading. The school's minority student enrollment is 98%. The student–teacher ratio is 12:1, which is better than the district. The student population is made up of 47% female students and 53% male students. The school enrolls 92% economically disadvantaged students. There are 74 equivalent full-time teachers and four full-time school counselors.

Participant	Gender/Ethnicity	Years teaching	School demographics
3	Female/Black	7 years	A premier international school that serves a diverse student body of more than 1,700 students from more than 50 countries. About a third of the students hold citizenship from a nation other than the United States. Selective Admission–High Ability-Students–Rigorous Academics. Enrollment: 1,731 students; 65.1% international program; 34.9% French program. Citizenship: 44.9% U.S. citizens; 17.3% U.S./dual; 37.8% international (of which 22.8% are French/non-U.S. dual). Multilingual community: 60.4% are multilingual (64 native languages). International faculty; 54% of faculty hold an advanced degree.
4	Male/White	9 years	A large suburban setting. The student population is 900, and the school serves grades 6–8. Twenty percent of students scored at or above the proficient level for math, and 23% scored at or above that level for reading. The school's minority student enrollment is 98%. The student–teacher ratio is 14:1, which is better than the district. The student population is made up of 49% female students and 51% male students. The school enrolls 95% economically disadvantaged students. There are 62 equivalent full-time teachers and two full-time school counselors.
5	Female/White	14 years	It is located in a large suburban setting. The student population is 1,219, and the school serves grades 6–8. Forty-three percent of students scored at or above the proficient level for math, and 43% scored at or above that level for reading. The school's minority student enrollment is 92%. The student–teacher ratio is 14:1, which is better than the district. The student population is made up of 48% female students and 52% male students. The school enrolls 77% economically disadvantaged students. There are 89 equivalent full-time teachers and two full-time school counselors.

Participant	Gender/Ethnicity	Years teaching	School demographics
6	Male/White	7 years	The student population is 1,008, and the school serves grades 6–8. Thirty-four percent of students scored at or above the proficient level for math, and 34% scored at or above that level for reading. The school's minority student enrollment is 99%. The student–teacher ratio is13:1, which is better than the district. The student population is made up of 48% female students and 52% male students. The school enrolls 79% of economically disadvantaged students. There are 75 equivalent full-time teachers and three full-time school counselors.
7	Male/Black	5 years	The student population is 461 students, and the school serves grades 6–8. Twenty-eight percent of students scored at or above the proficient level for math, and 19% scored at or above that level for reading. The school's minority student enrollment is 98%. The student–teacher ratio is 13:1, which is better than the district. The student population is made up of 45% female students and 55% male students. The school enrolls 96% economically disadvantaged students. There are 36 equivalent full-time teachers.

Materials and Instrument

I used in-depth semistructured interviews based on a guided protocol. These interviews provided insight into how RP may impact the middle school environment. I conducted interviews as the primary data collection instrument. The guided protocol (see Appendix A) is based on the research questions and the literature review (see Table 5). According to Adams (2015), semistructured interviews enable the researcher to better understand the participants' perspectives and their perceptions and interpretations of the world. Prior to conducting the interviews, I completed an expert review with an individual who had knowledge of the study topic by conducting a practice interview and asking the expert to review and refine the interview questions, which provided additional support and helped clarify the topic. The additional support

created a balanced environment and a sense of checks and balances. According to Kallio et al. (2016), interviews are the appropriate approach because they provide a structured environment where the researcher can engage in detailed discussion and participants can freely share their perspectives. Before interviewing participants, they each received the consent form for the study by email. The informed consent form discussed the purpose of the study, confidentiality, risks, if any, and benefits of the study.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Yin (2018) suggested that qualitative methodology is the best method for answering the how or why. I gathered data primarily through semistructured interviews, which are used in qualitative inquiries to provide researchers flexibility (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Other data sources included field notes and artifacts. Once participants were selected, they were interviewed about their insights on good quality practices used on their campuses. Interviews were conducted and recorded via video conferencing using the Zoom online platform and the interview protocol as a guide (see Appendix A).

The interview participants included seven middle school teachers from surrounding middle schools in Southeast Texas that have implemented RP. The interview questions focused on the perceptions teachers have regarding the influence of RP on the middle school classroom environment. The data collected from interviews, field notes, and artifacts were recorded, transcribed, organized, and sorted based on emergent trends identified. Leavy suggested immersing oneself in the data in three stages. First, I immersed myself in the data; second, I developed ideas based on the data; and third, I prioritized the data, which is essential to the study's intent. To transcribe the data, I used Rev.com, a transcribing system, to determine the emergent themes of interviews by reviewing them a minimum of three times. Transcripts

produced by artificial intelligence will still invariably be less accurate than human transcription; therefore, participants were given the opportunity to review the transcription to check for any errors (Tai, 2020). Leavy (2017) suggested condensing and categorizing the data to recount the participants' actual verbal and nonverbal communication. For organizational purposes, I used Dedoose, which is a web application for qualitative data, where each column with qualitative data is extracted and a document created for each participant with all their text responses and properly linked to the descriptor data. The participants' responses and related data (such as field notes and artifacts) provided emergent themes that addressed the research questions focusing on how RP implementation influences the middle school classroom environment.

Trustworthiness

Validity is often referred to as trustworthiness in qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Shenton (2004) emphasized that trustworthiness can be established through four components: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability.

- Credibility: How confident the qualitative researcher is in the truth of the research study's findings.
- Transferability: Provide accurate descriptions of the contexts, circumstances, and situations.
- Confirmability: The degree of neutrality in the research study's findings by bracketing potential bias.
- Dependability: The degree to which the study provides information for replication. This also looks at the consistency of findings.

To strengthen the credibility of the study, I used triangulation. Triangulation is the use of multiple sources of information in a qualitative study to develop an all-inclusive understanding

of the phenomena (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018) and to verify or corroborate an event, description, or fact reported in a study (Yin, 2018). Another form of triangulation used in this study was using different schools, districts, and multiple sources of information. Data sources included interviews, as well as artifacts and field notes, such as lesson plans, classroom activities used by participants, and district website information on student discipline and attendance data. Also, I provided participants with a copy of their transcript to verify the accuracy of their data in a process called member checking. According to Adams (2015), member checks and bracketing of my biases also improved the internal validity.

To assure transferability, I provided clear descriptions of the context and participants. To assure confirmability, I bracketed my biases regarding the researcher's role in the study. To assure dependability, I involved at least two peer reviewers in reviewing the data analysis. I also was careful to provide accurate descriptions of the study methodology processes so that the study could be replicated.

Researcher's Role

In designing this study, I recognized my own biases as a means of reporting less biased results to lessen possible harmful effects of decisions that may influence the research process, also known as bracketing, according to Tufford and Newman (2012). My role was to develop a study that contributes to the literature regarding middle school classroom environments and RP. Therefore, it is important to bracket my own personal and private experiences, which could creep in and influence my perspectives, not allowing me to analyze the data without bias.

For the last 19 years, I have worked in the K–12 public school setting. I have served in the role of teacher, assistant principal, and school specialist, and I currently serve as the director

for school safety. As the researcher, I have extensive training with RP, and I am a certified trainer and have provided over 150 RP training sessions throughout the state of Texas.

Ethical Considerations

The Office for Human Research Protections (2018) governs a researcher's behavior through ethics in research. The three concepts outlined by the Belmont Report, namely respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, served as guiding principles for all areas of this study. The plan for the study was submitted to Abilene Christian University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and approved (see Appendix B). All potential participants received an electronic communication describing the study's specifics, expectations, risks, and impact. Respect for all people was ensured by obtaining informed consent from all participants to ensure the principles of the Belmont Report were followed (Office for Human Research Protections, 2018). The informed consent was based on their comprehension of the study's goal, voluntary participation, and the ability to withdraw.

Assurances for beneficence were provided by protecting participant identity and personal information. The interviews were conducted online, and participants were assured of confidentiality in sharing their opinions and experiences regarding the study.

The school district, campus, and participants' identities were concealed at all times, and they were provided with a pseudonym to protect their identities. The data were stored on a password-protected digital file and placed on a thumb drive that is locked and stored. The data will be deleted 3 years after this study.

Assumptions

As the researcher, I expected the participants to provide truthful responses to the questions on the survey. Another assumption is that participants were knowledgeable of RPs and

successfully implemented the practices in their classrooms with fidelity. I also assumed that participants responded honestly and openly to interview questions regarding RPs implementation. Had they not implemented RP successfully in their classroom, their responses would not be valid to the research questions asked.

Limitations

Limitations of a qualitative research study are those identifiable traits of the design of methodology that persuade the interpretation of the findings from the research (Price & Murnan, 2004). An inherent quality of qualitative research is that it is not generalizable (Leavy, 2017). Therefore, a limitation is that if this study were conducted in a different demographic, the findings might not be the same. Limitations of this study included not having control over how participants interpreted the questions and the experiences of the participants.

Delimitations

Delimitations, according to Theofanidis and Fountouki (2019), are the constraints voluntarily imposed by researchers. These constraints are concerned with the definitions that researchers choose to designate as the boundaries or limits of their work to keep the study's goals and objectives from becoming difficult to achieve. Thus, delimitations for participation included the following:

1. Participants must be trained in RPs to ensure they are knowledgeable about the study.
2. Participants must have worked as middle school teachers in a school that has implemented RP for at least 1 year in Southeast Texas.
3. Participants must have worked at that school prior to implementing RP for at least 1 year to provide a full picture of their experiences.

4. Participants must be middle school teachers from a variety of different schools and districts throughout Southeast Texas.
5. Participants must be middle school teachers who have previously worked in a middle school that did not implement RP so they can compare the successes and challenges of working in a school without RP and with RP.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter 3, I described the research methodology. In Chapter 4, I report the findings. In Chapter 5, I review the study and determine conclusions, make implications for practice, and suggest recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 4: Results

This qualitative case study explored how RP implementation influences middle school classroom environments as perceived by middle school teachers. This study aimed to identify how RP influences classroom environments to improve students' overall school and life achievement and success at the middle school level. The data were collected through interviews and artifacts, as well as district and school websites. The findings present emergent themes relating to teacher perceptions of RP and how they influence classroom environments. The research participants were asked two research questions with multiple open-ended prompts (see Appendix A) to allow interviewees to explain how the implementation of RP influences middle school classroom environments. Each research question included probing questions that allowed me to elicit more information to understand their responses to the interview questions better.

Findings are organized and presented regarding the two research questions:

RQ1: What do teachers perceive to be the influence of RPs on the middle school classroom environment?

RQ2: What challenges do teachers encounter when implementing RPs in the classroom?

Research Question 1

Research question one examined teachers' perceptions of the influence of RP in their middle school classrooms. Emergent themes included the importance of relationship building, trust between students and teachers and peers, and improved student behaviors. The RPs implemented in these classrooms were circles, time out and reflection activities, stop and jots of feelings (a form of journal writing), wronging a right, reverse suspensions, and conflict circles. Five of the seven participants' school websites included references to an RP weekly calendar for

circle topics for the entire year, and Participant 4's and 5's school websites included RP resources for parents.

Building Relationships

The participants noted that RP allows students and teachers to develop close relationships. Each participant noted that relationship building was the foundation, and based on the relationships between teachers and students, relationships between students contributed to the positive classroom environment. Building solid relationships creates a culture for student success. For example, Korbey (2017) pointed out that middle school children's human and social connections are vitally essential and improve the classroom environment. For example, Participant 2 stated, "Instead of making the relationships more strained, it brought us together and improved our interactions."

Participant 4 stated, "We're able to humanize ourselves and our students by shifting from transactional to authentic relationships." Participant 4 shared that he created a lunch pass for students to "eat lunch with the teacher" three days a week for students. This created a relaxing environment that helped the teacher get to know their students, and their students get to see their teacher in an unstructured environment. Figure 6 is an example of what Participant 4 provided his students. He mentioned that the lunch passes were not made to be a big deal, so students did not feel embarrassed. He had a basket on his desk, and students could come by and pick one up discretely.

Figure 6

Participant 4's Lunch With the Teacher Classroom Coupon

Participant 3 emphasized, "Restorative practices help students build relationships [and] learn how to speak to and interact with others, peers, adults, and other people they have relationships with."

Creating a Trusting Environment

The second emergent theme regarding teachers' perceptions of the influence of restorative practices in their middle school classroom was creating a trusting environment. Participants mentioned that students were beginning to trust one another and adults. Participant 3 stated, "My students trust me with information; sometimes, I can't believe how openly they share with me." Participant 1 acknowledged trust by stating, "My kids have started to volunteer information without me probing." For example, she shared:

> John and Freddie were supposed to fight during lunch. This speaks directly to how important creating a trusting environment is. I was shocked because most students don't want to be labeled as a snitch or tattle-tell, but instead, these students notified a trusted adult to stop a potential physical altercation among their classmates.

Participants considered that a trusting learning environment is conducive to meeting students' learning and emotional needs. For example, Participant 4 stated:

> Initially, scholars are either too shy or do not have anything to say. After a few weeks of interaction, scholars tend to loosen up and share more personal stories in community circles. They develop trust for their teachers and peers through time and social interactions.

Improved Student Behavior

Teachers' perceptions of the influence of restorative practices in their middle school classroom emphasized that restorative practices encourage positive student behavior, shifting from traditional discipline consequences when students are involved in a disciplinary infraction. Participant 6 created a reverse suspension policy on their campus. For nonviolent behavior, the school handles the poor behavior with an option called a "reverse suspension," where parents escort their student to each class for up to two consecutive days. This option takes the place of an out-of-school suspension consequence. Based on the data Participant 6 provided, reverse suspensions on his campus have decreased by two-thirds over the last school year, and poor behavior has decreased by more than half based on office referral data.

Participant 1 emphasized, "I spend less time on discipline and more time available for teaching and interaction." In fact, Participant 3 stated:

> Student behavior has improved immensely over the last year. There are fewer outbursts and disruptions and minimal re-directing inappropriate student behavior [students talking when I'm talking, getting out of their seat without permission, or just asking to leave for the restroom].

Participant 4 emphasized:

One of the influences of restorative practices in my classroom is that scholars are more aware of their strengths and weaknesses on a more personal level. They are led to check their actions and be more strategic in dealing with peer pressure.

This participant noted, “Often with RP, there can be a lack of clarity on how student consequences are leveraged and cause a barrier to building a positive school community.”

Participant 6 said:

When students misbehave, they are called to the office and allowed to share their side(s) of the story, and a mini restorative conference took [takes] place. In years past, the student(s) would either be sent home or to in-school suspension, and the issue was rarely resolved, which meant they would more than likely reoccur. Once we implemented RP conferences, students who would have a physical fight addressed the issue and could tell each other how the incident made them feel leading up to the altercation.

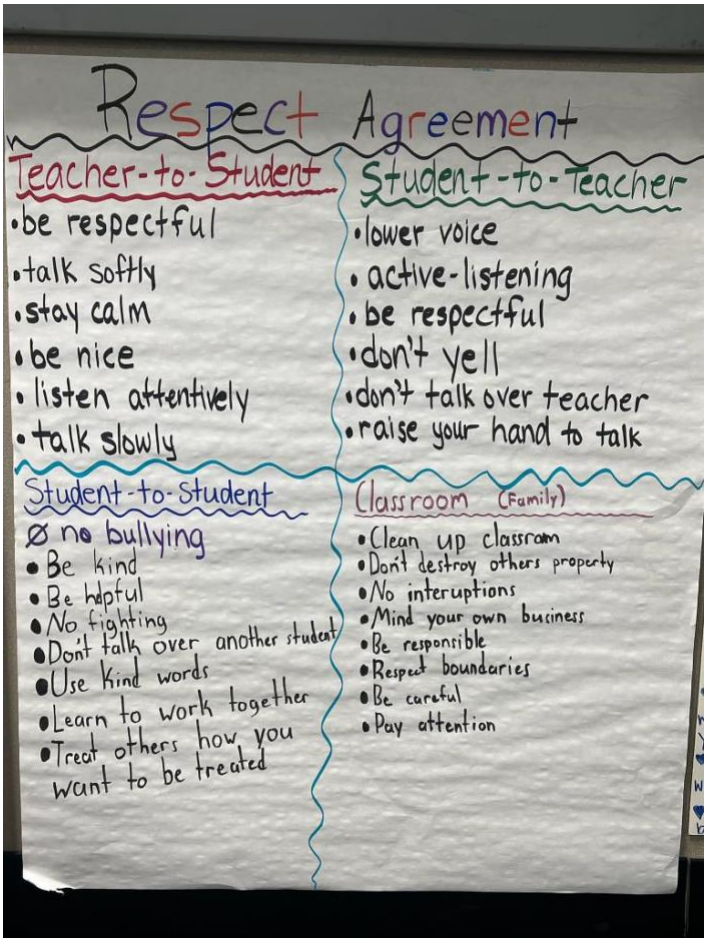
Participant 5 discussed how the bullying-type behavior was very prevalent in his classroom in previous years before implementing RP in her classroom. She stated:

My classroom became a safe space for students. A few years ago, students would pick on each other non-stop, say unkind things, and hurt each other’s feelings. I am still working with my classes on respecting one another, but it is nowhere near as bad as it used to be. I am also working on focusing on how I talk to my students; I try not to use accusatory language and affective statements (when you all talk to each other like that, it makes me and others uncomfortable).

Figure 7 is a copy of Participant 5’s respect agreement.

Figure 7

Participant 5's Classroom Respect Agreement



Research Question 2

Research question two focused on teachers' challenges when implementing RPs in the classroom. The two key findings that emerged were allowing time for change and creating a safe space for students.

Allowing Time for Change

Allowing time for change takes time and understanding that implementing RP is a long-term approach. Therefore, it is important to allow time for a change. Participant 1 stated:

> It's not just about circles; it's about respect agreements, affective statements, temperature checks, morning meetings, and we handle conflict. Sometimes that means I won't be able to teach the planned lesson, depending on my students' needs. If I sense they need to talk or "circle up," that's what I have to do.

Participant 7 had another perspective about allowing time for change. Participant 7 stated:

> Everyone is looking for a quick fix, and when that fix doesn't look like it's working, we want to give up. On my campus, we were provided bi-weekly debrief sessions during PLC with grade-level teachers and administrators. During these meetings, the biggest complaint among my colleagues was student behavior was not changing; everyone was looking for a quick fix.

Participant 3 stated:

> Shifting the student mindset took time for them to get used to. Students were used to acting out, getting sent to the office, and being issued a consequence. This was no longer the practice in my classroom; it was as easy just to put a student out and continue teaching. Sometimes this meant stopping my lesson and having a mini conference with my students about their inappropriate behavior. On my campus, teachers were responsible for handling level 1 and level 2 infractions (nonviolent behaviors).

Participant 2 said:

> When we were training in RP, many of us complained that this was just another program that we don't have time to implement, and in about 3 months, it will be put on the back burner. I was utterly wrong. Not only was RP enforced all year long, but we also had an RP coordinator who provided a weekly RP lesson along with a script for our weekly community-building circles. The excuse for not having the time was taken away, which

was an expectation. The support from the administration made implementing RP in our classrooms so much easier.

Figure 8 is a community-building circle lesson plan provided by Participant 2 as part of a weekly RP lesson.

Figure 8

Participant 2's Community-Building Lesson Plan

Lesson 1 Overview—Introduction to Circles	
Objective	Orient students to circles and how to participate in them.
Time	30-45 minutes
Purpose	Circles have their own set of guidelines that are essential for them to function well. This lesson introduces those guidelines and begins the process by which students will become skillful participants in circles.
Materials	Talking piece; something to put in the center of the circle; a poster of the circle guidelines, or write the guidelines on the whiteboard.
Other Preparation	Figure out in advance how to get your class seated in a circle without tables or desks in the middle.
	Activities
Overview	Give a clear, simple and honest explanation, using your own words, of why the class will be meeting in circles.
Shape of the Circle	Everyone should be able to see everyone else's face without having to lean forward. This is important and will require everyone's cooperation each time we gather in a circle.
Check in Round	Review the list of prompts on page 12 –or– Invite students to each tell about a time they have sat in a circle.
Introduce the Four Circle Guidelines	• Speak from the heart • Listen from the heart • Be Spontaneous/No need to rehearse • Lean Expression
Talking Piece	• Introduce the talking piece and how to use it: • Pass it respectfully • Give full attention to the one holding it
Circle Agreements	Introduce concept of circle agreements and why they are important. They will be discussed in the next circle (generally held at the same time next week).
Closing Round	Each student shares up to three words about their experience in the circle today.

Participant 7 shared that his school adopted the whole-school implementation, and the expectation was that all teachers had to conduct community-building circles two times a week. Participant 7 said:

> At the beginning of the year, everyone conducted their circles at the same time, the second period, but as the school year progressed, this was also the time that administrators would pull students from class to address a discipline referral, and by December, small group tutorial pull-outs were taking place. This meant the time for community building circles to occur was no longer a priority. It was almost like we were shifting back to the old ways, and RP was no longer a priority.
>
> When we made time in the schedule, I could see my student's attitudes improving, especially the shy students. Once they saw the lack of support from the administration, they reverted to old behaviors. Shifting culture takes time, and we no longer prioritize creating a positive culture. I tried my best to keep up RP in my classroom, but this is Texas, and we all know test scores take precedence in our schools, especially when you work at a failing school.

Participant 7 did mention that even though the expectation from the school administration shifted, it did not stop him from connecting with his students.

Creating a Safe Space

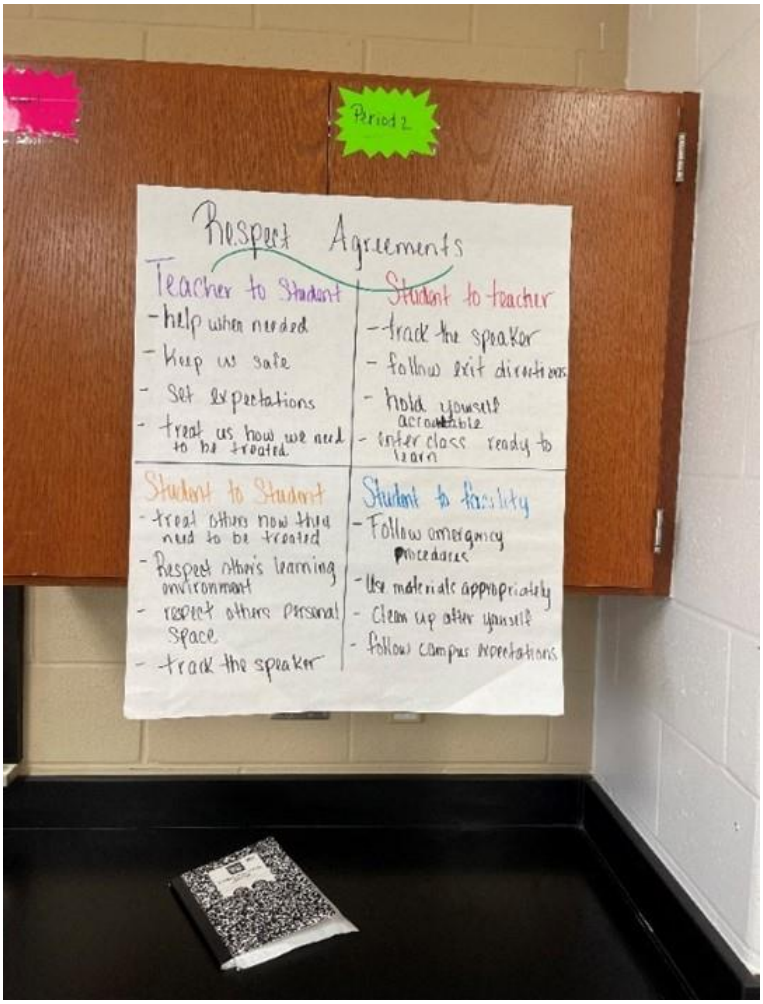
Creating a safe space was often mentioned as a challenge. Each participant expressed the highs and lows they experienced with RP. For example, Participant 1 said:

> Our first community building, I was very reluctant to share at first, but as the round of questioning continued, I could start to find commonalities between myself and my colleagues. There were tears, lots of laughs, and the opportunity to build community among the staff. That's when I knew how beneficial this process would be for our students.

My next task was to ensure that I created a safe space for my students. To ensure all of my students understood the importance of respecting each other, we created our class respect agreements. Our respect agreements [see Figure 9] took the place of classroom rules; my students developed these and voted on them, and these agreements it has ensured my students have a safe space to share in our classroom.

Figure 9

Participant 1's Classroom Respect Agreement



When asked about challenges, Participant 3 emphasized the need to create safe spaces in the classroom in the following way:

> One of the biggest challenges in my classroom with RP is ensuring all students are safe. I consider my teaching style very traditional; when a student misbehaves in my classroom, my first instinct is to raise my voice, use accusatory language and let them know they do not have permission to speak while I am speaking. I never allowed my students to share their side of the story, and I often sent them to the office with a referral. Even though I have had training in RP, I am still old school and believe in doing what I say, or you are not welcome in my classroom. I focused on the student's behavior and not the cause.
>
> One day the school counselor pulled me to the side and told me a few students had met with her and wanted a schedule change out of my classroom, citing they [were] afraid to ask questions because I yell all the time. This was my wake-up call; I was not creating a safe space for learning. My students were not being harmed physically, but they were too scared to talk to me, which meant they weren't learning. When I pulled students' grades and attendance, it was clear they weren't learning and didn't want to come to my class.

Participant 4 highlighted that creating safe spaces in the hallways was "just as big a challenge" as creating a safe space inside the classroom. Participant 4 said:

> It was important for me to make sure my students were safe outside of the classroom too. A lot of our physical infractions were occurring during the transition periods. For example, I had a student share some very personal information during our class community-building circle, he was then teased about it outside of the classroom, which led to him getting into a physical altercation. I knew then the sharing space was not being respected. When the student returned to class, I held a resolution circle with both students and re-visited the circle guidelines.

Participants noted that creating a safe space was a challenge that often led to a discussion of attendance. Each participant noted that classroom attendance over the last 2 years has decreased and suggested that COVID-19 was a factor. Participant 6 stated:

> We have been struggling with attendance not just with students but with teachers over the last 2 years due to COVID, and our enrollment has dropped tremendously. I teach eighth grade, and I have found that during COVID, my students went out and got jobs to support their families; I don't think the implementation of RP is a deciding factor in the increase or decrease of student attendance.

Participant 7 stated, "Before COVID, my campus had a 98% daily attendance rate; once we returned from the COVID shutdown, we lost more than 30% of our student enrollment." The impact of COVID-19 has emphasized several of the nation's systematic disparities, including educational inequities; consequently, many students across the country are experiencing increased levels of stress and anxiety due to the pandemic (Schiff, 2018).

The challenge of creating a safe space led to Participant 6 sharing discipline data from the last two school years. Participant 6 said, "It was clear the number of infractions declined significantly, which teachers and students on my campus often made the statement, something feels different now, it's calmer with less fights inside and outside of the classroom." Participant 6 stated that RP was implemented toward the end of the 2020 school year and the following summary from the 2021 school year suggests a decline in discipline infractions, specifically physical altercations. In 2020, 109 students were suspended from school. In 2021, 19 students were suspended from school. However, due to COVID, there was a decline in enrollment at that same time. Figures 10 and 11 provide data from 2019 and 2021 to show the decline in discipline

infractions. For example, note that in 2019 there were 834 discipline counts, but in 2021 after RP, that same issue only had 57 discipline counts.

Figure 10

Texas Education Agency 2019–2020 Campus Discipline Summary

S EDUCATION AGENCY

Level Annual Discipline Summary

Discipline Data for 2019-2020

ER	SECTION	HEADING	HEADING NAME	YR20
046	A-PARTICIPATION	A01	CAMPUS CUMULATIVE YEAR END ENROLLMENT	904
		A02	CAMPUS DISCIPLINE POPULATION	280
		A03	CAMPUS DISCIPLINE RECORD COUNT	834
	B-DISCIPLINE DATA TRENDS	B07	COUNT OF STUDENTS REMOVED TO A DAEP	N/A
		B08	MANDATORY DAEP REMOVALS	N/A
		B09	DISCRETIONARY DAEP REMOVALS	N/A
		B10	COUNT OF STUDENTS SUSPENDED IN SCHOOL	254
		B13	STUDENTS SUSPENDED OUT OF SCHOOL	109
	E-DAEP PLACEMENTS	C17	BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN	N/A
		C18	HISPANIC/LATINO	N/A
	F-OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS	C24	BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN	163
		C25	HISPANIC/LATINO	12
		C28	WHITE	27
	G-IN SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS	C29	AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NAT	N/A
		C30	ASIAN	N/A
		C31	BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN	477
		C32	HISPANIC/LATINO	74
		C33	NATIVE HAWAIIAN/OTHER PACIFIC	N/A
		C34	TWO OR MORE RACES	14
		C35	WHITE	61
	J-SPEC. ED. DAEP PLACEMENTS	D07	SPEC. ED. STUDENTS IN DAEP PLACEMENT	N/A
		D08	SPEC. ED. DAEP PLACEMENTS	N/A
		D09	NON SPEC. ED. DAEP PLACEMENTS	N/A
	K-SPEC. ED. OUT OF SCHOOL SUS.	D10	SPEC. ED. STUDENTS OUT OF SCHOOL SUS.	21
		D11	SPEC. ED. OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPEN	56
		D12	NON SPEC. ED. OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPEN	146
	L-SPEC. ED. IN SCHOOL SUS.	D13	SPEC. ED. STUDENTS IN SCHOOL SUSPEN	27

Note. Data are from "Discipline Summary Reports," by Texas Education Agency, n.d.-a, (https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/student-data/discipline-data-products/discipline-summary-reports). In the public domain.

Figure 11

Texas Education Agency 2020–2021 Campus Discipline Summary

Campus Level Annual Discipline Summary

PEIMS Discipline Data for 2020-2021

E AND NUMBER	SECTION	HEADING	HEADING NAME	YR21
[redacted]	PATION	A01	CAMPUS CUMULATIVE YEAR END ENROLLMENT	727
		A02	CAMPUS DISCIPLINE POPULATION	39
		A03	CAMPUS DISCIPLINE RECORD COUNT	57
	B-DISCIPLINE DATA TRENDS	B10	COUNT OF STUDENTS SUSPENDED IN SCHOOL	27
		B13	STUDENTS SUSPENDED OUT OF SCHOOL	19
	F-OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS	C24	BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN	N/A
		C25	HISPANIC/LATINO	N/A
	G-IN SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS	C31	BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN	N/A
		C32	HISPANIC/LATINO	N/A
	K-SPEC. ED. OUT OF SCHOOL SUS.	D10	SPEC. ED. STUDENTS OUT OF SCHOOL SUS.	N/A
		D11	SPEC. ED. OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPEN	N/A
		D12	NON SPEC. ED. OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPEN	15
	L-SPEC. ED. IN SCHOOL SUS.	D13	SPEC. ED. STUDENTS IN SCHOOL SUSPEN	N/A
		D14	SPEC. ED. IN SCHOOL SUSPEN	N/A
		D15	NON SPEC. ED. IN SCHOOL SUSPEN	30
	P-ECO. DISADV. OUT OF SCHOOL SUS.	E13	ECO. DISAD. STUDENTS OUT OF SCHOOL SUS	19
		E14	ECO. DISAD. OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPEN	23
	Q-ECO. DISADV. IN SCHOOL SUS.	E17	ECO DISAD. STUDENTS SUSPEN IN SCHOOL	27
		E18	ECO DISAD. IN SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS	34
	U-AT RISK OUT OF SCHOOL SUS.	F13	AT RISK STUDENTS OUT OF SCHOOL SUS	11
		F14	AT RISK OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPEN	13
		F15	NON AT RISK OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPEN	10
	V-AT RISK IN SCHOOL SUS.	F17	AT RISK STUDENTS SUSPEN IN SCHOOL	19
		F18	AT RISK IN SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS	25
		F19	NON AT RISK IN SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS	N/A
	W-REASON INCIDENT COUNTS	G21	21-VIOLATED LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT	N/A

Note. Data are from "Discipline Summary Reports," by Texas Education Agency, n.d.-a, (https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/student-data/discipline-data-products/discipline-summary-reports). In the public domain

Chapter Summary

In Chapter 4, I restated the purpose of the study. The chapter specified the study's findings, which clarified applying the themes developed during the data analysis process. In Chapter 5, I review the study, present conclusions based on the findings, suggest implications for practitioners, and make recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Student discipline and classroom management sustain a safe school environment (Kafka, 2011). According to González et al. (2018), punitive discipline policies in schools tied to zero-tolerance legislation led to complications in the criminal justice system. Over 20 years ago, Skiba (2000) emphasized that zero-tolerance mandates in school districts soared after the 1999 mass shooting in Columbine, Colorado, fueling concerns about a lack of school safety and gun violence. The U. S. Department of Education (2015) suggested exclusionary practices contribute disproportionally to the number of minority students suspended throughout the school years. Payne and Welch (2017) emphasized that exclusionary discipline practice separates students committing an offense from the remainder of the school community and enforces mandatory penalties such as suspension, expulsion, and referral to the police for not following the rules.

The process of RP, a framework created to address students' relationships and respond to harm, was introduced in Australia, the United States, and other countries in the early 1990s (Queensland Department of Education, 2021). Zehr (2002) reported that the RP approach, adopted in several school districts, has resulted in shifts in how school discipline is applied, increasing student perceptions about educators being fair and creating a thriving learning environment.

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore how RP implementation influences the middle school classroom environment as perceived by teachers. This case study utilized a qualitative case study design. Data collected included semistructured interviews using Zoom, field notes, and artifacts from seven middle school teachers to explore how implementing RP influences the middle school classroom environment. Teachers were selected to participate using a snowball recruitment strategy.

Following are the main study findings.

Research Question 1: What do teachers perceive to be the influence of RPs on the middle school classroom environment? Emergent themes included:

- building relationships;
- building trust between students, teachers, and peers; and
- improved student behavior.

Research Question 2: What challenges do teachers encounter when implementing RPs in the classroom? Emergent themes included:

- allowing time for change, and
- creating a safe space.

Chapter 5 contains a discussion and conclusions of findings in relation to the literature, implications for practitioners, recommendations for future studies, and closing remarks.

Discussion and Conclusions of Findings in Relation to the Literature

In this study, the seven participating teachers perceived the influence of RPs on the middle school classroom environment to be that of building strong relationships, creating a trusting environment, and resulting in overall improved student behavior. Challenges were most likely determined as making time for the appropriate implementation of RPs and creating a safe space. Overall, the study's emergent themes or findings suggest that RPs are indeed a disciplinary model that improves the middle school classroom environment. This agrees with Silverman and Mee (2018), who emphasized that RPs are now being considered a viable alternative to building positive classroom relationships and changing the classroom climate.

Research Question 1

Relationship Building. RPs and relationship building has many benefits for middle school students. All interviewees acknowledged the skills gained throughout the process and the importance of teaching young people to be empathetic toward each other. Even 20 years ago, a review of relevant literature suggested that although discipline reforms were varied and implemented by program-based interventions or policy changes at differing levels, building relationships was noted as essential to the success of implementing RP (Skiba, 2000). Recent events and environmental changes in schools emphasize the critical need for developing positive relationships in classrooms and resolving disputes more constructively, according to Kehoe et al. (2018).

According to Wachtel (2016), the overarching goals of RP are to build healthy relationships and to repair those relationships if harm arises in any given community or classroom. Thirty years ago, Nathanson (1992) emphasized that RPs' primary function is to reconcile and rebuild relationships. Positive relationships between students and staff improve the learning process, including student attitudes toward the teacher, the subject, and grades (e.g., Wilson et al., 2017). In agreement with this, participants stated that RP was beneficial to improving their classroom management. This supports the conclusion that RP has the capacity to improve the classroom climate overall by building positive relationships.

Creating a Trusting Environment. Teachers' perceptions of the influence of RPs in their middle school classroom considered that consequently creating a more trusting environment occurred. This finding is important and consistent with Smith et al. (2018), who argued that there are many benefits to RP and proffered that "a climate of trust is essential for learning—but is quite fragile among the complex interactions of many humans each school day" (p. 75). Foulkes

and Blakemore (2018) reported that most middle school students lack the social skills and awareness needed to manage their changing hormones, social pressures, academic expectations, and the additional responsibilities common to their group; thus, the need for trust becomes imperative.

Participants also noted that teachers focused on the needs of the student more with the implementation of RP and became more empathetic to students' needs. Kehoe et al. (2018) reported that students felt more comfortable sharing in a restorative environment, and students described teachers as calmer and more open to listening to their feelings and thoughts while using RP strategies. Additionally, this resulted in teachers and students listening with a greater capacity for empathy for all community members participating.

Morrison et al. (2005) noted that RP directly affects the culture and climate of a classroom. Participants in this study noted that implementing RP in their classroom created an environment where they would talk to a trusted adult about a situation or potential threat that may occur outside the classroom. Several strategies have been found useful for the classroom and school environment. Participants noted that after implementing community-building circles, the student's behaviors toward each other began to shift to a more positive, trusting environment. As noted by Wachtel (2016), circles are an essential part of RP that have been used to help students share their opinions and feelings and voice their concerns about a certain subject. Wachtel purported that a circle conference is an interactive restorative exercise that can be utilized to foster relationships and community building, or responsively, to address wrongdoing, conflicts, and difficulties. RPC is also a community-building practice that includes affective statements that communicate people's feelings, as well as affective questions that cause people to reflect on how their behavior has affected others (McCold & Wachtel, 2003).

Improved Student Behaviors. Teachers' perceptions in this study of the influence of RPs in their middle school classroom emphasized that RPs encourage positive student behavior, shifting from traditional discipline consequences when students are involved in a disciplinary infraction. Lodi et al. (2022) suggested that RP could be an option and solution for educators. RPs are geared toward resolving inappropriate and violent behaviors, such as bullying, and promoting prosocial behaviors through the development of social and emotional skills (e.g., empathy, awareness, and responsibility), with the overarching goal of fostering safe school communities that promote well-being. Thus, Amstutz and Mullet (2015) suggested that off-task student behavior in the classroom should be met with compassion and teaching strategies to re-correct and address that behavior instead of creating more separation. All seven participants in this study agreed that they noticed a display of positive student behavior. For example, participants were no longer sending students to the office for off-task behavior infractions but dealing with nonviolent behavior infractions in the class.

Considering the finding of improved student behaviors further supports the conclusion that the overall influence of RP on the classroom is that it creates a positive classroom atmosphere for students to learn and interact with each other. In fact, RPs have improved the classroom environment, positively affecting student academic performance, increasing school attendance, and improving emotional and physical safety (Smith et al., 2015). Literature affirms that implementing RP provides an overarching positive influence on the classroom (Kafka, 2011).

Research Question 2

Research suggests links between restorative approaches and improved school climate outcomes, including increased levels of student connectedness, improved relationships between

students and teachers, and improved perceptions of school climate. Even though restorative approaches emphasize the positive results of implementing RPs in the classroom, teachers still encounter challenges (González et al., 2018). In this study, the primary challenges were allowing time for change and creating a safe learning environment.

Allowing Time for Change. Change takes time and implementing a new practice with educators is not always accepted (Katic et al., 2020). Participants noted that allowing time for change and shifting the mindsets of their colleagues could be seen as a challenge for some. Zehr (2002) reported that the RP approach, adopted in several school districts, has resulted in shifts in how school discipline is applied, increasing student perceptions about educators being fair and creating a thriving learning environment.

Although allowing time for change was a clear finding in this study, allowing time for change was not a common theme in most literature reviewed. However, the participants in this study considered it a very valid point for educators looking to implement RP. However, Katic et al. (2020) suggested that implementing RP successfully on a secondary campus could be incorporated into a school's MTSS. MTSS refers to proactive interventions that schools might implement to assist students in achieving academic success (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, n.d.). For example, the two most commonly used approaches are MTSS, formerly known as RtI, and PBIS (James & Cobanoglu, 2019). However, implementing RPs requires time for planning for questioning, connecting, and interactive healing circles that involve organizing groups of people (van Woerkom, 2018).

Creating a Safe Environment. The challenge of creating a safe space led to Participant 6 sharing discipline data from the last 2 school years. The participant stated that RP was implemented toward the end of the 2020 school year, and the summary from the 2021 school

year suggested a decline in discipline infractions, specifically physical altercations. In 2020, 109 students were suspended from school. In 2021, 19 students were suspended from school. However, due to COVID, there was a decline in enrollment at that same time. In other words, the participants felt that to create a safe environment, discipline infractions must decrease, and they agreed that RP helped that occur.

Participants discussed the importance of ensuring they created safe spaces for their students to share openly. According to Boyes-Watson and Pranis (2020), students with social–emotional deficiencies need connectedness and to feel safe. Often, students who lash out or become angry in class are removed, which is the opposite of what needs to happen, creating a challenge for teachers. To belong, one has to feel seen. Based on the community-building circle process, hierarchy does not exist, and everyone has a safe place to share (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2020).

The findings from the current study support that RPs have improved the classroom environment, positively affecting student learning, increasing school attendance, and improving emotional and physical safety (Smith et al., 2015). Thus, schools are increasingly using RJ and RPs, which could aid in creating safe school communities that promote well-being and enhance the environment of middle school classrooms (Sprague & Tobin, 2017). A related conclusion to the findings in this study concurs with Wachtel (2016), who suggested that RJ is considered a relational approach to fostering safe and caring school climates through the use of a structured set of practices that place importance on engaging stakeholders to identify and address their harms, needs, and obligations.

Implications for Practitioners

The findings from this study can be used with teachers, administrators, counselors, parents, and school and district support staff to help create a positive campus culture between students and adults in middle school classrooms. Schools are increasingly using RJ and RPs, which could aid in creating safe school communities that promote well-being and enhance the environment of middle school classrooms (Sprague & Tobin, 2017). The implications of this study suggest resources for school educators looking to successfully implement RPs on a middle school campus. I recommend the following based on the findings.

- Administrators should conduct ongoing RP training for teachers throughout the school year with information on updated strategies that teachers can incorporate into their classrooms. This is supported by Sullivan et al. (2014), who suggested providing professional development focused on empowering teachers to be problem solvers and more conscious about how they interact with their students.
- Administrators should continue setting parameters around implementing RP with fidelity by creating a tracking system to ensure teachers use RP correctly. The success of implementing RPs on a campus level must have the support of administrators, the campus leadership team, and support provided throughout the process (DuFresne, 2021).
- Administrators must provide continued support from campus and district leadership to ensure RP has a sustainability plan for new and existing staff. Alger (2018) found that the challenge of inconsistencies and discrepancies between administrators and teachers has developed during the implementation of RP. This causes the practices' implementation and sustainability to fail, making partnership and support from

leadership vital for a successful implementation.

- Administrators must support the staff's willingness to implement RP by providing training on building relationships, creative use of time, and ways to encourage safe, trusting behaviors. Clearly, teacher buy-in is important. The Dignity in Schools Organization (2013) noted that implementing a school-wide RPs program includes hiring a restorative coordinator to lead and support the implementation efforts. The RP coordinator works with stakeholders to establish a school-wide plan incorporating the RP framework. The key to successful implementation includes teacher buy-in and ongoing training for teachers, students, and parents to ensure the principles of the program are being implemented correctly.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research to build on the work of this study could include the following.

- Conduct a quantitative design comparing behavioral issues in schools that have implemented RP.
- Conduct a longitudinal discipline data study in RP schools.
- Conduct a qualitative study interviewing students regarding their perception of RP in the classroom.
- Conduct research as to why teachers fail to implement school-wide initiatives with fidelity that will have an impact on school climate and culture.
- Explore RP methods that would benefit special education students specifically.

Concluding Remarks

This qualitative instrumental case study explored how RP influenced middle school classrooms throughout Southeast Texas. All seven of the participants were currently working in

schools that had implemented RP for at least a year. Also, each participant had experience working in a middle school that did not use RP. I was inspired by the participants' willingness to try new behavior management strategies and not just rely on putting students out of the class when they misbehave but ultimately look past the behavior and dig deeper into why the behavior is occurring. A shift in the teachers' mindset was evident, and I am hopeful more teachers will begin to explore nonpunitive practices that promote positive relationships because, as this study demonstrated in agreement with much of the literature, it also improves the overall school culture.

RP may not provide all the answers, and it does have challenges. Time for teachers to implement with fidelity must be provided, and creating middle school classrooms to be environments where students are safe and feel safe does not happen automatically. However, studying RPs and appropriate strategies to implement them may reveal resources that can inspire systemic changes throughout public schools at all levels. Too often, those in the seats making policy for schools have rarely interacted in a school setting. Teachers and students are our most precious assets, and their voices are valid and important because they impact our future.

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Appendix A: Protocol

Teacher Interview Guided Protocol Matrix

Title of the Study: The Perceived Influence of Restorative Practices on the Middle School Classroom Environment: A Qualitative Study

Getting Acquainted Introductory/Demographic Questions:

1. Note gender, ethnicity
2. Ask about years of teaching
3. Brief demographic information about the school—size, rating, etc.

Central Research Question: "*What are the influences of RP on MS classrooms as perceived by teachers?*"

RQ1: What do teachers perceive to be the influence of restorative practices to be on the middle school classroom environment? Prompts include the following:

a. What influences do you perceive regarding academics?

b. What influences do you perceive regarding relationships among students and among teachers?

c. What influences do you perceive regarding discipline with students and how teachers administer discipline?

d. What influences do you perceive regarding student safety in the classroom—bullying, for example?

e. What influences do you perceive regarding student and teacher attendance?

f. How do you perceive the implementation of restorative practices has affected the overall campus culture?

RQ2: What challenges do teachers encounter when implementing RP in the classroom?

a. What challenges did you encounter regarding academics?

b. What challenges did you perceive regarding relationships?

c. What challenges did you perceive regarding discipline?

d. What challenges did you perceive regarding attendance?

e. What supports are in place to support teachers in overcoming challenges when implementing RP?

f. How do you perceive faculty and staff have responded to the use of restorative practices? Support your response.

Appendix B: IRB Exemption Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
328 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29145, Abilene, Texas 79699-9145
325-674-2885

June 28, 2022

Julia Y. Andrews
Department of Organizational Leadership
Abilene Christian University

Dear Julia,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "TEACHER PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES ON THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY". (IRB#22-081) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects. If at any time the details of this project change, please advise our office of the change(s) by email, so that the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work!

Sincerely,

Russell P Kruzelock

ACU Vice President of Research

Additional Approvals/Instructions:

The following are all responsibilities of the Primary Investigator (PI). Violation of these responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of research by the Institutional Review Board. If the Primary Investigator is a student and fails to fulfil any of these responsibilities, the Faculty Advisor then becomes responsible for completing or upholding any and all of the following:

- If there are any changes in the research (including but not limited to change in location, members of the research team, research procedures, number of participants, target population of participants, compensation, or risk), these changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
- Report any protocol deviations or unanticipated problems to the IRB promptly according to IRB policy.
- Should the research continue past the expiration date, submit a Continuing Review Form, along with a copy of the current consent form and a new Signature Assurance Form approximately 30 days before the expiration date.
- When the research is completed, inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. If your study is Expedited or Full Board, submit an Inactivation Request Form and a new Signature Assurance Form. If your study is Exempt, Non-Research, or Non-Human Research, email orsp@acu.edu to indicate that the research has finished.
- According to ACU policy, research data must be stored on ACU campus (or electronically) for 3 years from inactivation of the study, in a manner that is secure but accessible should the IRB request access.
- It is the Investigator's responsibility to maintain a general environment of safety for all research participants and all members of the research team. All risks to physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as any risks to confidentiality should be minimized.

For additional information on the policies and procedures above, please visit the IRB website https://cdn01.acu.edu/community/offices/academic/orsp/human-research/overview.html or email orsp@acu.edu with your questions.