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## K-5 EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

Jessica Ellen Finney

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K-5 EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN ST. LOUIS,  
MISSOURI

by

Jessica Ellen Finney

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The College of Education and Human Sciences Department of Educational Studies,

Leadership, and Counseling

At Murray State University

In Partial Fulfilment of Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education P-20 &

Community Leadership Specialization: K-12 Leadership

Under the Supervision of Associate Professor - Dr. Randal Wilson

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### **Abstract**

Restoration is any form of guidance or counsel toward right decision-making. One can be restored in an emotional or psychological way. The act of restoring emotional reactions back to logical thinking are the core teachings of this paper. The objective of this study was to analyze K-5 educators' lived experiences, opinions, and perceptions in regard to this social and emotional restoration of teaching. This study advocates teacher perspectives in the art of restorative teaching and thinking for students they teach. This qualitative research study provides insight into the perceptions, opinions, and lived experiences of 10 educators regarding the implementation of restorative practices in their St. Louis school district. This research study explored the overall impact of restorative practices of K-5 teachers. Each of the ten participants offered a distinguishing perspective on the impact of restorative practices through personal experiences. The research questions of this study were answered through finding themes and trends gathered from participant responses. The qualitative research results provided conclusions of insufficient time, varying of perceptions, lack of knowledge of history, and inconsistency of implementation of the practice. Educators in St. Louis, Missouri may find the themes in this study valuable when implementing restorative practices in middle or high schools. Educators may also find the themes valuable in comparing other districts that implement restorative practices.

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

Suspension and expulsion data reveal alarming statistics related to the effects of students who are being expelled or suspended. In a large-scale study, Perry and Morris (2014) found “higher levels of exclusionary discipline within schools over time generate collateral damage, negatively affecting the academic achievement of non-suspended students in punitive contexts” (p. 1067). The active engagement of programs and policies to address student behavioral management and consequences for actions have been implemented in schools. These student behavioral management programs impact students because “when schools rely on exclusionary disciplinary policies, the achievement of all students is negatively affected” (Perry & Morris, 2014, p. 15). The impact of restorative practices can improve school climate through caring about students’ achievement, civil rights, and emotional and psychological health. This individual care and nurture can positively impact the entire school and all students involved. This qualitative study seeks to understand elementary teachers’ perceptions of restorative practices. By definition, “a restorative practice is a social science that achieves social discipline through participation and reflection of decision making” (Wachtel, 2019, p. 1). Restorative practices are known to help reduce crime, violence, and bullying. The practice is improving human behavior through strengthening civil society. The practice allows for individual effective leadership and repairing skills of harm created. This social science ties together theory, research, and practice in education, counseling, criminal justice, social work, and organizational management (Wachtel, 2019).

Restorative justice is not deeper than forgiveness, mediation, and reconciliation: the practice has more depth than primarily reducing recidivism or repeating offenses. Restorative justice is richer than a particular program or blueprint: the practice has more depth than a map,

but the principles of restorative justice can be seen as a compass pointing a direction (Zehr, 2015). Restorative practice is concerned with needs and roles and it tracks information, truth-telling, empowerment, restitution or vindication, accountability, and community. Restorative practice is a process to involve and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations in order to heal and put things as right as possible (Sharpe, 2015).

### **Background of the Study**

School districts have often used restorative practices as a disciplinary method through hands-on learning and participation. Scholars have shown that it is not if, but when, a student misbehaves as they learn and grow. This puts high pressure on how leaders respond to this misbehavior that matters (Smith et al., 2015). Restorative practices target the root cause of behaviors. This includes behaviors that are deemed intolerable by empathizing with and understanding children. Restorative practices, often used interchangeably with restorative justice, originally developed in criminal justice systems. Restorative justice is a method used to bring victims and offenders together to re-establish their relationship (González, 2012; Zehr, 2002).

### **Problem Statement and Significance of the Study**

This qualitative study explored the perceptions of restorative practices by elementary school teachers. The research was based on K-5 teacher observations and experiences in the classroom. Research shows a correlation between suspension and lower student achievement which even extends to increased involvement in juvenile and criminal justice systems (Fabelo et al., 2011; González, 2012; Skiba et al., 2014). Zero-tolerance policies, which intend to deter negative behavior, often fail to teach students the skills and strategies used to prevent future intolerant behavior. (González, 2012; Kline, 1957). The objective of this study was to better understand how elementary school teachers perceive the success and sustainability of using

restorative practices and how their professional relationships and school culture play a role in those perceptions.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

This study employed the theoretical frameworks of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Title's 5 R's theory (Title, 2011), and Eglash's (1957) restorative justice theory. A theoretical framework according to Eisenhart (1991) is "a structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory...constructed by using an established, coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships" (p. 205). Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs creates a progressive outline of how individuals must feel safe and their routine should feel consistent and positive. Adults and teachers work through these same needs in school settings just like every student. These needs include: basic needs, safety needs, feelings of belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Some techniques to help children or teachers includes creating a calming space or a checklist of effective energy they want to give out to others. The end result of these needs include: proper manners and respect, respond to requests for help, make every effort to minimize delays, speak in clear and normal tones, make eye contact and smile, demonstrate a generally pleasant demeanor and open physical stance, nod and initiate greetings, and be open to change (Maslow, 1943).

In social learning theory, Bandura (1977) suggested that people learn from one another via observation, imitation, and modeling. Most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling. In observing others, individuals form an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action (Bandura, 1977). Social learning theory explains human behavior in terms of continuous reciprocal

interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1977).

Teachers are critical to the implementation of educational reforms, and teacher networks are important because teachers draw on local knowledge and conform to local norms as they implement new practices (Frank et al. 2004, 2011). The nature and development of these interactions can be studied through the lens of Bandura. Bandura's social learning theory compliments significant influences and/or pathways of knowledge gained through the social networking.

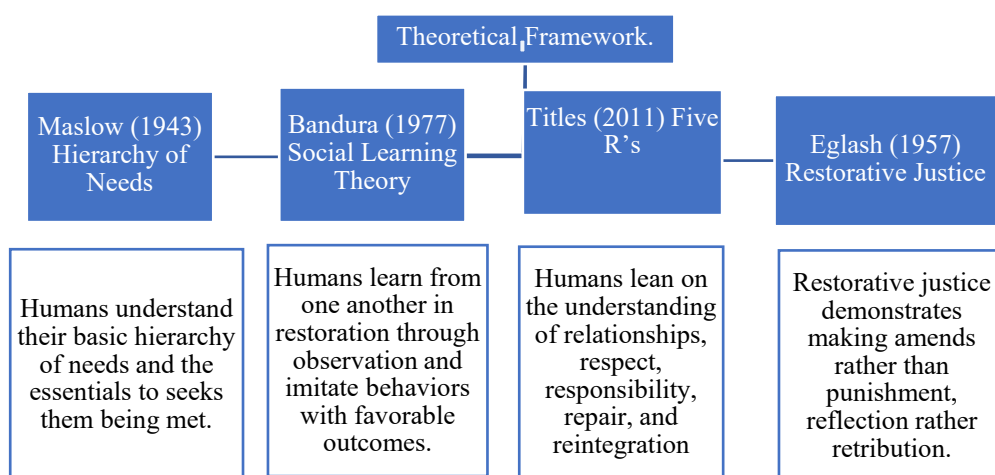
Restorative practices utilize the 5 R's of relationship, respect, responsibility, repair and reintegration. These concepts recognize that, when a wrong occurs, individuals and communities feel violated (Title, 2011). The consequences of the action or relationship are primarily important. The response is the central focus of what restorative practices seek to address. When relationships are strong, people experience more fulfilling lives and communities become desirable places to live. Relationships may be mended through accountability for one's actions and to make repairs (Title, 2011). The essential components of the 5 R's framework are:

- Relationships: Restorative practices seek to address the damage to relationships and trust by acknowledging how people have been affected.
- Respect: Respect is essential to show respect for others and themselves.
- Responsibility: For restorative practices to be effective, personal responsibility must be taken.
- Repair: The restorative approach is to repair the harm that was done to the fullest extent possible.
- Reintegration: Individual who caused harm is accepted back into the community.

The following figure will convey the theoretical frameworks that are highlighted throughout this paper. The figure is a quick synopsis of Maslow (1943), Bandura (1977), Title (2011) and Eglash (1957).

**Figure 1**

*Theoretical Framework*



### Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework as a system of concepts, assumptions, and beliefs guide the research plan (Miles & Huberman, 1994). More specifically, the conceptual framework “lays out the key factors, constructs, or variables, and presumes relationships among them” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 440). The theories of hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), 5 R’s theory (Title, 2011), and restorative justice theory (Eglash, 1957) will be the framework of focus.

### Researcher’s Positionality

As a teacher with nine years of experience working in the kindergarten classroom, this researcher has seen many reform initiatives come and go. This begins with the standardization of

No Child Left Behind (2002) policy to the current curricular restructuring brought by Common Core Standards (2010). All of these umbrella-type change policies have never addressed collegiality and collaborative school cultures. The main purpose of this standardized curricular structuring was primarily academic success. The restorative practice initiative is the first of its kind to identify reciprocal relationships among educators as a method of teacher and overall school success. Restorative practices are social and emotional focus to educational reform. The current position of the researcher requires participation in restorative based practices and professional developments centered on restorative practices. The researcher's positionality resulted in viewing restorative practices as effective in theory but not practical in daily teaching. The act of restorative thinking is full-time duty to restore teacher mindset and the mindset of students in approaching and accepting this practice.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study examined the perception of elementary school teachers on the implementation of restorative practices. The significance of this study was to better understand how teachers perceive the success and sustainability of their restorative practice approach, and how or if, their professional relationships and school cultures play a role in those perceptions. Along the way, this study will highlight the theoretical frames of hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), 5 R's theory (Title, 2011), and restorative justice theory (Eglash, 1957)

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

Research question 1: What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the implementation of restorative practices?

Research question 2: How do elementary school teachers implement restorative practices in the classroom?

Research question 3: What do elementary school teachers need to implement restorative practices?

Research question 4: What collaboration is needed to implement restorative practices for elementary school teachers?

Research question 5: What barriers do elementary school teachers have in implementing restorative practices?

### **Rationale for Methodology**

This study used a basic qualitative case study methodological approach. Researchers conducting a qualitative study are interested in (1) how people think about their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research seeks to explore, understand, and present member perspectives with careful attention paid to their natural setting (Creswell, 2013).

### **Definition of the Terms**

*Restorative justice*: an alternative disciplinary approach to the traditional, punitive approach to discipline (Weaver & Swank, 1977).

*Restorative practices*: an approach to practices implemented by school staff that aligns with restorative justice. Specifically, the elements may (a) promote interpersonal support and connection, (b) uphold structure and fair process, and (c) integrate student voice (Gregory et al., 1957).

*School climate*: the social atmosphere of the learning environment where students grow and develop (Griffith, 2000).



*School culture*: the guiding beliefs and values evident in the way a school operates. School culture can be used to encompass all the attitudes, expected behaviors, and values that impact how the school operates (Fullan, 2007).

### **Summary and Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

The intent of this study was to explore, determine, and describe how elementary school teachers perceive restorative practices. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs suggests that adults must feel safe and their routine should feel consistent and positive. Social learning theory, theorized by Bandura, postulates that people learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modeling (Bandura, 1977). The 5 R's of Title suggests that when a wrong occurs, individuals and communities feel violated (Title, 2011). Restorative Justice is about seeking the good in people, about bringing people face to face, about hearing the pain of woodenness, and about healing (Shadd, 2013).

Chapter II will explain a review of the literature for the study. The problem was restated along with the research questions. The conceptual framework and theoretical framework were explained. The chapter concluded with a summary of the literature review.

Chapter III will explain the methodology, research design, and procedures for the study. This chapter focused on the research, the statement of the problem, and the research questions and methodology. The chapter described the research design, the population to be used, the sample selection, and the interview procedure. The chapter shared validity and reliability of the study. The chapter will conclude with ethical considerations, limitations, and a summary.

Chapter IV will provide summary of data collection and how it was analyzed, including results. This chapter restated the problem, research methodology, and

research questions. The chapter gave in-depth information about the collection of data and how the analysis of the data provided the results.

Chapter V will provide a summary and conclusions as well as recommendations. This chapter consisted of an introduction, summary of the study, discussions and interpretations of the study, findings and conclusions, and implications for practice, as well as recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

### **Introduction to the Chapter and Background to the Problem**

There was substantial need to examine how schools have been implementing restorative practices. If teachers were finding restorative practices beneficial, then the restorative practice initiative is sustaining its primary goal. The idea of the restorative practice model came out of the theoretical frameworks of *Maslow* (1943), *Bandura* (1977), *Title* (2011), and *Egash* (1977). These theoretical frameworks have foundational values of restorative practices and their implementation in schools.

In thematic reviews of literature, the researcher identified a theme and briefly cited literature to document this theme (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The themes for this research included an analysis of the theories informing the conceptual framework. Additionally, there was an in-depth review of restorative practices which identifies the need for further investigation into elementary school teacher perspectives of restorative practices.

The restorative practice model complements Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Title's 5 theory (Title, 2011), and Egash's Restorative Justice Theory (Egash, 1957). The restorative practice has become a cornerstone of professional development in the United States in education.

### **School Climate**

School climate is a system of values, beliefs, and norms that are collectively accepted and implemented with full awareness as a norm or natural behavior (Setiyati, 2014). Cohen and Geier (2010) identified four domains of school climate:

- Safety (e.g., rules and norms; physical safety; social-emotional safety)
- Relationships (e.g., respect for diversity; school connectedness-engagement; social

support—adults; social support—students; leadership);

- Teaching and learning (e.g., social, emotional, ethical, and civic learning; learning support; professional relationships);
- Institutional environment (e.g., physical surroundings).

Schools are a primary agent in the works of socialization, after one's own family, the school is often the first place a child learns society's norms, values, and culture and understands their roles and responsibilities in society (Peguero & Bracey, 2015). The sense of safety in schools promotes students' learning and healthy development (Cohen & Geier, 2010). School climate can affect multiple student behavioral, academic, health, and social-emotional outcomes (Bradshaw et al., 2014).

Furthermore, a positive school climate has been associated with desired student academics and student behavior (Waasdorp et al., 2019). A positive school climate can influence student achievements, civil rights, emotional and physiological health, adequate learning styles, discipline, and decision-making. This pertains to both staff and students in a positive school community (Waasdorp et al., 2019).

Wiley et al. (2019) suggested that while improving school climates is beneficial; there may be limits to the role school climate can play in altering the effects of discipline. Research found that teachers felt students were not being held accountable for student misconduct and impacting school climate (Gregory & Evans, 1977). Restorative climates that are fair and equitable include whole-school change efforts (staff and students), as well as long-term investments in educator learning and development (Archibald, 2014).

This study drew on teachers' perceptions of restorative practices. This chapter included a history of basic common needs, the 5 R's, and restorative justice. Additionally, restorative practices and the sustainability of the practice was explored.

### **Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Framework**

According to Imenda (2014), "the conceptual or theoretical framework is the soul of every research project" (p. 185). The conceptual or theoretical framework governs how researchers frame their study problem, purpose, and questions, how they investigate the problem, and what meaning they assign to the collected data. This study employed the theoretical frameworks of hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), 5 R's theory (Title, 2011), and restorative justice theory (Egash, 1957).

#### **Bandura's Social Learning Theory**

Bandura's social learning theory hypothesizes that people learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modeling. Most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: "from observing others, we form an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (Bandura, 1977, p. 22). Social learning theory explains human behavior in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences. The three basic components of this theory are:

- Observing a behavioral model (that which can be seen, heard, or read about)
- The consequences, or results, of the model's behavior
- The internal thinking (cognitive) and feeling (affective) processes of the observer

According to the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), an individual sees or hears an action, decides to imitate it based on a positive expected outcome, and then exhibits the behavior. Bandura (1977) indicated that there are four processes that influence learning. These are attentional, retention, motor reproductive, and motivational. The attentional process deals with the observer watching the model. If the observer does not closely attend to the model, little learning will happen. The retention process includes “acts the observer performs to aid recall of the model’s behavior” (Bandura, 1977, p. 31). When the observer tries to recall the model’s behavior, it is acted out symbolically, most often in words. The motor reproductive process involves the observer’s ability to perform the model’s behavior.

The motivational process deals with whether the model’s behavior is actually imitated. “The observer must have an expectation that an imitated behavior will produce reinforcement; otherwise, he will not perform it” (Bandura, 1977, p. 28). Further, “learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling” (Bandura, 1977, p. 22). Ultimately, the motivational factor of restorative practices complements the lens of Bandura’s social learning theory in order to determine significant influences and/or pathways of knowledge gained through the social environment.

Bandura’s 1977 work in learning how behavior can be understood and changed has been instrumental in helping people around the world lead healthier, more productive and peaceful lives. Bandura notes that addressing great social problems requires propelling to endure in pursuits strewn with obstacles and uncertainties who will persevere against tough odds. They may encounter social rejection, which can scare off the fainthearted. Or they may

be dismissed as attention-seekers, or as self-deluded eccentrics doggedly pursuing ill-conceived ideas (Bandura, 1977).

Research in observational learning represents a critical development in the history of psychology. Indeed, the research and scholarly work conducted by Bandura set the occasion for the social cognitive perspective of learning which seemed to challenge the possibility that all behavior could be accounted for by respondent and operant processes alone (Bandura, 1986). The social cognitive perspective focused more explicitly on both modeling and cognition, and their role in understanding behavior. Meanwhile, behavior analysts have continued to contend that observational learning can be explained through processes of generalized imitation, conditioned reinforcement, and rule-governed behavior (Catania, 2007; Pear, 2001; Pierce & Cheney, 2008).

Related to the role of verbal behavior, Bandura (1963) and colleagues noticed a difference between the observer's imitative performance at a later time compared to their ability to describe what was observed when asked. The ability to describe what was observed was viewed as a measure of learning, while engaging in the observed behavior at a later time was viewed as performance. For example, Bandura (1963) found that children in both the aggressive-reward (participants observed a model be rewarded for engaging in a sequence of responses) and aggressive-punished (participants observed a model be punished for engaging in a sequence of responses) groups were both able to describe observed sequences of behavior. This was despite differences in imitative behavior change.

Similarly, Bandura (1965) found that differences between group measures on imitation of observed behavior were removed on an acquisition index, where children were told they would get a reward for telling the experimenter what the model did. These findings further highlighted

the role of verbal behavior in the process of learning from observation, including the ways learning from observation might be measured.

### **The Five R's of Restorative Practices**

The 5 R's of restorative practice recognize that when a wrong occurs, individuals and communities feel violated (Title, 2011). The research of 5 R's sought to understand the damage to these relationships. When relationships are strong, people experience more fulfilling lives, and communities become places where individuals want to live. Relationships may be mended through the willingness to be accountable for one's actions and to make repair of harms done (Title, 2011).

Restorative practices utilize the 5 R's of relationship, respect, responsibility, repair and reintegration. These concepts recognize that, when a wrong occurs, individuals and communities feel violated (Title, 2011). This results in the steps to repair consequences of the action or relationship that is primarily important. The response is the central focus of what restorative practices seek to address. When relationships are strong, people experience more fulfilling lives and communities become desirable places to live. Relationships may be mended through accountability for one's actions and to make repairs (Title, 2011). Title (2007) established the Five R's for restorative practices. Relationship practices recognize that when a wrong occurs, individuals and communities feel violated. A cornerstone of restorative justice is the 5 R's framework (Title, 2011).

### **The Restorative Approach Outcome**

The restorative approach if applied correctly can repair any harm that was done, fully identify the underlying causes, and recognize that harm may extend beyond anyone's capacity for repair. The process begins by acceptance of responsibility for behavior and identifying



how others were harmed by their action. This leads to the expectation of making repairs (Title, 2011), which allows those affected to set aside thoughts of revenge and punishment. This process has an essential component that all stakeholders in the event be involved in identifying the harm and having a voice in repairment. In taking responsibility for one's own behavior and making repairs, people may regain or strengthen their self-respect and the respect of others (Title, 2011). This can also unify the group through collective accountability and efforts.

Consequently, damage to these relationships that is a central focus of what restorative practices seek to address. When relationships are strong, people experience more fulfilling lives, and communities become places where we want to live. Relationships may be mended through the willingness to be accountable for one's actions and to make repair of harms done. Respect is the key ingredient that holds the container for all restorative practices, and it is what keeps the process safe. Title's theory emphasizes that all persons in a restorative process be treated with respect (Title, 2011). One way we acknowledge respect is that participation in a restorative process is always optional. Every person is expected to show respect for others and for themselves. Restorative processes require deep listening, done in a way that does not presume we know what the speaker is going to say, but that we honor the importance of the other's point of view.

The focus for listening is to understand other people, so, even if we disagree with their thinking, we can be respectful and try hard to comprehend how it seems to them (Title, 2011). Responsibility for restorative practices to be effective, personal responsibility must be taken. Each person needs to take responsibility for any harm that was caused to another, admitting any wrong that was done, even if it was unintentional (Title, 2011). Taking responsibility also

includes a willingness to explain the harmful behavior. All persons in the circle are asked to search deeply in their hearts and minds to discover if there is any part of the matter at hand for which they have some responsibility. Everyone needs to accept responsibility for their own behavior and the impacts behaviors have on other individuals and the community (Title, 2011).

The restorative approach is to repair the harm that was done and the underlying causes to the fullest extent possible, recognizing that harm may extend beyond anyone's capacity for repair. Once the persons involved have accepted responsibility for their behavior and they have heard in the restorative process about how others were harmed by their action, they are expected to make repairs (Title, 2011), which allows us to set aside thoughts of revenge and punishment. Consequently, all stakeholders in the event be involved in identifying the harm and having a voice in how it will be repaired. The act of taking responsibility for one's own behavior and making repair that persons may regain or strengthen their self-respect and the respect of others.

For the restorative process to be complete, persons who may have felt alienated must be accepted into the community. Reintegration is realized when all persons have put the hurt behind them and moved into a new role in the community (Title, 2011). This new role recognizes their worth and the importance of the new learning that has been accomplished. The person having demonstrated to be an honorable person through acceptance of responsibility and repair of harm has transformed the hurtful act. At the reintegration point, all parties are back in a relationship with each other and with the community, the final step in achieving wholeness (Title, 2011).

### **Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice is about seeking the good in people, about bringing people face to face, about hearing the pain of woodenness, and about healing (Shadd, 2013). Restorative justice is also about righting a wrong not only for victims but also for offenders and communities. Restorative Justice is about making amends rather than punishment, and restitution rather than retribution (Shadd, 2013).

Restorative justice is richer than a particular program or blueprint. Restorative justice has more depth than a map, but the principles of restorative justice can be seen as a compass pointing a direction (Zehr, 2015). Restorative practice is concerned with needs and roles and it tracks information, truth telling, empowerment, restitution or vindication, accountability, and community. Restorative practice is a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible (Sharpe, 2015).

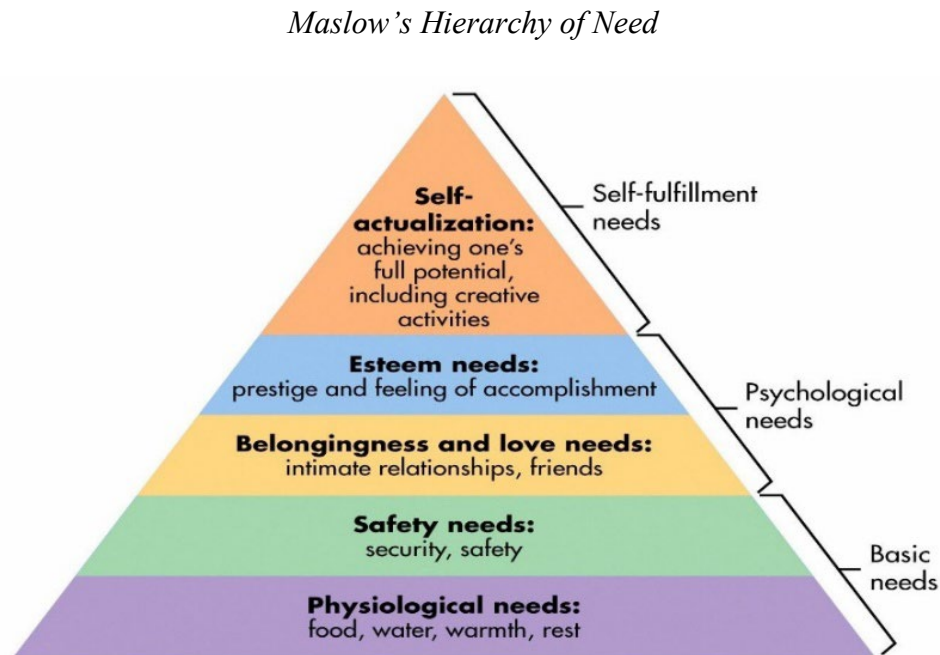
The theoretical framework of this study provided a view into teachers' perceptions regarding the sustainability of their perception of restorative practices. An analysis of the data collected from participants determined how, or if, they learn from each other, professionally growing as a result of their participation in professional relationships, and how organizational culture impacts their interactions. This information provided insights into the sustainability of the restorative practice initiative over time or for future research endeavors.

### **Hierarchy of Needs**

Maslow (1943) identified five categories of basic needs common to all people. Maslow represented these needs as a hierarchy in the shape of a pyramid (Figure 2). A hierarchy is an arrangement that ranks people or concepts from lowest to highest (Martin & Joomis, 2007).

According to Maslow, individuals must meet the needs at the lower levels of the pyramid before they can successfully be motivated to tackle the next levels. The lowest four levels represent deficiency needs, and the upper three levels represent growth needs (Martin & Joomis, 2007).

**Figure 2**



Pichère & Cadiat, (2015)

In order to consider these levels in regard to students, one must understand the definitive purpose of each level of Maslow's hierarchy to students (Minton, 2008). At the physiological level is the need for air, water, nourishment, good health, activity, rest, and avoidance of pain. Developing children require nourishing food and a clean diaper before they are in any condition to move on to a higher stage of development such as playing patty-cake with parents. Some of these needs may be specific to the child.

At the safety and security level, the physiological needs have largely been taken care of and children are confident that they receive care by trusted adults (Minton, 2008). Children become increasingly interested in finding safe circumstances, stability, and protections and it is at this level where they develop a need for structure, order, and limits. In the safety and security level, children develop fears and anxiety. They may worry about someone breaking into the home, a monster in the closet, or a drive-by shooting in the neighborhood (Minton, 2008).

At the love and belonging level, children need others to love and to provide them with a sense of belonging. At this level, some sort of family stability is needed for children to invest love in someone else. If a caregiving parent dies or is incarcerated and children are placed in a series of foster homes, they may not attain the feeling of stability required for emotional investment (Minton, 2008). If it appears that no one wants to make a lasting commitment to them, the children may be unable to love themselves. This sense of belonging can be threatened when parents' divorce. At this level, loneliness and social anxiety may also manifest (Minton, 2008).

With this understanding, one can conclude that if the lower levels of the pyramid (physiological, safety and security, and love and belonging) are not met, it will not be possible for the upper levels of growth (self-esteem and self-actualization) to be met. In Maslow's hierarchy, the level of self-esteem is defined as including both confidence and achievement. Therefore, if children do not feel a sense of love and belonging, it's likely they will struggle with self-confidence and ultimately falter in their achievement (Minton, 2008).

For each of the five needs in Maslow's motivational hierarchy, operational definitions were developed from Maslow's theory of motivation. New measures were created based on the operational definitions. These include: (1) to assess the satisfaction of each need; (2) to assess

their expected correlations with each of the other needs and with four social and personality measures (i.e., family support, traditional values, anxiety/worry, and life satisfaction); and (3) to test the ability of the satisfaction level of each need to statistically predict the satisfaction level of the next higher-level need (Toarimina, 2013).

Additionally, as predicted, family support, traditional values, and life satisfaction had significant positive correlations with the satisfaction of all five needs, and the anxiety/worry facet of neuroticism had significant negative correlations with the satisfaction of all the needs. Multiple regression analyses revealed that the satisfaction of each higher-level need was statistically predicted by the satisfaction of the need immediately below it in the hierarchy, as expected from Maslow's theory (Toarimina, 2013).

Maslow's (1962) hierarchy of needs theory has made a major contribution to teaching and classroom management in schools. Rather than reducing behavior to a response of the environment Maslow (1970) adopted a holistic approach to education and learning. Maslow examined the complete physical, emotional, social, and intellectual qualities of an individual and how they impact learning. Classroom teachers use applications of Maslow's hierarchy theory to the work of their classroom. This application is a working foundation of student's cognitive needs can be met, they must first fulfill their basic physiological needs.

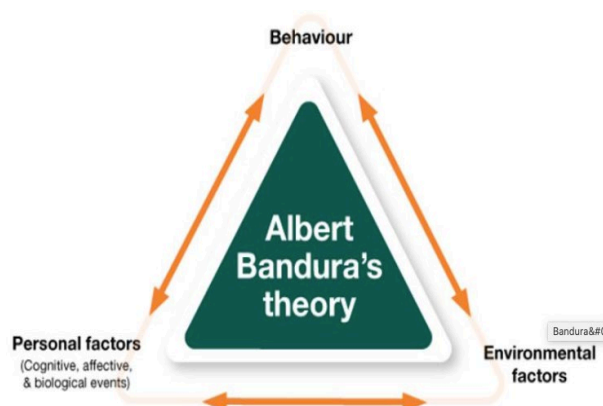
### **Social Learning Theory**

Bandura's 1977 theory of self-efficacy (and collective efficacy) is key in understanding how to motivate people to act on any major societal problem. The theory holds that individuals and groups are unlikely to attempt to act to solve a problem unless they have a belief, a perceived sense of efficacy, that their individual and collective actions can make a difference, will help to solve the problem (Bandura, 1977)

Bandura, 1977, explained that most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions, this coded information serves as a guide for action. Bandura identified three basic models of observational learning: 1) a live model, which involves an individual demonstrating or acting out a behavior; 2) a symbolic model, which involves real or fictional characters displaying behaviors in books, films, television programs, or online media; and 3) a verbal instructional model, which involves descriptions and explanations of a behavior (Bandura, 1977). The figure below demonstrates how Albert Bandura's theory is dependent upon personal factors, behavior, and environmental factors.

### Figure 3

#### *Bandura's Theory*



Bandura (1977)

In addition to influencing other psychologists, Bandura's, 1977, social learning theory has had important implications in the field of education. Today, both teachers and parents recognize how important it is to model appropriate behaviors. Other classroom strategies such as encouraging children and building self-efficacy also rooted in social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). As Bandura observed, life would be incredibly difficult and even dangerous if

you had to learn everything you know from personal experience. Observing others plays a vital role in acquiring new knowledge and skills. By understanding how social learning theory works, one can gain a greater appreciation for the powerful role that observation plays in shaping the things we know and the things we do (Bandura, 1977).

Social learning theory is increasingly cited as an essential component of sustainable natural resource management and the promotion of desirable behavioral change. (Muro & Jeffrey 2008). The theory is based on the idea that we learn from our interactions with others in a social context. Separately, by observing the behaviors of others, people develop similar behaviors. After observing the behavior of others, people assimilate and imitate that behavior, especially if their observational experiences are positive ones or include rewards related to the observed behavior.

According to Bandura, 1977, imitation involves the actual reproduction of observed motor activities. Social learning theory has become perhaps the most influential theory of learning and development and it is rooted in many of the basic concepts of traditional learning theory (Muro & Jeffrey 2008). This theory has often been called a bridge between behaviorist learning theories and cognitive learning theories because it encompasses attention, memory, and motivation (Muro & Jeffrey 2008).

Bandura, 1977, believed that direct reinforcement could not account for all types of learning. For that reason, Bandura, 1977, added a social element, arguing that people can learn new information and behaviors by watching other people. According to the elements of this theory there are three general principles for learning from each other (Muro & Jeffrey 2008). The principles of social learning are assumed to operate in the same way throughout life. Observational learning may take place at any age. Insofar as exposure to new influential,



powerful models who control resources may occur at life stage, new learning through the modeling process is always possible. Social learning theory posits that people learn from one another via observation, imitation, and modeling.

Based on these general principles, learning can occur without a change in behavior. Behaviorists suggest that learning has to be represented by a permanent change in behavior. However, social learning theorists suggest that because people can learn through observation alone, their learning may not necessarily be shown in their performance (Bandura, 1965). Learning may or may not result in a behavior change (Bandura, 2006). Determining if teachers are learning from one another through observation and modeling, as Bandura (1977) theorized, will help explain the human behaviors within the group from a psychological perspective.

### **Restorative Practices**

More than anyone, teachers understand how vital it is for students to be present in class each day. When consequences of dismissal of classroom or principal office time is executed, they undercut their efforts to boost attendance. Research shows that regular school attendance in the early grades is an excellent predictor of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading levels (Chang & Romero, 2008) and that students' 9<sup>th</sup> grade attendance levels can predict whether or not they will graduate high school (Roderick et al., 2014).

Restorative practices are based on Eglash's (1957) theory of restorative justice. Restorative justice focuses on mediation and agreement rather than punishment (Kaplan, 2021). Eglash wanted people to understand the value in their making restitution when they hurt others:

A restorative approach of creative restitution accepts both free will and psychological determinism. Restorative approaches can benefit past responsibility in terms of damage or harm done, and can therefore accept psychological determinism for our past behavior

without destroying the concept of our being responsible for what we have done (1975, p. 91).

Eglash (1975) also wrote “For me, restorative justice and restitution, like its two alternatives, punishment and treatment, is concerned primarily with offenders. Any benefit to victims is a bonus, gravy, but not the meat and potatoes of the process” (p. 99).

After discussing creative restitution with adults in a county jail, youths in a correctional facility, adult pre-parolees in a house of corrections, and other juveniles and adults involved in criminal circumstances, Eglash (1975) concluded that the concept makes sense to adult offenders and is more acceptable to them than is mandatory restitution.

Restorative justice has been used to keep people away from the traditional justice systems and for convicted offenders already supervised by the adult or juvenile justice system. Offenders must accept responsibility for harm and make restitution with victims (Fronius et al., 2019). Restorative justice manifests itself in a school by implementing alternatives to exclusionary discipline (i.e., suspension and expulsion). The theory of restorative justice was appropriate for this study because it focuses on a restorative approach to school discipline. Restorative practices focus on building, nurturing, and repairing relationships rather than managing behaviors (Fronius et al., 2019). The connection between restorative justice and restorative practices lies in the school staff’s role in contributing to students’ behaviors (González, 2012).

In a small number of cases, the criminal justice system will play an important part in a restorative approach to student discipline (Fischer & Frey, 2014). Strong ties to local police departments and juvenile justice system have enhanced the ability to play a meaningful role in the lives of adjudicated youth, allowing families and the courts to positively affect students’ lives

(Fischer & Frey, 2014). In fact, many youth court systems follow the restorative approach to justice, which mandates therapeutic interventions over retributive ones (Fischer & Frey, 2014).

Restorative practices are an alternative disciplinary measure to the traditional, punitive approach to discipline (Weaver & Swank, 1977). Restorative practices train teachers and administrators on how they can respond to student problems without punishment. A significant component of restorative practices is building relationships with others. Restorative practices are an approach implemented by school staff that aligns with restorative justice. Specifically, the elements may (a) promote interpersonal support and connection, (b) uphold structure and fair process, and (c) integrate student voice (Gregory et al., 1957).

Why do teachers punish students by assigning consequences when they misbehave? Probably because teachers experienced punishment as students themselves. The most common punishment for student misbehavior in elementary school is loss of recess (Moberly et al., 2005), which is ironic because evidence has shown regular physical activity reduces problematic behavior and increases student achievement (Rakey, 2008). Another common punishment is placing students' names on a board and applying checkmarks by those students who have misbehaved. Such attempts to hold students publicly accountable for their behavior can render them compliant but can also make them feel anger, humiliation, and a range of other negative emotions that serve to shut down learning (Woollfolk et al., 2006).

The impact of restorative practice can improve the school climate through caring about students' achievement, civil rights, and emotional and psychological health. Other researchers indicate that restorative practices have led to increased student connectedness, the greater community, parent engagement, improved student academic achievement, and support from

students from staff (González, 2012). Brown (2017) also reported decreases in discipline disparities, fighting, bullying, and suspensions resulting from restorative practices.

Restorative practices train teachers and administrators on how they can respond to student problems without punishment. A significant component of restorative practices is building relationships with others. Specifically, educators develop relationships, especially those that may be fractured, to be harmonious in the school (Cavanaugh, 2009). In restorative justice, staff members are contributors to children's behavior, so there is an opportunity for learning rather than barriers to their development (Cavanaugh, 2009).

Restorative practices are approaches or techniques implemented by school staff that align with restorative justice. Specifically, the elements may promote interpersonal support, uphold structure, and integrate students' voice (Gregory et al., 1957). Implementing restorative principles in schools brings together stakeholders to resolve issues and build relationships rather than control students' misbehavior through punitive exclusionary approaches (Fronius et al., 2019). To successfully implement restorative practices, schools need transformational leaders (Aggarwal & Krishnan, 2014).

Restorative practices are an alternative disciplinary measure to the traditional, punitive approach to discipline (Weaver & Swank, 1977). Restorative practices are based on Eglash's theory of restorative justice. Schools using comprehensive restorative justice in schools aim to address challenging behaviors and to nurture school climates that promote learning through relational and supportive practices rather than punitive and exclusionary ones (Gregory & Evans, 1977).

The emphasis on making amends and repairing relationships is restorative practices' hallmarks (Archibald, 2014). Restorative practices hold people accountable, repair harm to

victims, and provide support to those involved (Evans & Lester, 2013). The goals of restorative practices are to keep kids in school, address the root cause of the behavior issue, and repair the relationships among stakeholders (Fronius et al., 1957). Restorative practices seek to replace a punitive approach to discipline with a more collaborative approach to solving discipline issues (Losen et al., 2014). Restorative practices can be described as an umbrella of tools educators can use to establish positive relationships with all students and stakeholders (Kline, 1957).

Restorative practices allow schools to respond to students' inappropriate behavior and provide them with an opportunity to make amends for the situation through relationship building. The overarching goals of restorative practices are building healthy relationships and repairing those relationships if harm arises in any given community (Silverman & Mee, 2018). Restorative practices have a preventive component that should be taught, emphasized, and exercised daily in schools (Kline, 1957). Consistency with implementation allows for the adherence to principles of restorative practices.

The approach to restorative practices in learning can start with morning meetings in the beginning of the day. Morning meetings are one form of restorative practices school use. Morning meetings begin with students and teachers gathering to strengthen their connections and relationships through communication (Kline, 1957). In addition, community circles are another form of restorative practice.

Teachers establish trust and relationship building by having students face each other and positively discuss academic, social, and classroom-specific topics (Silverman & Mee, 2018). The restorative chat is another form of restorative practice school leaders implement. The restorative chat is an informal dialogue with one or several students involved in a low-level conflict (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005). The restorative chat focuses on questioning, which aims to build

thought and awareness of the harm done. Furthermore, peer mediation is commonly used to settle conflicts between students through trained peers (Gunduz et al., 2017). These programs generally teach students about healthy resolutions to conflict and how improved communication can often help resolve misunderstandings.

Finally, peer jury is another common practice. This practice centers on developing youth accountability through a court process with their peers acting as the jurors, offering guidance and support to the referred individual and creating an agreement that outlines actions needed by the student to repair the harm (Gunduz et al., 2017).

These examples of restorative practices model how to address problems through talking about feelings and encouraging empathetic responses (Oxley & Holden, 2021). These approaches also focus on a different approach to discipline rather than the use of punishment. Restorative practices do not ignore harmful behavior but shift the focus to honoring and preserving the dignity of people through relational practices that focus concurrently on individual and community well-being and responsibility (Vaandering, 2013).

Recent studies highlight the impact restorative practices are having on classrooms. Acosta et al. (2019) evaluated restorative practices as a whole school intervention and found that they had improved perceptions of school climate, connectedness, peer attachment, and social skills. Wearmouth and Berryman (2012) found when schools incorporated restorative justice principles into their behavior management policies, they supported both the wrong-doers and the victim so that they were able to help restore the relationship. At the same time, a recent national review found evidence that restorative approaches can reduce suspension rates and decrease disciplinary referrals. Finally, teacher and student morale and attachment are higher in schools

that practice restorative practices. In addition to this research, there is also research about the impact of restorative practices on the whole school ((Losen et al., 2014).).

While implementing restorative practices is relatively new, research suggests these practices can positively impact student exclusion and school climate. Other researchers indicate that restorative practices have increased student connectedness, the greater community, and parent engagement, improved student academic achievement, and support from staff (Cavanagh et al., 2014; González, 2012). Evidence substantiates the impact of restorative practices on school climates; however, there is still work needed to build a school-wide implementation system.

One obstacle to implementing restorative practices in schools is the proper amount of professional development for staff. Professional development provides an opportunity for new learning and the acquisition of new skills. The quality of professional training in classroom management skills and experience in working with students are critical factors in the educators' ability to address disruptive behaviors in the classroom (Moreno & Scarletta, 2018). Educators need in-depth knowledge of the children in their care and cultivate empathy and help students develop those skills (Evans & Lester, 2013).

There is a lack of information on the types of effective professional development and ongoing staff support needed. Understanding these resources for staff will provide schools with information to assist with implementation. Another obstacle in fully implementing restorative practices is the building principal's commitment to the process. Administrators' lack of support for staff implementing restorative practices could hinder development in their building (Sandwick et al., 2019). Additionally, some educators and stakeholders do not believe that restorative practices are effective and some staff are resistant to restorative practices because

they are perceived as too soft on student offenses and not supportive of teachers who struggle with classroom management (Evans & Lester, 2013). Finally, implementing restorative practices takes time. Some researchers believe a shift towards restorative practices takes one to three years to implement (Karp & Breslin, 2001).

Restorative practices have the potential to create a more positive school climate. Restorative practices focus on making amends and repairing relationships between parties (Archibald, 2014). Restorative practices respond to students' inappropriate behavior by building relationships with students rather than punishing them. Restorative practices positively impact school climate and have led to increased student connectedness and improved student academic achievement (González, 2012).

This information is relevant because principals' restorative practices allow schools to acknowledge students' behavior and rectify the situation through less punitive measures. To cultivate learning environments in which solid relationships can flourish, educators must gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to meet their students' needs (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 1977). Educators need an in-depth understanding of the children and the social and emotional skills to cultivate empathy and help students develop those skills (Evans & Lester, 2013). Providing these supports increases the chances of successful implementation and sustainability of restorative practices. Another critical factor is time. The trait of patience is crucial to effective implementation because the interventions may take longer than expected to show results (Fronius et al., 1957).

### **Summary and Integration**

Restorative practices align with the philosophies of restorative justice. Restorative justice is an alternative disciplinary approach to the traditional, punitive approach to discipline (Weaver



& Swank, 1977). A vital component of this literature review illuminated the buildup of restorative practices brought to school buildings. Restorative practices promote interpersonal support and connection, uphold structure and fair process, and integrate student voice (Gregory et al., 1957). Restorative approaches can reduce suspension/expulsion rates and decrease disciplinary referrals (Losen et al., 2014).

Furthermore, a significant component of restorative practices is building relationships with others. Specifically, educators work to build relationships, especially those that may be fractured, to be harmonious in the school (Cavanaugh, 2009). In restorative justice, staff members are contributors to the behavior of the children. Implementing restorative principles brings people together to resolve issues and build relationships rather than punish them (Fronius et al., 2019). Highlighting the intersection between the teachers of restorative justice and restorative practices contributes to the body of knowledge. This study's contribution to the body of knowledge is essential because it improves outcomes for staff, schools, and students.

The research study aimed to gain new understandings that can contribute to the existing body of knowledge on a topic. The primary aim of the research was to look at the implementation of restorative practices from the elementary school teacher's perspective. The study sought to understand elementary school teacher perspectives on implementing restorative practices. The restorative practice model came out of the theoretical frameworks of Maslow (1943), Bandura (1977), Title (2011), and Eglash (1977). These theoretical frameworks have built upon the foundation of restorative practices and their implementation in schools. These baseline theories and theorists were essential in this study's goal to understand elementary school teacher perspectives on the implementation of restorative practices.

## **Chapter III: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This study sought to explore the perceptions of elementary school teachers on restorative practices. A restorative practice is a social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making (Wachtel, 2019). The use of restorative practices reduces crime, violence, and bullying; improves human behavior and strengthens civil society; provides effective leadership; restores relationships; and repairs harm. 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 (Wachtel, 2019).

Suspension and expulsion data reveal alarming statistics on the demographics of students being expelled or suspended. Perry and Morris (2014) found that “higher levels of exclusionary discipline within schools over time generate collateral damage, negatively affecting the academic achievement of non-suspended students in punitive contexts” (p. 1067). Policies to address student behavioral management and consequences for actions have been implemented in many schools.

The student behavioral management program impacts students since when schools rely on exclusionary disciplinary policies, the achievement of all students is negatively affected (Perry & Morris, 2014). Therefore, the impact of restorative practices can improve the school climate through caring about students’ achievement, civil rights, and emotional and psychological health. This qualitative study sought to understand the teachers’ perceptions of restorative practices. This chapter presents the research questions, the research methodology and design, the sample selections, the data collection tools, and the procedures that were used to collect and analyze the

data. Validity, reliability, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations are also discussed in this chapter.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The focus of this study was elementary school teachers' perception of restorative practices. Correlational studies have shown a link between suspension and lower student achievement (Skiba et al., 2014) and suspensions are associated with involvement in the juvenile and criminal justice systems (Fabelo et al., 2011; González, 2012). Although zero-tolerance policies are intended to deter negative behavior by making a clear point to students about what is not permitted, these policies might fail to teach students preventive strategies (González, 2012; Kline, 1957). The significance of this study was to understand how teachers perceive the success and sustainability of their restorative practice approach, and how or if their professional relationships and school cultures play a role in those perceptions.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions help to determine what is to be learned or understood as a result of a research study (Maxwell, 2012). This study will follow a qualitative approach, attempting to determine how experiential learning factors impact participants' perceptions of themselves as an educator. The following research questions guided his qualitative study:

Research question 1: What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the implementation of restorative practices?

Research question 2: How do elementary school teachers implement restorative practices in the classroom?

Research question 3: What do elementary school teachers need to implement restorative practices?

Research question 4: What collaboration is needed to implement restorative practices for elementary school teachers?

Research question 5: What barriers do elementary school teachers have in implementing restorative practices?

### **Research Methodology**

A qualitative research approach was applied to this study to better understand the perceptions of all early-career educators involved. According to Maxwell (2012), there are five goals for which qualitative studies are useful:

- Understanding the meaning of the accounts that your participants give about their experiences.
- Understanding participants' context and the influence it has on their actions.
- Exploration: generating new theories from unexpected phenomena.
- Understanding processes.
- Developing causal explanations.

How participants make sense of their learning experiences and the influence they have on their behavior will serve, in part, as “the reality that the researcher is trying to understand” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 221).

According to Labuschagne (2003), qualitative analysis pursues the richness of people's experience in their own terms. Understandings and meanings emerge from in-depth analysis of detailed descriptions and verbatim quotations. “The word qualitative implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are rigorously examined, but not measured in terms of quantity,

amount or frequency. Qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed data about a much smaller number of people and cases” (p. 2).

### **Study Population and Sample Selection**

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Two common characteristics of qualitative research are that the researcher is the primary instrument of data analysis and interpretation and that the product of the study is richly descriptive. Selecting participants bound within this study, who meet the criteria will help to ensure that the data collected is from those with previous experience with the phenomenon allowing for comparisons and a theory to emerge (Cohen et al., 2017). Prior to participant selection, the Murray State University Institution Review Board (IRB) application was submitted for approval. The superintendent of the school district was contacted and briefed about the study. The school district was selected because they sought to understand the perceptions of teachers who have implemented Restorative Practices. The researcher works within this district. Written permission was obtained by the researcher, from the district, to contact the principal of the selected school or schools (Appendix A). The principals at the selected schools were notified that permission was granted from the district office for the researcher to recruit teacher participants. This was to be done in the form of a letter/email (Appendix B).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data for this study was collected through virtual, one-on-one interviews conducted through Zoom. Audio recordings of individual interviews were transcribed and used for member checking to ensure accuracy and validity of participants’ responses. The researcher’s goal was to

identify patterns and themes in the data collection to provide the researcher with insights and explanations for the phenomenon of elementary school teachers' perceptions of restorative practice (Creswell, 2013).

### **Interview Process**

There were 10 teacher participants who answered open ended, broad, and descriptive questions. These were structured interviews in which the interviewer asked each participant the same set of questions in the exact same order, to gather consistent and comparable data (Merriam, 2009). The responses were open-ended in the sense that participants had the freedom to respond in their own words. The interviews, conducted via Zoom, lasted approximately one hour. According to Creswell, 2013, it is important for the researcher to have good interview procedures including sticking to the interview questions, remaining within the time specified, being respectful and courteous toward participants, offering few questions and advice, and recording information using the interview protocol should there be any concerns with the audio or video recordings.

### **Interviews**

Using a set of 20 semi-structured questions, individual interviews determined participants' perceptions of their experiences (Appendix D).

Research question 1 was supported by four interview questions. The four interview questions were: What are your observations of restorative practices? What do you observe in children when you use restorative practices? What do you observe in yourself? Do you think a restorative practice approach to discipline is extra work throughout your workday?

Research question 2 was supported by four interview questions. The four interview questions were: What is discussed during a Restorative conversation? Describe a typical

Restorative Intervention with one of your students. Describe the level of knowledge that you have about the 5 R's (relationship, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration) and how you implement them throughout the day. Do you think additional training or professional development on restorative practices would benefit your grade level team? Why or why not.

Research question 3 was supported by five interview questions. The five interview questions were: How does your administrator support the 5 R's? What are your typical needs to restore yourself in the situation and then the child? Do you feel you are growing professionally as a result of your restorative way of teaching? Why or why not? What are the discussions of Restorative Justice in your school? Do you get administrative support?

Research question 4 was supported by four interview questions. The four interview questions were: How often do you meet to discuss or learn more about restorative practices? Are there other colleagues outside of your grade level who are helping you grow in this topic professionally? Have you ever disagreed between administration because of the restorative approach? Describe why or why not. Has the collaborative culture changed at your school since restorative practices have become a normalized topic requirement? How?

Research question 5 was supported by three interview questions. The three interview questions were: Do you feel you have sufficient time to restore poor behaviors? How would you describe your school culture regarding Restorative practice? Describe the greatest challenge you have with restorative practices?

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

To address the research questions, inductive and deductive analyses were utilized. Data analysis, according to Creswell (2013), "consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the

codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion” (p. 180). For the purpose of this study, transcripts derived from recorded interviews. The interviews were used to gather data about the impact that their experiences have had on the development of their professional identities and retention (Creswell, 2013). During the early stages in of analysis, data will be organized in a manner with which to ease accessibility (Creswell, 2013).

After interview member checks were complete, the researcher kept “notes or memos in the margins” in the form of “short phrases, ideas, or key concepts” that occur within the text helping to “identify major organizing ideas” leading to the formation of codes or categories (Creswell, 2013, pp. 183-184). According to Creswell, “coding involves aggregating the text...into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code...and then assigning a label to the code” while classifying requires the researcher to take apart the text or information to look for categories or themes (approximately five to seven) from which to form a “common idea” or interpretation and detailed description of the cases (2013, pp. 184-187). Themes found within the study provided the researcher with insights into the phenomenon of elementary school teachers’ perception of restorative practices.

The process of pulling apart data and putting it back together to establish patterns and look for similarities and differences to develop generalizations (Creswell, 2013). Member checks, triangulation of data, and a critical friend was use to maintain validity and limit the researcher’s personal biases (Creswell, 2013; Kember et al., 1997; Maxwell, 2012).

Creswell, 2013 offered a six-step generic process for analyzing qualitative data:

- Collecting and organize the data (interviews/transcribe)
- Preparing the data (Read multiple times to obtain a general sense)
- Begin coding process (considering patterns/themes)



- Coding the data (assign codes to relevant patterns/themes)
- Reducing overlap and redundancy of codes (to be used in research report)
- Collapsing codes into 5-7 themes (to be used in research report)

### **Ethical and Data Security Considerations**

After receiving approval from University, the school district, and prospective school sites as part of the IRB process, the researcher contacted each potential participant prior to the interview process outlining the purpose of the study, measures of confidentiality and assurances including potential consequences to participants for withdrawing or choosing not to participate in the study of which, there are none. Participants were treated with the utmost respect and dignity, their identities will be kept anonymous through pseudonyms, and the names of the school and district will not be disclosed.

All interview data, including participants' demographic data, will be stored in a password protected file accessible only to the researcher for a period up to three years after the conclusion of the study (and then destroyed). All participants were over 18 years of age with the ability to perform all the necessary responsibilities to the workplace positions, thus qualifying them as participants within the study. Risks associated with participation within the study was limited and explained, along with the benefits to all research participants.

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used the process of member checking and the critical friend method to ensure trustworthiness within the study. Member checking "is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 111). To help avoid bias or confusion of the interview

information, the researcher transcribed the interview data no longer than five days after the interview for participants to review.

The use of a critical friend was utilized to adjust the study: to listen, provide perspective, and critique the work of the researcher, ultimately strengthening the reliability of the researcher's findings and reducing personal bias (Kember et al, 1997). A 'friend' of the teacher-researcher," the critical friend will help "facilitate the progress of research by developing the reflective and learning capacity of the teacher-researcher" by pushing their thinking forward, questioning and encouraging them to 'think aloud' about their work, and challenging them in a positive, supportive way (Kember et al., 1997, p. 464).

### **Summary**

This study sought to determine and describe how elementary school teachers perceive Restorative practices. Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests that must feel safe and their routine should feel consistent and positive (Maslow, 1943). Social learning theory, theorized by Bandura (1977), postulates that people learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modeling. The 5 R's of restorative practice recognize that when a wrong occurs, individuals and communities feel violated (Title, 2011). The paradigm shift-restorative justice- is about seeking the good in people, about bringing people face to face, about hearing the pain of woodenness, and about healing (Shadd, 2013).

Virtual interviews with 10 early-career educators were used for the study. Transcripts were coded to analyze the data. Member checking, triangulation of data and a critical friend helped to maintain validity and limit biases both internal and external to the study (Kember et al., 1997). Once all of the data were analyzed, a written report was created in order to answer the research questions.

## **Chapter IV: Research Findings and Analysis**

This chapter presents the findings from the data collection and analysis of K-5 educators in a St. Louis School district. These educators have been practicing restorative practices for at least five years. The participants are part of a large district in St. Louis, Missouri. The purpose of this research study was to explore the perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and lived experiences of participants who implemented restorative practices.

### **Interview Participants**

The participants for this study consisted of nine females and one male. All participants were trained in restorative practices through Rockwood School district professional development. The participants were all Caucasian ranging from 28-52 years old. Four of the participants were kindergarten teachers, one was a first-grade teacher, one was a third-grade teacher, two were fourth grade teachers, and two were fifth grade teachers. The 10 participants' teaching careers ranged from 10 to 30 years. For anonymity purposes, the researcher identified participants for this study as T1 through T10.

T1 is a 50-year-old Caucasian female. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in Education and is currently enrolled in a Master of Education program. She has been teaching kindergarten for 30 years.

T2 is a 34-year-old single Caucasian female. She has taught Kindergarten for 11 years and has worked for the district for 13 years. T2 has been involved in writing curriculum and social emotional content for the district.

T3 is 33-year female. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology, a master's degree in education, and a master's degree in business. T3 has taught Kindergarten for 10 years. She is on

the building leadership team for her grade level and represents social and emotional needs for the staff.

T4 is a 51-year-old Caucasian woman. She was a previous reading teacher and has been teaching for 30 years. T5 has taught first grade for six years in this St. Louis district.

T5 was a 40-year-old Caucasian man. He has taught in the district for ten years and changed schools twice. He teaches fourth grade.

T6 was a 30-year-old Caucasian female. She has been working in the district for more than eight years and has middle school teaching experience. T6 has been teaching third grade for five years.

T7 has taught fourth grade for six years in the district. She is also a building team leader and coach of after school activities to promote healthy choices and well-being.

T8 was a Caucasian woman who has been teaching fifth grade for eleven years. T9, was a Caucasian woman who has been teaching fifth grade for seven years. T10 was a Caucasian woman who has been teaching fifth grade for 16 years.

### **Interview Questions**

Each of the 10 participants discussed their own personal experiences and opinions that addressed the interview questions freely. The researcher conducted all 10 interviews via Zoom.

All 10 interviews were conducted between January and March of 2024. The researcher asked all the participants the same interview questions regarding their perceptions, opinions, and experiences regarding the implementation of restorative practices in their school district. For

protection and anonymity purposes, all names and participants' identifying information, and characteristics have been removed from the findings.

### **Interview Findings**

Five research questions served as the foundation for the interview, but five interview questions were asked to serve data to support those research questions. The interview process was relaxed enough for the interviewee to elaborately discuss their responses and clarify as needed. They discussed their perceptions, opinions, and lived experiences in relation to the impact of restorative practice implementation in their school district.

#### **Research question 1: What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the implementation of restorative practices?**

**The first interview question for Research question 1 was: What is your opinion of restorative practices?**

Some of the participants responded that they liked it okay. T8 pointed out it was “a way forward with discipline.” T9 added “Restorative practices are great when used in conjunction with traditional discipline, not as a complete replacement.” She continued, “I know this approach to discipline is more nurture and often what our students need.” In a similar manner, T10 reported that he had looked forward to using restorative practices as an intervention, because the training made her deeply understand the benefits. She expressed, “I like the emphasis of focusing on the relationship. I think of it as a pow wow and talking about the solution rather than the problem. That, in itself, is a very positive and fulfilling reaction to troubled students and their trouble behavior.”

However, T4 and T3 admitted that they had frustrations with restorative practices and the lack of accountability for poor behavior. T4 said, “the restorative approach is a soft way to

discipline. Kids need structure, consequences, and accountability. T3 said, “teachers get burnt out utilizing restorative practices. They are often the ones on the receiving end of a child’s poor behavior and then they have to work to restore it. There is not enough time in the day, not to mention, teachers need to restore themselves.”

T2 mentioned, “Directly after training I had a fire under my butt to do restorative practices and circles with my class. In time, this has faded away in our daily routine and structure. I no longer do restorative practices with strong enough fidelity.” Lastly T1 said that she feels she does restorative practices often in Kindergarten but does not always title it as such. She feels it falls under the social and emotional learning realm. “I consistently deal with a lot of students with social and emotional learning needs,” she stated.

**The second interview question was: What are your observations of restorative practices.**

Each participant acknowledged that restorative practices made their school a stronger and more grace-oriented community. The researcher noticed that T5 and T6 had positive observations of students turning around their days based on the gentle approach of talking through behavior problems in the classroom. T5 stated that he feels better as a teacher when he teaches these principles. This approach is the way he would want to be treated in his own decision lapses, too. He continued to mention that if teachers teach kids to monitor and reflect on their emotions, they in return will do the same in their daily teaching life. It is a win, win. “I personally shut down under stress or high amounts of pressure. If I made a mistake in my teaching, I would want to learn from that mistake and grow. I would not like having my nose rubbed in dirt because of that mistake.” T6 also noted observations of smiling kids when restitution is made. “I firmly believe there is good in every student and they want to be good

amongst their peers and teachers. I have observed that when I take the time to nurture their emotions, students respect me more.”

**The third interview question was: What do you observe in children when you use restorative practices? What do you observe in yourself?**

T9 and T10 teach upper elementary school and felt restorative practices were better in theory than they were in practice. T9 explained that she felt burnt out to add this other step of behavior management to his plate. She said, “I find myself losing patience most with students who are disrespectful. The practice is now encouraging me to go back to those students and talk them through the disrespect. It just is not realistic.” T10 complimented this by saying, “I see the goal of the practice but I do not see it actually being obtained in a busy fifth grade classroom. These approaches seem better suited for counselors or administrators, but even then, there is skepticism.” T7 mentioned that she observed a student get more frustrated in talking through the action than even the action itself. “Sometimes kids are just not emotionally mature enough to talk through a behavior that was impulsive. They end up even angrier than they began.”

**The fourth interview question was: Do you think a restorative practice approach to discipline is extra work throughout your work day?**

The overall narrative to this question was yes. T8 said it well, “curriculum is sometimes on the back burner to education. We do have to look at the whole child and determine their social and emotional needs before any efficient learning can be done.” Furthermore, T4 said, “it is unmanageable to regulate emotions, teach what we need to teach, and prioritize our own mental health and sanity. I believe restorative practices must be built into the day but should not be on our shoulders in response to poor classroom behaviors. That is when we need administrative support.”

T5 added, “yes, it is more work but it is to be expected of this job we signed up for. I do find it imperative that counselors, admin, and teachers are on the same page. That makes all discipline procedures consistent and easier(ish).”

**Research question 2: How do elementary school teachers implement restorative practices in the classroom?**

**The first interview question was: What is discussed during a restorative conversation?**

“I believe the openness and transparency to talk through what happened gives kids the opportunity to have positive interactions with their actions through reflection,” T6 explained. “I do not personally have a script that I follow but I open my ears to listening.” Furthermore, T7 states that she always uses character words in her restorative conversations. She said, “teamwork, integrity, growth mindset, empathy, and respect are all words we focus the conversation on. We even discuss what character trait was lacking in their action or response. In connecting it to our character words, students feel a greater sense of belongingness.” T9 mentioned, “It is more difficult at the fifth-grade level with so much curriculum. My options are at the end of class or winding down time. I pull kids in private or in the hallways to have a brief conversation about what happened, what is going on, and what we can do to fix it. I can usually nip it in the butt before getting administration or parents involved. Mostly at the end of the class and out in the hallway.”

**The second interview question was: Describe a typical Restorative Intervention with one of your students.**

T7 was the most thorough in their response to this question. She stated, “I separate the victim and person who created the harming action. I speak to both students and ask them how they felt in that moment/what happened. When we are in an understanding as to what happened,



I conjoin the two students to explain or apologize. This builds empathy and understanding to all parties, including the teacher.”

**The third interview question was: Describe the level of knowledge that you have about the 5 R’s (relationship, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration) and how you implement them throughout the day.**

When asked about their familiarity with the Five R’s of restorative justice, each admitted that they weren’t familiar with them, but know they do them. T3 really liked that relationships were first in that list and all of the R’s that followed. “It makes sense that restorative practices is a process and not a one shoe fit all solution. It is helpful to connect the 5 R’s to restorative practices but no one really connected those dots for us.” All other participants agreed that the five R’s are not common language in restorative practices.

**The fourth interview question was: Do you think additional training or professional development on restorative practices would benefit your grade level team? Why or why not?**

This question was an overwhelming yes. T10 noted, “Yes. I think there are people who do not see the long-term benefits that an effective restorative practice system can have. I think co-workers dismiss it quickly. The general old school mindset of every behavior needs to have a consequence to discipline as opposed to discipline is a disconnect. There is a big disconnect of believers and non-believers.” T1 and T2 agreed that the practice of restorative practice is vague. T1 said, “I have made it my own and fit it into my classroom and their needs. There does not seem to be any overarching necessities to implement after training. If there was an accountability piece of restorative practices or restorative reflections with administration, I think that would be

more helpful.” T2 added, “I still think this practice is at the beginning stages of its development. I am on board with it, but still at the beginning.”

### **Research question 3: What do elementary school teachers need to implement restorative practices?**

#### **The first interview question was: How does your administrator support the 5 R’s.**

In addition to teacher buy-in, T3 is concerned about the lack of time for restorative practices. She said that discipline should not be on teacher’s plates. “The demand on teachers is already too high, this practice is unrealistic with our time constraints for curricular material.” T4 held the counselors and administrators to the higher standard to implement restorative practices. “We learn by their example and need follow through of office visits, too.” Most participants noted time and more knowledge of the content of restorative language. This in turn, would help with administrative support.

#### **The second interview question was: What are your typical needs to restore yourself in the situation and then the child?**

T8 asserted the difficulty to deescalate children once they have reached an emotional breakdown. She stated, “sometimes you really just need time and space for that child to talk through an impulsive behavior or reaction.” T5 complimented this by adding his methods of walking to the water fountain, calm corners, and sensory walks. He added, “the hardest part is restoring the teacher sometimes. We are forgot about in the restorative process and that is a huge shortcoming.” T9 added, “A highly escalated child is hard to know how to approach. In leading with restorative practices, the child expects you to approach them with care. The trust is established in restorative practiced based classrooms.” T9 continued, “When students know you are there to help them and not punish them, they approach their escalation differently. They ask

for help differently.” T10 said, “We realistically need administrative or teacher support if the behavior is highly escalated. She added, “Sometimes the problem is bigger than just a problem-solving approach.”

**The third interview question was: Do you feel you are growing professionally as a result of your restorative way of teaching? Why or why not?**

All the participants agreed that restorative practices are a positive approach in addressing students’ social and emotional health. T6 and T7 perceived the need for more data to compliment this approach to teaching. “In sacrificing our time and resources to restore students, we would love more professional data of why this is effective in teaching,” said T6. T7 said, “I would love an opportunity to observe classrooms that exude restorative approaches. I learn through modeling and do not see it enough in our community to grow in the practice.” T5 mentioned that the practice is subjective. “I do not know how I can incorporate restorative practices in my daily lessons.” T5 admitted that growing professionally does not fit his feelings toward this practice at this time.

**The fourth interview question was: What are the discussions of Restorative Justice in your school?**

Many of the participants admitted that they had not known the connection between restorative justice and restorative practices. T9 said, “We have received one training and were given a book. Restorative practices had an over emphasis to develop community. I do remember that it was not about fixing kids or punishing kids. The practice is about repairing harm and restoring relationships.” T10 added, “I have never heard of restorative justice but feel that the two are synonymous of each other.

T4 and T7 admitted, “restorative practices can sometimes be an eye roll.” T4 said, “The teacher’s lounge is filled with chatter about this matter. The gossip is frustrating and it is hard to send a student to the office and know that there aren’t harsher or more serious punishments other than talking and working through the problem.” T7 added, “I feel like it is something we are supposed to do but it is not realistic to implement.

**The fifth interview question was: How does your administrator support the 5 R’s?**

T1, T2, and T3 mentioned the push from administration to implement these practices. T1 mentioned, “we know if we call for support that their approach will be a restorative one. This can be frustrating but also supporting. When we cannot do the restoring, administration gladly steps in.” T6 added, “Our admin has a list of questions that they ask upon their office visit. These questions are: What happened? What were you thinking at the time? What have you thought about since? Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way? What do you need to do to make things right?”

**Research question 4: What collaboration is needed to implement restorative practice for elementary school teachers?**

**The first interview question was: How often do you meet to discuss or learn more about restorative practices?**

Most of the teacher participants stated that they do not regularly meet to discuss or learn about restorative practices. They admitted that it was a great motivation about six years ago, but the consistency has changed. The response collected from asking this question was across the board consistent. With training being six years ago, Covid, and new curriculum/practices, it seemed neglected. Many participants noted the aspect of time and that other things are just at the center of their plates over this approach to discipline. T1 stated that she feels social and

emotional learning has taken place over restorative practices. T9 said, “We are implementing a new Reading Horizons program this year. It feels that all of our intention is based on either learning the new program or increasing math scores across the district.” T6 said, “It seems that these conversations are discussed more at Care Committee than any time of professional development within the school day. Care Committee is essentially the time to bring forth students who need social and emotional services or accommodations in their learning. T6 continued, “Their conflict resolution process cannot realistically be on our shoulders, too.”

**The second interview question was: Are there other colleagues outside of your grade level who are helping you grow in this topic professionally? Who?**

T3 mentioned a lack of training opportunities. She explained, “we were trained for a summer and it has not been refreshed.” T4 added that a sense of belongingness is something our school has struggled with in our school climate survey. She said, “I feel a sense of belongingness because I have a mentor and we do talk a bit about restorative approaches in teaching.” T5 stated that unless he is talking to an administrator, the word and practices rarely come up in the reality of a busy school classroom. T8 stated, “It is no longer a topic of discussion at meetings within my team or with the school. I do not even hear it much at district level professional development meetings. It is becoming a lost practice as it is not discussed much. This might be because it is subjective and individual to your own classroom and that class’ needs.” T10 mentioned, “Our counselor loves this practice and will encourage conversation. She is usually the person I speak to about success stories or interventions.”

**The third interview question was: Have you ever been in a disagreement between administration because of the restorative approach?**

T9 and T10 were passionate about this answer as it is a subjective approach to discipline. “The way I restore and the way you restore, may be different,” said T9. She continued, “I always feel supported by administration but most times I do not know what goes on in their office visits.” T10 added, “there is often a disconnect of following through with office visits.” She continued, “it would be nice to have an office tracking form and marking of what took place in the office. A lot of the disagreement just gets lost in the transition process. Four of the 10 participants expressed trust with their administration and no discord or anger of their restorative approach. T5 feels that the approach is too soft. “We have to have a backbone,” he said.

**The fourth interview question was: Has the collaborative culture changed at your school since restorative practices have become a normalized topic requirement?**

The word requirement was noted in this question. T6 and T7 noted that they never felt it was a requirement. “A big vocabulary word in restorative practices is building community. I do feel that our community changes when we are all in sync and using grace in our tools,” said T6. T7 felt that restorative practices were more about being a good person. “I think of it in simpler terms, how am I helping a student work through their day or action?” T4 asserted, “each teacher and leader implement the practice vastly differently. It is hard to collaborate on the practice because everyone leads differently. We trust our teacher instinct and do not need to collaborate because no-one else has that specific child or that specific situation. I do not think our collaborative culture has been influenced in a positive or negative way.

**Research question 5: What barriers do elementary school teachers have in implementing restorative practices?**

**The first interview question was: Do you feel you have sufficient time to meet about restorative practices?**

Most participants asserted that there is not nearly enough time to meet about restorative practices. T10 feels that it is almost unrealistic to expect this of teachers. T7 supported this thinking when saying, “we can only do so much when it comes to behaviors and respect.” The participants seemed to be fighting against time in more than just behavior management. T1 said, “I think to teach a kid, you must reach a kid, but we are always scrunched on time and have so many students. It is daunting and discouraging to think kids slide between the cracks with emotional regulation and management.”

**The second interview question was: How would you describe your school culture regarding Restorative practice?**

T2 bluntly said that she found this question hard to answer. She said, “Our climate and community is happy and positive but it is hard to gage the effectiveness of this approach.” T7 and T8 agreed that there is a lack of data on behavior management and it is hard to track what is working and what is not working. T8 continued, “behavior is not always a one shoe fits all. I struggle that every student even needs this coddling and gentle approach.” T1 said, “our culture is impacted positively in restorative practices. There is a precedence of grace and understanding through implementation of this practice.”

**The third interview question was: Describe the greatest challenge you have with restorative practices?**

This was a collective answer. All participants mentioned that the greatest challenge of restorative practices is time and resources. Many participants voiced concern about the lack of consistency it brings, too. T9 said, “how you restore and how I restore can be vastly different. It is such a subjective way to discipline that it is hard to streamline it.”

### **Analysis**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions, opinions, and lived experiences of K-5 educators regarding the impact of restorative practice implementation in Rockwood School District. From the interview questions, four categories emerged containing themes that were consistently and continuously discussed by most participants in the study. Each of the ten participants mentioned at least one theme in the following four categories: insufficient time, perception, history, and consistency. All the participants easily expressed their thoughts, perceptions, and lived experiences regarding the implementation of restorative practices in their school district.

### **Insufficient Time**

Within the category of insufficient time, the following code emerged: incompetent to complete work with other curricular needs. All of the participants stated that they liked the idea of restorative practices but felt incompetent because of lack of time. They all mentioned that they had received one training at the beginning of the school year in August of 2018, and that they did not feel well-prepared to competently implement restorative after that one session.

T9 explained, “I would love to implement this more in my classroom but I do not feel confident enough in what I am doing.” T10 added, “It felt like a buzz word for the time and it



really didn't stick to my teaching style." T3 mentioned that maybe teachers would be more willing to implement restorative practices if they received adequate, and consistent training throughout the entire school year. T4 bluntly said, "it is not realistic in the duties of our day to console and nurture poor behaviors like this." T8 added, "this practice seems more practical in smaller groups or upon behavior interventions. It is hard to take time with the whole class when or with the teacher when it is only one or two children needing the guidance."

### **Perception**

Under the category of perception, the following codes emerged: sense of belongingness and implementation subjectivity.

During the interview process, each of the participants asserted that there seemed to be a rise in their positivity after implementing restorative practices. Many participants rejoiced about their school climate of grace and understanding. T1 expressed that she feels great about proactively building relationships and centering her day around the whole child. T7 said, "I feel super safe when I implement restorative practices in the classroom. In safety comes trust and in trust comes belongingness. The approach is nurturing and kind to kids who really need behaviors broken down to them to move forward."

T2 stated, "Other than our end of the year climate survey given to students, we do not have an assessment tool to gage student's social and emotional well-being. There is a vast amount of approaches toward reaching a student and that is why the area is gray in teacher approach." Overall, the participants agreed that they believed that if implemented correctly, restorative practices can have a positive impact on student behavior, student academic outcome, and overall school climate. T5 mentioning that she has a check in process in the beginning of the day. "This helps students regulate their own emotions on a day to day basis. This tool also allows

for self-reflection and self-awareness. These skills do get reported on our essential course outcomes for behaviors.” Overall, many participants believe restorative practices is positive but subjective. One of the participants even mentioned that she thought the most powerful asset to restorative teaching is the teacher’s outlook on the class. “It is a mindset of continual processing of behavior and reflection. It is a life skill,” said T7.

### **History**

Within the category of history of the practice, the following codes emerged: unknown, and irrelevant. Nine of the ten participants had no connection to the 5 R’s or ideas of restorative justice. However, T3 expressed knowledge because she was administratively trained. T3 said, “the fruition of the practice is important and helpful. I liked learning about how it came to be.” All other participants were in the dark about why or how restorative practices is what it is today. T10 mentioned, “we do not have the time to know the background of the practice, nor the resources to learn.” T5 mentioned “I have no idea how or why we started implementing these practices when we were first trained. It seemed like it was being pushed down from administration to be more social and emotionally aware of student needs. It did take on a counselor-like approach to teaching.” There was sufficient evidence of confusion and uncertainty about any words other than restorative practice.

### **Consistency**

Within the category of consistency, the following codes emerged: subjective, inconsistencies, and accountability. Many of the participants pointed out the coronavirus pandemic was right in the middle of the implementation of this practice. T7 stated, “we had a good thing going but school abruptly closed and the practice was never re-polished.” T6 said, “I felt

the disconnect between administration and teachers the most. They were clearly more trained and prepared to implement these practices at a leadership level than the teachers.”

Each of the participants felt an unease about how to properly assess how they are utilizing this practice and how it is affecting student’s emotional well-being. Two of the participants noted that there are many social and emotional practices in place. T6 expressed, “we are teaching the students character traits on a daily basis. We also assess on five management skills: self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management, and relationship skills. T10 expressed “there is no common assessment for the assessment of these skills. There are also only two choices: concern or not a concern. Thus, the ambiguity of how to implement restorative practices is vague but so is the alignment to core standards.” T1 said, “there is no rule of thumb to follow or set guidelines in restorative practices. The ambiguity and individual teacher implementation can vary. This makes it hard for me to properly know if I am even accountable myself for implementing them effectively.”

### **Summary**

This qualitative study explored the perceptions, opinions, and lived experiences of 10 K-5 educators regarding the impact of implementing restorative practices in their K-5 school. Even though each participant was interviewed individually, and taught different grade levels, commonalities existed within the categories of insufficient time, perceptions, history, and consistency.

## **Chapter V: Conclusions and Discussion**

Restorative practices are becoming a growing area of focus for teachers, school administrators, parents, and the community at large. The researcher intentionally selected K-5 educators who were involved in implementing restorative practices for at least five years to participate in this study.

### **Connection to Literature**

Both the literature and the participants highlighted the four categories of insufficient time, perception, history and consistency when describing the importance of restorative practices for K-5 students. The literature points out that teacher capacity, attitudes, ability, and perceptions are some of the most important aspects that influence successful implementation of social and emotional learning (Durlak & Durlak, 2015; Forman, 2015).

The participants discussed their beliefs regarding the effectiveness of restorative practices. The insufficiency of time was a developed theme and challenge. A solution to this problem could be creating a specific time for teachers to teach best practices of restoration. The literature takes an approach of looking at the reactive procedures that are oriented to finding a quick solution before moving on to the next problem. The literature supports that schools are not static and demands of schooling are changing. The participants' responses matched the literature as they described their inability to obtain a restorative classroom due to lack of time and consistency (Vaandering & Evans, 2016).

In terms of perception, the literature points out that in addition to addressing students' social and emotional well-being, restorative practice is subjective. If we narrowly define teachers' action research in terms of how to improve educational practices on an objective dimension, it becomes merely another attempt to make educational practice more "scientific".

However, the gist of action research can be considered to bring out personal, social and political transformations by involving “I” at the heart of its process (Whitehead, 2006). The literature compliments the need to stay subjective in our perception and embrace the personal and professional forms of knowledge that perspective brings.

Regarding history, the literature focuses on the role of policy makers and the educational context. The literature states that there are three major influences that inform restorative practices. The first influence is the culture from all around the world. The literature is rooted in the idea that repairing harm requires the involvement of the community (Vaandering & Evans, 2016). The second influence comes from social sciences, particularly meditation, resolution, social work, counseling and psychology. The insight being that additive perspective can better equip individuals to make future decisions because of their gained wisdom in their experience (Vaandering & Evans, 2016). The final influence is derived from the field of criminal justice. The participants expressed that they feel no sense of background or understanding of how restorative practices came to be.

Review of accountability data from hundreds of schools reveal that schools with the greatest gains in achievement consistently employ common assessments, non-fiction writing, and collaborative scoring by faculty (Reeves, 2004). Common assessments and consistency provide teachers with a basis of comparison as they learn. Furthermore, teachers are reluctant to persist in implementing new practices in the absence of evidence that what they’re doing makes a positive difference. Therefore, it is important to build some mechanism into the implementation process to show teachers that their new practices are working (Guskey, 2014). The inconsistency of what restorative conversations look and sound like are problematic to the participants. The participants

voiced the lack of protocols and assessment tools to the practice. The literature compliments a need to tie this together through assessments and consistency.

### **Research Question Conclusions**

This qualitative research study provides insight into the perceptions, opinions, and lived experiences of ten educators regarding the implementation of restorative practices in their school district. This research study also explored the overall impact of restorative practices of K-5 teachers. Each of the 10 participants offered a distinguishing perspective on the impact of restorative practices in their work. To answer the research question of this research study, similarities, themes, and trends gathered from the participant responses were used.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The target audiences identified at the beginning of this study were K-5 educators in a small school district in St. Louis, Missouri. This study highlights some of the challenges that educators encountered while trying to implement restorative practices in their school district. The participants experienced time constraint issues, school closures caused by the coronavirus pandemic, and lack of updated professional development and training collaboration. Educators in St. Louis, Missouri may find the findings in this study valuable when implementing restorative practices in middle or high schools.

### **Insufficient Time**

In conclusion to the interview discussions, it was obvious that teachers felt pressed with time. The data was clear that a set time of regimented restorative circles was not being implemented. Many participants admitted to not utilizing restorative practices and even thinking less fondly of the administrative approach to discipline. The participants admitted to not utilizing

this practice because it does not align with essential course outcomes or character education. It became evident that more time and professional development was needed.

### **Perception**

In the area of perception, it was evident that the participants in this study all recognized that a positive impact on student outcomes and stronger school community can be created within restorative practices. The participants reported that when schools closed, the district did not mandate this practice. This was especially subjective during the first half of the 2021 school year. The ambiguity and lack of structure caused confusion within the participant responses.

### **History**

Another area for educators to consider before implementing restorative practices is knowing the history. During the interviews, participants talked about their character words and restorative circles. There was a lack of attention of why or how the restorative approach came to their building. This lack of background caused a lack of motivation and interest in the subject when it did not succeed. The development of the practice and statistics of criminal restorative justice would be helpful tools for teacher buy in.

### **Consistency**

While recognizing that grace is necessary for student success, the participants expressed that they could not implement it because they did not feel supported by a curriculum of common verbiage. This compliments the subjectivity to the manner. One of the participants expressed the positive side to traditional discipline is accountability. Students know what to expect when a rule is broken in traditional punishment. The participants explained that restorative practices are not so cut and dry in routine discipline and expectations. This also needs to be consistent with our

essential course outcomes and social and emotional words. The practice is not aligned well at this time.

### **Researcher Insight**

The researcher learned that there was a lack of expanded understanding of restorative practices in educational settings. The participants did not know any sense of background or history in the practice. The researcher was able to empathize with teachers who truly had a lack of understanding this alternative to suspension and expulsion. The biggest asset to restorative practices is the ability to nurture healthy school climates. The research showed an apparent that lack of awareness of this overarching goal or vision. Previously, most of restorative practice training was expressed to be given via professional development. Several participants voiced the concern of not fully grasping the idea and having a lack of consistent protocol. This subjectivity, along with Covid-19 school closures, has delayed the implementation of the practice. The most valuable takeaway from this research was leadership implementation and communication.

The researcher would appreciate the perspective of administrations' perceptions on the practice. The researcher sees a gap in communication between administration and teachers of the practice. This gap is what created the themes of: insufficient time, perceptions, lack of history, and consistency within the participants responses. The researcher plans to share these themes with leaders or administrators of buildings who are implementing restorative practices. In summary, all ten participants voiced a concern of the idea of the practice properly being implemented. Therefore, the healthy school climates are not being achieved due to a lack of understanding of how to attain such goal.



### **Mending a Disconnected Society**

Restorative justice in education is a response to a disconnected society. “Healthy relationships, characterized by attachments and belonging, are a critical element for well-being. Restorative justice and practices in education uniquely emphasizes people’s dependence on one another, not their own independence. For relationships to become mutually beneficial, or interdependent, it is necessary to be aware of what constitutes quality relationships” (Vaandering & Evans, 2016, p. 61).

The researcher learned that restorative practices is a secret message of sharing power with the student rather than over a student. History shows that there has been an imbalance of power in schools over time. This evidence is crucial to the teaching the practice of restorative justice. In identifying power, one also relates it to self-worth. “Power is embodied in the support and expectations that people have for one another’s humanity. When people provide support and expectations in a balanced way, power is used constructively, and results in people engaging with and for each other instead of for themselves.” (Vaandering & Evans, 2016, p. 63).

The research clearly showed that teachers did not know the compass in which restorative practices were rooted in. In knowing that is based in principles of feeling belongingness, their lack of knowledge was a setback of teaching belongingness. Particularly if the participants do not feel it themselves. Howard Zehr articulated three core needs that serve as pillars of restorative practices and a fundamental for well-being: 1. Autonomy: a sense of personal control and empowerment. 2. Order: a sense of trust about the world we live in and how it works. 3. Relatedness: a sense of connection and where we fit in our relationships.

### **Future Trainings**

In an effort to help future training and professional developments in restorative practices, this researcher has found briefing on the practice and history of the practice is essential. The participants shared a lack of knowledge of even the definition. The researcher can also conclude that administration is lacking on restoring teachers. This relationship and connectedness is the first leadership position of the community. If the principal or leader of the school is not doing this practice with fidelity, and in all they do, the practice will likely loose in communication/translation.

In conclusion, the researcher noted a sense of cynicism when it came to the practice of restoration. The researcher concludes that burn out of behaviors was evident throughout my research. For this reason, many participants voiced that it simply did not work. In theory, it seems appealing, but without fidelity, it feels less efficient. The researcher recommends that the professional development of this practice comes straight from the leader of the school.

### **P-20 Implications**

This qualitative research study provides several P-20 implications in relation to innovation, implementation, diversity, and leadership. Although the educators who participated in this study were not entirely successful in their restorative approach of implementation due to factors discussed earlier, they understand that restorative language is crucial for addressing their students' social and emotional needs in a positive direction. This leads to the conclusion that an innovative training to implement restorative practices is necessary. The P-20 goal of implementation of the practice could be a goal for future trainings. Furthermore, diversity is

exemplified in the practice and leadership support is needed. The P-20 implications are weaved throughout the needs of restorative practice growth and the benefits already set in place.

### **Innovation**

Innovation is the practical implementation of ideas that create or introduce new goods or service for improvement. Innovation is taking a simple idea or service and thinking outside of the box with it. An example of innovation is taking theorists and applying their works to the ideas of my dissertation. The three major theorists that created personal innovative thinking are: Bruner, Maslow, and Eglash. These theorists and their values all connect to teacher leadership within this researched school and community. These researchers also connect their works to P-20 community leadership values.

Innovation is seen as necessary in the implementation of restorative circles and practices. The research shows that we must take these restorative rooted ideas and make them new and fresh in implementation. The innovative way to teach restorative practices might be digital check-ins of social and emotional well-being. Innovation is needed in the practice by taking the ideas of this old research to make root decision-making for positive school climates and trust to be built. Innovation is seen through the history of restorative practices. The criminal justice system rooted this practice and now it is being implemented in educational settings.

### **Implementation**

The student learning objective of implementation is well understood and researched throughout P-20 coursework. “Higher education institutions face important challenges, such as the need of responding to diverse social demands, increase of educational spending as well as the need to adapt to the new age of information and knowledge” (Calvo-Mora, Leal, and Roldan 2006). The existential approach addresses inch by inch improvements with guidance, but not

rules to follow. This creates teacher leadership communities to conclude “viewing ideas as tools, not as blueprints, they are things to use, not things to follow” (Bruner, 1977). This approach applies to learning being a process and journey.

Learning should create skills that allow for students to transfer the skill to problems or activities they encounter later (Brunner, 1977). This process is best described as implementation of learning. Bruner, a view of pragmatic learning is captivating. Bruner connects implementation to Social and Emotional Curriculum base and the upbringing of principles and attitude. This is a management piece of education that will carry through our everyday life. Bruner explained that the job of learning is to take us somewhere and allow us to progress forward easier (Brunner, 1977).

Implementation is seen throughout this research through learning from co-workers, counselors, or leadership to sharpen the restorative process. The research supports that there is a lack of implementation cohesiveness within professional beings in educational settings. The implementation of the practice could be tweaked in getting all educational participants on the same page of implementation. This compliments the idea of a better qualified script to follow or list of questions that coexist consistently within all levels of educational implementers.

### **Diversity**

Diversity can range from diverse thinking in motivation or diverse thinking of needs being met or even diverse outward appearances. When thinking of diversity, most think of the outward appearance and acceptance of race, culture, gender, etc. Psychologist Abraham Maslow identified seven categories of basic needs common to all people. Maslow represented these needs as a hierarchy in the shape of a pyramid. A hierarchy is an arrangement that ranks people or concepts from lowest to highest. According to Maslow, individuals must meet the needs at the

lower levels of the pyramid before they can successfully be motivated to tackle the next levels. The lowest four levels represent deficiency needs, and the upper three levels represent growth needs (Martin & Joomis, 2007).

Motivation is defined as a condition that activates and sustains behavior towards a goal. There is intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is the desire to complete something just for the sake of completing it while extrinsic motivation is the desire to complete something for a reward.

The research throughout this paper proves that diversity of needs should be at the forefront of the education system of restorative practices. The research proves that there are clear correlations between trust and care in a restorative classroom. The diversity of problem-solving skills is exemplified throughout this study. Students are not one shoe fits all and it is important to fulfill diverse needs in educational approaches to healing. The research supports the need to understand diverse needs in the classroom in order to mend and restore positive school climates. The P-20 concept of diversity is complimentary to the research and practice of restorative approaches.

### **Leadership**

Restorative Justice was created in the 1970's by Albert Eglash and focuses on mediation and agreement rather than punishment between victim and offender. Restorative Justice manifests itself in a school by focusing on implementing practices as alternatives to exclusionary discipline. The research proved that leadership is a key component to the success or deuteriation of implementation of these practices. Restorative practices train teachers and administrators on how they can respond to student problems without punishment. A significant component of restorative practices is building relationships with others.

The idea of building relationships with others starts at the district level and cohesion between leadership of principals to leadership of counselors, janitorial staff, bus drivers, and teachers. The essential need for leadership to be consistent and thorough with this approach is crucial to the impact of school-wide implementation. Restorative practices are an approach implemented by school staff that aligns with Restorative Justice. Specifically, the elements may (a) promote interpersonal support and connection, (b) uphold structure and fair process, and (c) integrate student voice (Gregory et al., 2016). The P-20 concept of leadership is essential in the development of the practice.

### **Limitations**

An inherent aspect of a qualitative study is it is not generalizable. While the conclusions of this study are not generalizable, they could be transferable to other situations. This study was conducted in the St. Louis school district. The sample size was a range of grade levels from K-5. The researcher had initially planned to interview one grade level (higher grades) but the sample size was too small. Interviewing same grade level participants would have provided more and richer data of participants. Ideally, a fifth-grade class would have been used.

Additionally, the findings may be limited because participants were trained seven years ago. The researcher understood that the continuum of this training has not been fine tuned. After the Covid-19 pandemic, the school district did not adjust training needs. Therefore, some had teacher buy in and implemented the practice while some did not. The changes in school routines may have affected the professional learning of this approach.

The demographic makeup of participants was another limitation of this research study. Nine out of the 10 participants were female and one of the ten were male. The researcher had planned to interview more diverse teachers in race, gender, and age. The limitation of only

researching with Caucasian teachers is not racially diverse enough. Lastly, another limitation of this study is that the researcher works in the district in which she studied. The researcher tried her very best to remain objective and avoid bias during the data collection and analysis process.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

For future research, the interview questions could be less repetitive. The desire for richer data turned to repetitive data. Additional studies may include a focus group of the individuals with follow-up questions. Additionally, the follow-up study may include other school districts in range of St. Louis, Missouri that implement restorative practices. The concept of comparing more than one district who implements the practice would be ideal for future research.

Similarly, involving students as participants in future research will be beneficial. Giving students the opportunity to discuss their perceptions on how restorative practices has influenced their well-being would provide for more accurate data. This research would be significantly harder to obtain, especially in kindergarten, but would be straight from the students themselves. Additionally, involving parents in future research is also recommended. Since parents are more likely to know their children better than the teachers, it would be beneficial to involve parents in the initial data collection to find out what the needs of their children are.

### **Conclusion**

The biggest deficit in this research was the ability to see clearer the restorative practice approach being formed effectively for the teachers as well as the students. The researcher wished to ask more concise questions about how the teacher feels restored by administration. There was an overwhelming theme of not feeling restored as teachers, therefore, they felt unable to restore students through the work day. In addition, the lack of time, subjectivity, history of the practice, and consistency were factors working against the practice.

This qualitative research served as a grand gesture to demonstrate several P-20 concepts to restorative practices. The researcher was able to code the findings and understand a relation to innovation, implementation, diversity, and leadership to succeed the practice. Like any great research project, things did not go as perfectly planned and lessons were learned. In all, the conclusions proved helpful and meaningful in the researcher's pursuit to understanding restorative practices in K-5 teachers.



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## Appendix A

### District Letter of Approval





**Learning and Support Services**

Administrative Center Annex  
500 North Central Avenue  
Eureka, MO 63025-1263

636.733.2146  
636.733.8848 Fax  
hancockglenn@rockwood.org

**Glenn Hancock**  
Director of Research, Evaluation and Assessment

November 2023

RE: Request for Research within the Rockwood School District  
Project Title: Perceptions of Elementary School Teachers on Restorative Practices  
Institution: Murray State University  
Researcher: Jessica Finney

Dear Jessica Finney,

We have reviewed your application to perform research and the associated documentation in support of your application with researching Perceptions of Elementary School Teachers on Restorative Practices. As Director of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment for the Rockwood School District, I hereby express Rockwood's interest in supporting your research endeavor.

Your process explains that you will take required precautions to protect student, parent, staff and school confidentiality and there will be no interference with the normal instructional time offered to students to conduct this research. As part of this agreement you will be responsible for recruiting, communicating and scheduling interviews with research participants.

Furthermore, in line with this approval, any significant modifications to the study must be promptly communicated to Rockwood. If there are changes in Rockwood's interests, we retain the right to withdraw our consent at any point. Finally, as a condition of Rockwood's approval for your research application, you are obligated to submit the research results upon the completion of the project.

If I can be of further assistance, please let me know. Good luck in your research investigation.

Sincerely,

Glenn Hancock  
Director of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment

cc: Dr. Shelley Willott, Assistant Superintendent of Learning Support Services  
Dr. Gary Jansen, Executive Director of Secondary Education  
Dr. Dave Cobb, Assistant Superintendent, Supervision of Schools

## Appendix B

Research Director Letter/Email

Hi all,

The following teachers have agreed to participate in research regarding Restorative Practices.

The researcher is a Rockwood teacher working on their doctorate that would like to partner with an elementary school or two to conduct research about Restorative Practices within Rockwood and perceptions of the practice. This only involves teachers, and those listed below have agreed to help the researcher Below is an outline of the research:

- A half hour interview via Zoom is time required.
- No role of principal or student. The only role is teacher feedback.
- The researcher will send the Zoom invitation and record the meeting.
- The researcher will then transcribe the data and make conclusions based on ten participants and their input.
- The benefit to the school is having a deeper understanding of Restorative Practices in Rockwood School District and the perceptions of their success/room for improvement(s).

If you have any questions or issues with their participation, please let me know by the end of the day on **Wednesday, 11/28**. Thanks, Glenn

## Appendix C

Murray State University IRB Approval



**Institutional Review Board**  
328 Wells Hall  
Murray, KY 42071-3318  
(270) 809-2916  
[Msu.irb@murraystate.edu](mailto:Msu.irb@murraystate.edu)

Date: 01/17/2024

Principal Investigator: Jessica Finney

Faculty Sponsor: Randal Wilson

IRB Approver: Dr. Dada

IRB Reference Number: 24-125

The IRB has completed its review of Exempt protocol K-5 Educator's Perceptions of Restorative Practices in St. Louis, MO. After review and consideration, the IRB has determined that the research as described in the protocol form, will be conducted in compliance with Murray State University Guidelines for the Protection of human participants.

**The forms and materials approved for use in this research study are attached to the email containing this letter. These are the forms and materials that must be presented to the subjects. Use of any process or forms other than those approved by the IRB will be considered misconduct in research as stated in the MSU IRB procedures and Guidelines section 20.3.**

**Your stated data collection period is from 01/17/2024-01/17/2025**

If data collection extends beyond this period, please submit a continuation to an approved protocol form detailing the new data collection period and the reason for the change.

**This Exempt approval is valid until 01/17/2025.**

If data collection and analysis extends beyond this date, the research project must be reviewed as a continuation project by the IRB prior to the end of the approval period, 01/17/2024. You must reapply for IRB approval by submitting a Project Update and Closure form (available at [murraystate.edu/IRB](http://murraystate.edu/IRB)). You must allow ample time for IRB processing and decision before your expiration date, or your research must stop until IRB approval is received. If the research project is completed by the end of the approval period, a Project Update and Closure form must be submitted for the IRB review so your protocol may be closed. It is your responsibility to submit the appropriate paperwork promptly.

**This protocol is approved. You may begin data collection now.**

Appendix D  
Interview Questions

*Interview Questions to Address Research Questions*

| <b><u>Research question #1</u></b><br>What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the implementation of restorative practices? | <b><u>Research question #2</u></b><br>How do elementary school teachers implement restorative practices in the classroom?  | <b><u>Research question #3</u></b><br>What do elementary school teachers need to implement restorative practices? | <b><u>Research question #4</u></b><br>What collaboration is needed to implement restorative practice for elementary school teachers? | <b><u>Research question #5</u></b><br>What barriers do elementary school teachers have in implementing restorative practices? |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| 1. What is your opinion of Restorative practices.  | 1. What is discussed during a Restorative conversation?  | 1. How does your administrator support the 5 R's.   | 1. How often do you meet to discuss or learn more about restorative practices?   | 1. Do you feel you have sufficient time to restore poor behaviors?  |
| 2. What are your observations of Restorative practices.  | 2. Describe a typical Restorative Intervention with one of your students.  | 2. What are your typical needs to restore yourself in the situation and then the child?                           | 2. Are there other colleagues outside of your grade level who are helping you grow in this topic professionally? Who?                | 2. How would you describe your school culture regarding Restorative practice?   |
| 3. What do you observe in children when you use restorative practices? What do you observe in yourself?                                      | 3. Describe the level of knowledge that you have about the 5 R's (relationship, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration) and how you implement them throughout the day. | 3. Do you feel you are growing professionally as a result of your restorative way of teaching? Why or why not?    | 3. Have you ever disagreed between administration because of the restorative approach? Describe why or why                           | 3. Describe the greatest challenge you have with restorative practices?   |
| 4. Do you think a restorative practice approach to discipline is extra work  | 4. Do you think additional training or professional development on restorative practices would   | 4. What are the discussions of Restorative Justice in your school?  | 4. Has the collaborative culture changed at your school since restorative practices have   |   |

|                           |  |                                       |   |  |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| throughout your work day? | benefit your grade level team? Why or why not. |                                       | become a normalized topic requirement? How? |  |
|                           |  | 5. Do you get administrative support? |   |  |