

Restorative Practices at a Charter K-3 Elementary School

First Year Implementation Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

This evaluation assesses the first year of restorative practices (RP) implementation at a charter elementary school in the southern United States and its impact on the school's climate specific to the goals of (a) transparency and authenticity, (b) physical and emotional safety, and (c) connectedness between members of the school community.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Background	8
Restorative Practices Whole School Approach	9
Restorative Practices at the Elementary Charter School	10
Methodology	11
Findings	14
Impact: Connectedness	14
Impact: Emotional and physical safety	17
Impact: Transparency and authenticity	18
RP implementation process	20
Teacher-administration challenges	22
Time challenges	29
Training challenges	32
Communication challenges	34
Discussion	36
Conclusion	41
References	41
Appendices	
Appendix A: Assessment of Teacher and Staff Level of Engagement with RP Survey	44
Appendix B: Focus Groups	47
Appendix C: Administrator Interview Guides	50
Appendix D: restorative Questions	51
Tables and Figures	
Table 1. Teacher demographic data	14
Table 2. Timeframe and indicators of change	38
Table 3. Stages of whole school RP implementation	39

Restorative Practices at a Charter K-3 Elementary School: First Year Implementation Evaluation

Executive Summary

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the first-year implementation of Restorative Practices (RP) at an urban charter elementary school in the southern United States and its impact on school climate. “RP is a whole school relational approach to building school climate and addressing student behavior that fosters belonging over exclusion, social engagement over control, and meaningful accountability over punishment” (Armour, 2014). RP includes processes and practices that build a community based on a relational ecology (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012) that prevents wrongdoing, and productively addresses conflict. When the leadership begun school-wide implementation of RP, parents, teachers, and students were already reporting high satisfaction on the annual school survey; however, the administrative team saw RP as a way to further their ongoing school community engagement efforts and enhance the school climate. They saw RP as an approach that can help them create a school climate that (i) supports transparency and authenticity of staff and students (e.g., being comfortable with telling the truth; being honest and able to communicate directly); (ii) ensures physical and emotional safety; and (iii) increases connectedness among the members of the school community. Additionally, while the school was not experiencing any major challenges related to physical safety and undesirable student behaviors, the school leadership saw implementation of RP as a preventative measure given the school’s continuous growth.

The school partnered with a community-based restorative justice organization to hire a part time RP Coordinator to implement the initiative in the school. The RP Coordinator facilitated circles with students, teachers, and families. She also worked individually with referred students and provided coaching to teachers to help them respond effectively to the students’ needs. Most teachers facilitated community-building circles in their classrooms. Additionally, a number of teachers also facilitated family circles and circles of support and accountability. The administrative team, RD coordinator, and the community-based organization representative met regularly. The RP implementation team--the school administrators (Principle and Assistant Principles) and the RP Coordinator—provided leadership. Finally, the school implemented a Restorative Practices Committee comprised of eight teachers and the RP Coordinator to assist with RP implementation. The Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue (IRJRD) in the School of Social Work at The University of Texas at Austin provided periodic consultation and conducted the evaluation of the first year RP implementation.

Methodology

The sample for this evaluation was comprised of all teachers (n=21), all school administrators (n=3), and a sample of students (n=18). All teachers completed the RP Engagement Survey (RPES) to assess their level of engagement with RP. There were two focus groups conducted with teachers (n=11) and five group interviews with students to assess their experiences with RP. Additionally, IRJRD conducted individual interviews with school administrators. In compliance with The University of Texas at Austin, Institutional Review Board participation in this evaluation was voluntary.

Findings

In its first year of implementation, the school generated a truly remarkable school-wide commitment to RP from the administrators, staff, parents, and students. At the same time, the findings revealed the complexity of implementing restorative justice and the need for more strategic planning. The evaluation findings are followed by the recommendations for next steps based on lessons learned during the first year of implementation.

- The vast majority of teachers and administrators were enthusiastic about restorative practices (RP). They saw RP as a valuable approach to building relationships with the students, parents and peers, while tending to the students' social and emotional needs. Approximately 90% of teachers agreed that RP was an effective approach to building and sustaining trusting relationships and community.
- The children who participated in Circles of Support and Accountability (COSAs) with the RP Coordinator outside of their classroom were enthusiastic about the process. They enjoyed their relationship with the RP Coordinator and other circle participants. The students saw restorative circles as a space where they could be transparent about their feelings (e.g., share feelings without being judged) and receive support (e.g., everyone loves you).
- Teachers and administrators observed positive social, emotional, and academic changes among the students who had been involved with RP. They emphasized the positive impact of peer circles, continuous circles, 1:1 support, and family circles on connectedness and trust, which in turn had a positive impact on students' academic success.
- RP was implemented school-wide, but inconsistently. Some teachers did not use RP in their classrooms, while others partnered with their colleagues and facilitated circles with multiple families. All administrators participated in circles. Among teachers, approximately 90% participated in at least one circle and 38% participated in more than five circles. Teachers who participated in focus groups identified several memorable incidents, primarily related to physical safety, when RP could have been used to repair harm, but were not implemented in a timely or an effective manner.
- Teachers and administrators saw the role of the RP Coordinator as essential for supporting students and facilitating circles. They expressed gratitude for her work, skills, and support in engaging the school community. They also expressed the need for more training and coaching from the RP Coordinator in order to develop the level of skills needed for confidently and independently using RP. Given the level of need, they viewed the RP Coordinator's part-time appointment and limited availability as a major obstacle to the success of RP at the school.
- All teachers received RP training, but the amount of training varied: approximately 33%

received 1-3 hours, 24% received more than 3 but less than 6 hours, and 43% received 6 or more hours of training. However, almost half of the teachers (48%) did not feel confident in using RP. Training needed to be more frequent and diversified. While they valued the experiential training they received, teachers also needed more didactic training about RP theory and philosophy, evidence for RP, age-appropriate RP practices, and various forms of RP.

- RP Committee members valued the additional training and support they received as members of this group. While the individual members utilized RP in their daily work, the committee was not as active in the process of implementation as originally intended. The committee members expressed a strong desire and commitment to playing a more active role in training others and influencing policy during the second year of RP implementation.
- Teachers who participated in focus groups emphasized the effectiveness of family circles as a culturally responsive approach to engaging and connecting with the school families, building trust, and truly meeting the students' emotional, social and academic needs; however they pointed out that the family circles were underutilized due to lack of resources (e.g., time, coverage, RP Coordinator availability), their confidence in facilitating, and administrative emphasis on professional boundaries. Both teachers and administrators recommended strong focus on family circles in the future.
- Limited time and staffing coverage needed for implementing RP with integrity presented major challenges for teachers. Teachers who participated in focus groups identified lack of time and coverage as top obstacles to RP implementation, causing a number of them to question the school's true commitment to RP.
- Teachers who participated in focus groups expressed a desire to play a greater role in responding to their students' needs, including discipline. While they appreciated the RP Coordinator's role, many wanted to be actively involved in facilitating circles with students and families. A number of teachers believed that referring their students to the Assistant Principle, RD Coordinator, or a Counselor for discipline or emotional needs was disruptive to their relationship. They felt the school did not trust them to know what was best for their students. Ensuring classroom coverage in a timely way to allow teachers to engage with particular students and increase their skill level would allow them to play a more active role in meeting their students' needs.
- Focus group participants experienced conflict between the school's endorsement of RP and strong focus on curriculum and instruction, resulting in fears that they would be evaluated poorly or reprimanded if they shifted the curriculum to tend to their students' social and emotional needs.
- Both teachers who participated in focus groups and administrators experienced conflict between RP's focus on authentic relationships and professionalism at the school. RP inspired many teachers to be more honest, direct, and authentic with colleagues,

students, and parents. At the same time teachers who participated in focus groups feared that the school administrators would perceive authenticity as antithetical to professionalism. Administrators and teachers needed help with thinking about the power of authenticity within professional boundaries.

- Teachers and administrators identified significant frustration and confusion with two conflicting approaches to discipline: RP which is a relationally oriented approach to behavior and the old reward color-based behavior system, which many perceived as punitive. In addition to developing an RP-based integrated approach to character building and discipline, both teachers and administrators expressed a strong need for developing an explicit and formal RP structure with clearly outlined processes and procedures (e.g., referral process, follow up, coordination and communication with other involved individuals, coverage)
- Several teachers who participated in focus groups perceived RP's emphasis on relationships and community as key to uprooting structural racism and other forms of oppression experienced by students, their families, and staff. They specifically discussed how internalized oppression manifested in the punitive approaches to discipline in communities of color. RP has challenged them to personally examine and begin unlearning some of these attitudes as well as help parents with a more relational approach to discipline.
- While the use of RP to resolve interpersonal conflict among staff resulted in mixed outcomes, both teachers who participated in focus groups and administrators recognized the potential of RP to address human resources concerns and staff conflict.

Recommendations

- Develop a Leadership Response Team (LRT) that includes diverse stakeholders (e.g., administrators, teachers, RP Coordinator, staff who are not teachers, school counselor). Consider meaningful ways to include parent and student voice into the work of the LRT. Spend time strengthening the relationships among the team members and creating a safe space for productive conflict. Ideally this group would embody RP, modeling the behaviors and attitudes they want others to exhibit. Consider using an external facilitator to assist the group with this process so that all group members can fully participate.
- Engage teachers, staff and other stakeholders in developing the school-wide RP vision, clarifying values, and outlining a strategic plan consistent with the vision. The strategic plan should focus on four areas: systems (e.g., disciplinary system, behavioral system), learning and growth (e.g., professional development), resourcing (e.g., yearly cost for PD, staffing coverage, staff travel to observe other schools and attend national trainings), and policy (e.g., vision, mission, values, RP implementation procedures in various settings, referral process). The focus should be on developing flexible processes

and procedures tailored to the school community needs rather than rigid and scripted “cookie-cutter” responses.

- Use Thorsborne and Blood’s (2013) Stages of Whole School RP Implementation tool (Table 1) to monitor the implementation process and ensure that all eight steps are completed. While the order of steps is not important, completing all eight steps is crucial for successful RP implementation.
- Replace color-based behavior management system with values-based relationally oriented RP approach to manage classroom dynamics. Pilot the plan in several classrooms. Make any necessary changes based on the pilot, then implement school-wide. Review as necessary for modification and to ensure that the plan does not become rigidified.
- Increase RP Coordinators’ availability to at least 30 hours per week.
- Provide frequent ongoing high quality RP training with didactic and experiential components. Provide opportunities to practice RP interventions and receive feedback. Integrate knowledge about practices with content on critical consciousness, anti-oppressive practices, and meaningful inclusion into the RP training.
- Engage the RP Committee in developing a resource library of articles, books, and activities, including age appropriate RP practices.
- Develop a firm staffing coverage plan to ensure teachers can facilitate and participate in circles.
- Conduct ongoing circles with administrators, teachers, and staff to: (i) build relationships and strengthen the community; (ii) increase empathy through understanding what the school community members have to live with in their roles; (iii) explore and clarify community values; and (iv) develop shared understanding for practice expectations. Focus on the process and development of shared understanding rather than immediately fixing challenges.
- Engage school families through the use of RP practices. Offer family circles and RP training for parents. Enlist families in creating a forum to give parents a voice and formal avenue for involvement with RP implementation.

Restorative Practices at a Charter School: First Year Implementation Evaluation

Background

The charter school is a dual language urban elementary school in the southern United States that follows the 50/50 dual language approach where students spend half of their day learning in English and half of their day learning in Spanish. The school primarily serves Latino and African American families. Out of approximately 400 students 90% were Latino and 9% were African American. Almost 89% of the students were low income and 71% were English language learners. In addition to academic excellence, the school has a strong commitment to providing quality education in a context of positive relationships and a strong community.

Based on the annual parent, teacher, and student school satisfaction surveys, the charter elementary school consistently outperformed other similar schools in the region and the network. While average satisfaction scores have been consistently high, the leadership recognized that restorative practices (RP) offered an avenue for full realization of the school's community building vision. The administrative team decided to implement RP after the school partnered with a community-based restorative justice agency to conduct a series of family circles aimed at meeting the needs of one school family. In this case the traditional approaches such as parent conferences, increased communication, different cool-down techniques, and counseling were mostly ineffective and further exasperated the student's undesirable behaviors. The circle structure allowed parents, teachers, administrators and the student to see each other's perspectives and collectively get to the root cause of the student's challenges. The Principal and several teachers observed significant positive changes in the child's behavior as a result of participating in circles, including trusting adults and feeling empowered to speak up when he needed support.

This initial experience allowed the school's administrative team to realize RP's clear alignment with the school's vision of community building. Moved by the positive impact of the family circle, the Principal approached the community-based agency which facilitated the initial circles about the possibility of implementing RP at the school. The community-based agency's supportive and nonjudgmental approach to partnership grounded in deep respect for self-determination proved instrumental for the first year of RP implementation at this charter school.

Restorative Practice Whole School Approach

Restorative Practices (RP) is the application of restorative justice to schools. Rooted in the peace philosophy of the U.S. Mennonite community and the traditional practices of the indigenous people of North America and New Zealand, RJ seeks to involve all impacted by an offense to collectively repair harms and "put things as right as possible" (Zehr, 2002, p. 37). Any misconduct is considered a violation of people and relationships rather than a violation of the law or school rules (Zehr, 2002). As a result, violations create obligations to address the needs of those who have been harmed, the wrongdoer(s), and the community and provide an opportunity for those most directly impacted by that harm to be involved in responding to it and making things as right as possible for all concerned (Zehr, 2002). In schools these ideas translate into building a relational ecology, which relies on relationships as a motivator for change rather than fear. Within the relational ecology

context community members make changes because they care about each other rather than fear punitive consequences.

RP relies principally on circles to build community and resolve school-related conflict such as violence, bullying, truancy, and disruptive behavior (Umbreit & Armour, 2011). Unlike punitive zero-tolerance policies, which exclude students from the school community, circles and other restorative practices act to reintegrate the student as a productive member of the community thereby decreasing the potential for separation, resentment, and recidivism (González, 2012). While the community recognizes the undesirable behavior as harmful, the person is treated as a valued member of the community who has the capacity to act differently and can make different choices in the future (Riestenberg, 2012).

Although schools implement restorative practices in a number of ways, there is general agreement that a whole-school approach is preferred over a classroom or fragmented model because it is a systems-based intervention. Implementation of the whole school RP model requires concentration on building a closely-knit and caring school community (Kidde & Alfred, 2011). Morrison's three-tier model (Figure 1) offers a visual representation of the whole-school implementation approach and outlines what is needed for healthy relationships at each level of the model. Primary or Tier 1 practices are key to the whole school approach because they strengthen and reaffirm relationships among the community members through developing social and emotional skills (e.g., classroom circles to "check in" with students at the beginning of the week or "check out" before the weekend as well as to develop classroom values). When the whole school community rests on a foundation of restorative principles, it becomes easier to manage difficulties and respond to harmful incidents in a supportive way because the caring and supportive culture is already present (Kidde & Alfred, 2011). Secondary or Tier 2 practices build on the Tier 1 practices and focus on repairing relationship. The goal is to respond to difficulties that arise in the school community through problem solving and addressing conflict. Finally Tier 3 practices focus on rebuilding relationships and addressing harm through intensive specific student practices.

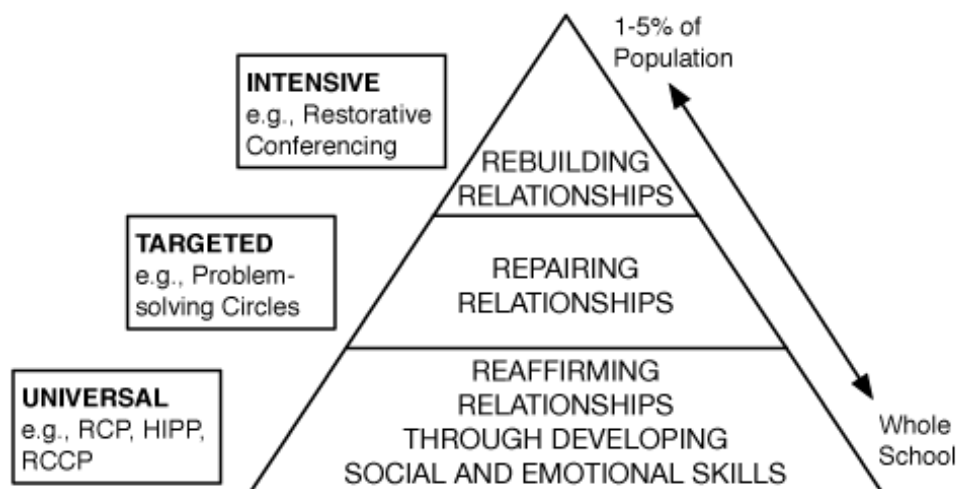


Figure 1. Hierarchy of restorative responses, Morison (2007).

Restorative Practices at the Elementary Charter School

The school partnered with a community-based restorative justice organization to hire a part time RP Coordinator to assist them with RP implementation. The RP Coordinator was housed at the elementary school three days a week, but directly reported to a Program Director at the community-based organization. This was imperative for ensuring her authority to focus on RP implementation fidelity and integrity. While she was fully integrated into the school's daily operations, she was outside of the school's organizational hierarchy and power structure, which gave her freedom to provide feedback and engage in advocacy.

The RP Coordinator 1) facilitated circles with students, teachers, and families; 2) worked individually with referred students; 3) and provided coaching to teachers to help them respond effectively to the students' needs. The school provided the RP Coordinator with an office, which was important for ensuring private uninterrupted meetings and circles with students. She also prioritized building relationships with the students, teachers, parents and the administrative team. The students could contact her directly by coming to her office, stopping her in a hallway, or writing her a note delivered via teachers. She also participated in two school-wide meetings with parents where she provided information about RP in English and Spanish.

Given the children's ages (5-8 years old), the RP coordinator focused on adapting the interventions to be developmentally appropriate. For example, she created a form that allowed children to describe their feelings through drawing, rather than solely relying on the use of language. To check in at the beginning of the circle, the students used a form with a blank circle they could modify to express their current state (e.g. smiley face, sad face, confused face). She also ensured that her room was comfortable yet simple, with limited decorations to minimize distraction and help the children focus on being in a circle. Finally, she ensured that she consistently used the five restorative questions (See Appendix D) with all children because they minimized defensiveness and allowed children to respond with honesty. Towards the end of the first year of implementation she also began training students to be peer circle facilitators.

All teachers and administrators received training prior to the beginning of the school year. The community-based restorative justice organization delivered the training. Teachers and administrators received additional training during two follow up sessions. Most teachers facilitated community-building circles in their classrooms. Additionally, a number of teachers also facilitated family circles and circles of support and accountability. The Restorative Practices Committee was primarily a venue for receiving additional RP training and supporting the members in developing confidence to serve as RP leaders at the school.

The RP implementation team--the school administrators (Principle and Assistant Principles), the RP Coordinator, and the community-based restorative justice organization's representative —provided leadership during the first year of implementation. The RP implementation team met regularly. The RP Coordinator and the Principle met weekly to discuss implementation progress and individual student needs. This was important for two reasons: 1) the Principle had an extensive knowledge of

students, their families, and teachers and could provide information to the RP Coordinator about the students' situations; 2) the regular contact with the Principle ensured expediency in addressing barriers to needed interventions. Expediency was especially important given the children's developmental stage and the need to respond quickly in order to support their social and emotional learning. The RD Coordinator and her supervisor from the community-based restorative justice organization met weekly for supervision and guidance. She also sent weekly email updates to the school's administrative team. The Principle, RP Coordinator, and her supervisor met monthly to ensure coordination and address challenges. Lastly, RP was a standing item during the weekly meeting between the Principle and the two Assistant Principles. In addition to their work at the school, the Principle and the RP Coordinator often participated in community forums and trainings where they shared their experiences with RP implementation at their school. Finally, The University of Texas at Austin Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue provided periodic consultation and completed the evaluation of the first year RP implementation.

Methodology

Because this school did not have a strong history of a punitive and exclusionary approach to student behavior, the purpose for implementing RP was not to reduce punitive measures such as suspensions. Rather, the purpose of the implementation and basis for evaluating its impact were informed by the school's overall goals which are (i) transparency and authenticity, (ii) physical and emotional safety, and (iii) connectedness between members of the school community.

The sample for this evaluation was comprised of all teachers (n=21), all school administrators (n=3), and a sample of students (n=18). All teachers completed the RP Engagement Survey (RPES) to assess their level of engagement with RP. Fifty two percent of teachers (n=11) also participated in two focus groups. Additionally, there were five group interviews with students to assess their experiences with RP. Additionally, IRJRD conducted individual interviews with school administrators. In compliance with The University of Texas at Austin, Institutional Review Board participation in this evaluation was voluntary.

Data was collected using a number of sources and methods.

- a. **Restorative Practices Engagement Survey (RPES):** RPES is a five question anonymous survey for teachers and staff about their level of engagement with restorative practices at the school (e.g., number of hours of professional development, participation in circles and confidence about using RP). In addition to the five RP-related questions, this survey also includes demographic questions about the role of teachers and staff at the school, number of years at the school, race/ethnicity, and gender identity. Finally the survey included a qualitative component with questions about which aspects of RP worked well during the first year of RP implementation and which aspects should change (see Appendix A).
- b. **Focus Groups:** Two 2-hour focus groups were conducted with teachers. One focus group was comprised of teachers from all grades who voluntarily served on the Restorative Practices Committee. The other focus group was comprised of second

grade teachers. The focus groups used different semi-structured interview guides to collect data about participants' demographics and experience with RP as an approach to improving school climate (see Appendix B). Both focus groups were held at the school. The focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

- c. **Administrator Interviews:** One-hour audio-recorded face-to-face interviews were conducted with three school administrators using a semi-structured interview guide to collect demographics and experiences with implementation (See Appendix C). The interviews were transcribed verbatim.
- d. **Student interviews:** There were five 30-minute audio-recorded face-to-face interviews conducted with children who participated in circles of support and accountability (COSA) as a result of a referral for undesirable behavior. The interviews were conducted during school hours. There were no demographics collected and an interview guide was not used. Students were asked to talk about the circle process but without revealing details about their individual difficulties. The RP Coordinator was present during the interviews to provide support and make it easier for children to participate. The small group format was used to ease possible discomfort for young children who were interviewed by an unfamiliar adult. Interviews were transcribed verbatim.

While evaluations of RP in schools usually relies on the outcomes measures such as frequency of suspensions and expulsions to evaluate effectiveness of the approach, these outcomes measures are not appropriate for this evaluation given the age and grade level of the students (K-3).

Protection of Human Subjects

In compliance with The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board participation in this evaluation was voluntary. All RPES survey, interview, and focus group adult participants signed an informed consent. All students who participated in focus groups provided an informed consent signed by their parent or guardian.

Surveys. All surveys were completed anonymously. No identifying data were included on the survey.

Interviews and Focus Groups. Interview and focus groups participants were told that the information shared would be kept confidential and not be divulged to others in ways that are inconsistent with the understanding of the original disclosure.

Individual interview transcriptions were de-identified and only contained the data about the participant's role and demographic information. Pseudonyms were used to identify participants and there was no document matching pseudonyms to information that could identify individual participants. To further protect participant identities, any names mentioned in the interviews were altered in the transcription.

Data Confidentiality. All data was shared among the research team using UTBox. Interviews and focus group discussions were digitally recorded and transferred to the UTBox for transcription. UTBox is a campus-wide service that allows faculty, staff, and

students at the University of Texas at Austin to use cloud-based file sharing for business and academic purposes. UTBox allows for safe store of Category I data. All records from this study were stored securely and kept confidential. Audio recordings were labeled using the dates of interviews and pseudonyms. Surveys were destroyed after data entry. Audio recordings, transcripts, and written notes will be erased two years following study completion so that the information can be re-reviewed as needed during that period.

Analysis. Data from RPES was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Interviews and focus groups were analyzed for themes and the findings grounded in direct quotes from participants.

Limitations. While the research team utilized mixed methods to conduct the evaluation (surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups), a large portion of the findings was derived from the two focus groups with teachers (n=11 or 52%). A focus group is a qualitative research method which, allows a researcher to systematically and simultaneously interview several individuals (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). Focus groups represent a flexible and cost-effective tool to gather data and use the group dynamic to uncover topics, which usually do not emerge in surveys; however, they have several disadvantages (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). The focus group participants are not randomly selected and therefore may not represent the opinions of all group members (e.g., the entire school staff). Additionally, the focus group format could generate the problem of group conformity, or group think, which is the tendency of the group participants to confirm with the opinions of the most outspoken members (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). While the researcher-interviewer was aware of the possibility of this dynamic and ensured that all focus group members participated, the influence of this phenomena cannot be completely ruled out. Costs and time precluded a more inclusive series of interviews and focus groups with the full staff. Consequently, the reader should be mindful of these limitations when interpreting the findings.

Findings

All administrators, all teachers, and a sample of children from K-3 grades participated in the evaluation. Table 1 summarizes teacher demographic information. The evaluation findings are organized in four groups: connectedness, physical and emotional safety, transparency and authenticity, and RP implementation process.

Table 1. Teacher Demographics

	% (n)	M (SD)	Min	Max
Gender				
Female	76.2 (16)			
Male	19 (4)			
Genderqueer	4.8 (1)			
Race/ethnicity				
Black or African American	9.5 (2)			
Hispanic/Latino	52.4 (11)			
White	28.6 (6)			
Other	9.5 (2)			
Years Teaching		2.5 (1.33)	1	6

Impact: Connectedness

The vast majority of teachers were enthusiastic about RP as a valuable approach to building relationships with the students, parents and peers while tending to the students' social and emotional needs. Based on their experiences, approximately 90% of teachers agreed that RP was an effective approach to building and sustaining trusting relationships and community, with 67% agreeing and 24% strongly agreeing.

Connecting with Students. RP allowed teachers to develop authentic relationships with their students based on mutuality. A teacher shared how she repaired harm after harshly responding to a student who repeatedly disrespected her and how in turn the student responded:

... I've held space for him, all year long. And like we have a relationship and then he just was like really disrespectful... And I got really upset and he was just laughing. He wouldn't do his work and he wouldn't address me. And I ripped up his paper and I got everyone's attention. I really shamed him. "If this is how we're going to act, this is how I feel. If this [is] what you're going to do with my relationship, this is how I feel about your paper." I ripped it up and I threw it at him. And I said, "Now pick it up." It was like one of the rawest moments ever teaching, because I was so angry. Afterwards I was really embarrassed and I felt really bad that night. I apologized to him the next day ... and [then] we had a circle meeting... I said, "The way that I expressed my anger in frustration with you was unacceptable. However, you know, you really hurt my feelings." Later on he apologized to me. I was convinced he's going to be very mad at me. But then later on, he gives me a really long letter apologizing to me. And then the next morning he gives me a chocolate bar. After that it was fine... I would never do

that to anyone. The only reason I did that to him [is] because he's so small. And he can't do anything about it.

In the context of this emerging relational ecology, teachers who participated in the focus group expressed a desire to play a greater role in responding to their students' needs, including discipline. While they appreciated RP Coordinator's role, many wanted to facilitate their own circles to address undesirable behaviors and build relationships with their students and families. Focus group participants were frustrated about the lack of time or staff coverage to respond to their students' discipline or emotional needs and the resulting referrals to the Assistant Principle, RP Coordinator, or School Counselor.

Connecting with Families. Administrators and teachers believed that RP helped them strengthen relationships with the students' families, which in turn improved the children's academic performance. The administrative team described plans to further focus on engaging families in the second year of implementation, including educating parents about RP and how to advocate for circles. This strategic step was consistent with what teachers identified as the necessary next step in RP implementation at the school.

Teachers who participated in focus groups emphasized the effectiveness of family circles as a culturally responsive approach to engaging and connecting with the school families, building trust, and truly meeting the students' emotional, social and academic needs. A teacher described the impact of a family circle on parents of a student who had a hard time regulating his body and was unintentionally hurting other students:

The parents came and we were able to communicate how much we cared for their student and they were able to see that. Which is hard to communicate when you're mostly communicating about negative days, you know? And so, for them to sit with us for thirty minutes and hear our hearts about this child was amazing... It wasn't a harm circle, it was just like a connection circle, but, I feel like it restored any harm that could've been done, cause mom was frustrated cause she kept getting calls and ... So, I think it just creates this community, like, we're one team and we're one family, and we're gonna do whatever it takes to get our kids from point A to Z.

However, the focus group participants emphasized that the family circles were underutilized due to the school's lack of resources (e.g., time, coverage, RP Coordinator availability), teachers' lack of confidence in facilitating them, and the administrative team's lack of clear expectations for the use of RP.

Connecting with Staff. Teachers and administrators reported that RP has positively impacted relationships among the staff members. One administrator described the staff response to circles conducted during professional development:

Even seeing the chairs all in a circle as people walk in, I can see a sense of like, "Okay, we're coming together," and it seems to be really reenergizing. And then afterwards, I'll always have a couple people come up and hug me and say, "Thank you for doing that. This is exactly what I needed."

Additionally, the staff members who participated in the RP Committee described the meetings as “therapeutic.”

It was in a space where you could confide in people, where it was typically open with no inhibitions. And building that trust, that everybody has something that has happened in their life, and being able to confide in people. Being able to open yourself and just be freely, um, like without judgment. And then being able to, in a way, you know, leave those scars behind.

The second grade teachers had a unique RP experience because they participated in two circles as a group. The goal of these circles was to address significant interpersonal conflicts that negatively impacted their ability to function as a team. These mandated circles, anonymously initiated by one of the second grade teachers and supported by the administrative team, had a mixed outcome. For some group members these circles provided an opportunity to begin the process of reconciliation because, for the first time, they saw their colleagues as complex human beings beyond the limited role they have at the school. For others, the circles were ineffective because they were mandated, “sugarcoated,” and conflict-avoidant. While the group eventually resolved these interpersonal challenges and became a cohesive team, not all members attributed this success to RP.

The desire for authenticity among administrator and teachers who participated in the focus groups stood in contrast to the teachers’ underlying fears of negative consequences for authenticity. One of the administrative team members was surprised to learn about this dynamic during a staff circle:

My mind was blown because of course, you wouldn't get fired, or you wouldn't get written up. I don't know what the negative consequences are, but in my mind, of course that wouldn't happen. But hearing from several people that that was a real concern, was like, “Okay. We do need something like [RP] so that people really do feel safe expressing themselves.”

The second grade teachers’ focus group participants and administrators recognized the potential of RP in the future to address these fears as well as other human resource concerns and staff conflicts. The current HR protocol, however, outlines the process steps, but did not always lead to a meaningful resolution. While the staff exhibited respectful behavior, the underlying issues often remained unresolved, which ultimately undermined the community strength.

People correct the business, but the personal aspect of it isn't necessarily hit, because we're adults and we're professional. “Okay. I'll follow through and I'll just get that done, cause this is my job and I need to do that.” Versus it being like, “Okay, let me hear this person out and see why it is that that offended them.”

As a result, an administrator wanted to see RP more fully utilized to help the staff repair and rebuild relationships. “I would like to see it become more like, ‘We’ve heard about this twice, we’re saying that we now need a circle with you and this other person. We’re gonna work through this for the good of our team.’” This decision to follow through appeared to address some of the concerns the second grade teachers expressed about the in-authenticity of the circles they experienced.

Fulfilling the School’s Vision. RP increased the school’s capacity to fulfill its stated vision to foster strong connections between students, families, staff, and community members. “I think now our actions and our words are matching much closer to [a] team and family..., [W]e’re in this together even if something happens, we’re still going to be in it together. Which is exciting.” One of ways that RP supported this community building vision was through providing a structure for a collaborative inclusive democratic approach to solving problems. An administrator contrasted the circle approach to the traditional administrator role in addressing conflict:

It's good to have an equal share, an equal say with a family, or a kid or a teacher. I think that's really a different type of communication that my role doesn't always allow. I think that's also good to put everyone in equal space. That's what I like, the thing I've taken away the most from it.

Additionally, the exposure to RP at school inspired several teachers to get involved in the larger Austin community-based RP practices. An administrator commented, “That's not something I would have ever required or pushed necessarily, but seeing that I think is a sign that it's resonating with people so deeply that they see the benefit, want to get involved more within the community as well.”

Impact: Emotional and Physical Safety

Administrators, teachers who participated in focus groups, and students felt that RP increased emotional safety at the school. They saw RP’s attention to process and outcomes as essential to ensuring a sense of security.

The structure of RD gives you boundaries and it allows you to operate within them, with freedom. So, because of that, you're able to feel safe in those environments and feel like you can communicate what you need to communicate. Because there are structures, you know that you're walking away with next steps. If there's not a structure, next steps don't always come about.

The following story demonstrates how emotional safety created in circles lead to greater connection between the teachers, students, and families, allowing them to collectively tend to the emotional and academic needs of the students. A teacher who learned about a parent’s incarceration in a family circle and its impact on a student discussed how surprising and transformative it was to experience this level of openness about a sensitive topic:

This student was very challenging in the beginning, behavior[ally] and academic wise. I couldn't find a way to connect with this student. It was very challenging because no matter what I did he was always giving me like a very mean look, or he will be skeptical about whatever I would say. When I would try to give him a hug, he felt awkward. So when we did a circle with [RP Coordinator] and his mom and his sister, I found out about Mom you know, spending the time [in prison]. Mom was open to the circle and so we had that circle with them and he was very vocal about it. It was the first time that he had actually shown any type of communication outside of the classroom with me and, he expressed how hurt he felt, how scared he was that he would lose Mom again. I was able to speak to him in front of Mom about how I felt for him, how my partner teacher felt for him as well that we were there for him. [I said] that no matter what had happened in the past it's the past. Whether Mom will be there for him is not something that we have control of, but at least in school he could feel safe. That was the moment that I actually connected with him. From then on, he's one of the closest kids that I have...he's always wanting to hug me and he's always wanting to spend time. He's very challenging still, but at least I can connect with him in a different way. So it was a very positive result having that circle and it's happened with other families as well.

RP implementation also created safety for families whose kids were not struggling academically or behaviorally to open up about the support they needed. “[It was] just much different from anything else that we've had before. [RP allowed us] to have that level of care for every student.”

Impact: Transparency and Authenticity

Students, teachers and administrators valued that RP required authenticity and understood that being truthful in circles was central to their effectiveness. The majority of students who were interviewed saw expressing feelings “without being judged” and hearing about other students’ experiences as the most valuable aspects of being in circles. As the students commented this was important because “If you don't talk about it, you might feel that guilty and not say [anything] until you're big,” “[...] people will be careful with you,” “[you] feel happy because you have got all of your feelings out.” “It really helps you. If you're mad it helps you calm down.” “If you're having a tough day or something is wrong with your family, you can talk about it in the circles and then it makes your day better.” Participants understood that being vulnerable in circles, while not easy, was central to its transformative power. “I would say I was still pretty nervous going into it because I had no idea. I'm used to facilitating those meetings and leading them, and in this I was a true participant, which I think leads to its effectiveness.”

Teachers who participated in focus groups shared that RP allowed them to build relationships with their students and as a result have more influence. Their students valued seeing them “as human beings who have feelings;” and could say “I'm sorry guys that this happened,” or “Today I'm happy because of this.” “So then they see that we have range of emotions too and I think that helps them connect with us and with each other.” The students confirmed these observations through describing adults’ honesty as one of the most valued aspects of the circles. One student said, “My favorite story in the circle is when

Ms. [Teacher] told all the stories that happened to her.” Another student shared, “My favorite story is when [RP Coordinator]...told one mistake that she had.”

Empowerment. Teachers who participated in focus groups and administrator observed that students were more confident and empowered than they were prior to RP implementation. They asked for circles and wanted to facilitate their own circles, leading administrators to consider a peer program in the second year of implementation. Students were able to address issues more freely and ask for what they needed. For example, a child in the re-entry circle after a legally-required suspension spoke freely about not wanting to be asked about the incident, which the community respected.

Administrators also observed that teachers felt empowered to take action without asking administrators for help. Many teachers were also more proactive in addressing problems at the root level. While not all the staff was fully engaged with RP, many were. Teachers engaged student and families in a new way:

We have teachers who are coordinating circles after school with families, with a family who has kids at multiple schools at this campus... [T]hey're talking to the administrator at the other school to make sure they can get the middle school student so they can come after school, and ... I mean that's just all ... I never imagined it going across schools.

Both teachers and administrators agreed that RP provided an avenue for improving relationships with the families. This story highlights how teachers collaborated to bring families to a circle and address a case of bullying on the school bus:

I noticed that for a really long time her affect was really low and she seemed really depressed. So we referred her to counseling and then a lot of things started coming up that we were not aware of. She was being bullied pretty badly by one of her peers and we did not know it because it was happening on the bus. We decided to address it because we noticed how much it was affecting her. We had never done it, so we decided to have a circle with both families. That was nerve wrecking because we were just like, “I don’t know how this is gonna go. I don’t think his mom knows how badly this has affected this child. I also suspect that this boy is doing this for certain reasons.” There were obviously a lot of tears because he had to hear from her how bad it was getting for her, how depressed she was about this. He got to hear it in a safe space and he didn’t feel like he was being reprimanded or getting a consequence. It was just like, “We’re here to talk about it.” We also learned from his end how low of a self-esteem he has and why he was doing this. They work in the same group now. In the past we would just say to the parents that something is going on but we would never face it the way that we did, like head-on and being as open and honest as it was for both the families and the children. I thought it was a really positive thing and it actually had a really good outcome. So, I felt good about that and they felt good about it too.

Self-awareness. Participating in circles resulted in self-discovery and greater self-awareness among teachers and administrators. Teachers learned about themselves and about how they interacted with others, resulting in their greater ability to be in touch with the notion of shared humanity and be curious about other people. “We're all people and we need to have this open mind about what we can bring to the world and then what we can receive from the world.”

A number of teachers who participated in focus groups discussed how RP helped them become aware of their own socialization related to discipline and punishment. While they believed in restorative practices they also had to actively work to overcome their punitive programming. “I have that internal struggle of having a restorative approach but at the same time having a punitive approach. And it’s like an internal struggle, always thinking ... wanting to be restorative but you automatically go to the punitive.”

Focus group participants connected punitive discipline to the past learning in their families but also in their communities, seeing it as a manifestation of internalized oppression within communities of color.

How do you make restorative discipline culturally relevant and how do you break down all the violence? I had to be really conscious of how I treated kids. This is the most conscious I've been of how I treated kids. Being raised if I hurt your feelings, it's because you asked for it, because you behave this way. Trying to find a balance between my culture and also recognizing how punitive my culture is [is hard], but also being restorative and addressing trauma in a different way. I'm trying to be restorative but culturally, you know, we have not been restorative because of oppression. But I identify so strongly with that punitive element of my culture, because of oppression. And like that paradox... has been a very difficult one.

This increase in self-awareness translated into more compassion for self and others. As a result a number of teachers who participated in focus groups described being more flexible and willing to work with their students to address challenges than they were prior to learning about RP,

Being a little more open and giving them opportunities to correct their mistakes, instead of just following a procedure. Giving them that opportunity to speak up, to correct their mistakes. And even if it's wrong it's like, “Okay. We can fix it, we can move on.” Because, we all have not so good days.

Focus group participants also discussed becoming increasingly conscious about how they talked to the students and more readily relied on their relationships with students to help them make the needed behavioral changes. “I changed how I approach them and how I get what I want from them. So instead of saying, ‘Get to work,’ now I think more like, ‘Okay, something is holding them up.’ Let me go ask them a question [first] like, ‘What do you need to start? How can I help you start this?’”

RP and Social Justice. Teachers who participated in focus groups perceived RP to be a formal organizationally-endorsed structure that allowed them to integrate their passion for education with their passion for social justice. Several perceived RP's emphasis on relationships and community as key to uprooting structural racism and other forms of oppression experienced by students, their families, and staff. Not only did RP challenge them to personally examine and begin unlearning the punitive approach to discipline, but it also gave them tools to help the parents consider a more relational approach to discipline.

Sometimes when I do tell parents positive things it's because, like with some of my brown skin families, "El nino es bruto, no?" They think their kids are stupid or lazy or unproductive like this [student's] mom. "He won't work. You see? He's just lazy." These parents have these negative perceptions of the children and so you also have the opposite power with circles like I can say something positive about your kid.

RP Implementation Process

During the first year the school implemented RP widely with an extraordinary level of support. Administrators, teachers, parents, and students embraced the approach and the newly hired RP Coordinator. At the same time, the school encountered four types of implementation challenges expected during a major organizational change: (i) teacher-administration challenges, (ii) time challenges, (iii) training challenges, and (iv) communication challenges. These challenges illuminated the complexity of early stages of change when an organization embraces a new culture, but is yet to let go of the culture that preceded it.

While the school implemented RP widely, the implementation was inconsistent. Among teachers, 90.5% participated in at least one circle. More than one third (38.1%) participated in more than five circles. Additionally, all administrators participated in circles. Implementation varied from some teachers not using RP in the classroom to teachers partnering with their colleagues and facilitating circles with multiple families. Some student received consistent circle support and other students who needed a circle never received one due to challenges with time, staffing coverage, and RP Coordinator availability.

All children who participated in the evaluation interviews experienced COSAs outside of their regular classrooms. Regardless of their age, all of them had a clear understanding of the circle process (e.g., use of talking piece; sitting in a circle; opening and closing of the circle; "everyone shares"). They almost unanimously expressed enthusiasm about participating in circles, describing circles as "relaxing," "fun," "entertaining," "really quiet and really relaxed;" a place where "we have friendship," and "it feels like everybody loves you." A circle allowed students to be with friends, which "starts [a] day in a good mood and it ends in a good mood." This was especially helpful when one had a bad day. For students the circles were about "happiness," "excitement," and also about "sadness." The circles could be "boring" at times and for some students a way out of class, a helpful relief when the teacher was "giving them a lot of work." Students discussed that circles would be even better if circle keepers played music, allowed students to sit on the floor, and had more comfortable seating (e.g., colorful blankets or more comfortable chairs).

Teachers and administrators experienced the first year of RP implementation in a number of different ways. Many were excited because they saw RP's potential to help them meaningfully connect with students, families, and colleagues; support students' social and emotional learning; and integrate anti-oppressive practices into their teaching. Others felt anxious about and intimidated by the emotional intensity and vulnerability inherent in RP. For some, the implementation process was moving too fast without an obvious roadmap, and for others not fast enough given the extent of the students' and families' need for support. While many saw RP as an extension of their worldview and commitment to social justice, some perceived the restorative circle structure as forced and culturally mismatched. One teacher described her struggle with the structure:

[Since circles are] not a part of my culture, it's hard for me to grasp it. Like I've seen people do it and I've seen it work with children but it's hard for me to implement something that I don't really get, you know? [...] I think that's how I am as a person but I guess maybe the way we do it like, "Let's sit in the circle and talk about it and now your turn." And I guess maybe the whole routine of it or the way it's supposed to flow.

RP Coordinator Role. For teachers and administrators, the RP Coordinator's role, "a professional who knows what they're doing," was essential for the implementation process. She supported students, facilitated circles, and provided RP coaching to staff. The RP Coordinator's ongoing presence at the school and her access to the community-based restorative justice organization's support gave the administrative team the confidence they needed to continue with an often uncertain and challenging implementation process.

Teachers and administrators viewed the RP Coordinator as another adult the students trusted and confided in. Having another supportive adult was important because the school counselor was on campus only one day a week for several hours. A student described the impact the RJ coordinator had on him:

It helps me have a good day because Miss [RP Coordinator], she's a nice woman. If we get in trouble or anything, she's not a yelling person or anything. She] doesn't be mean to us or anything and [she] lets us have second chances.

Additionally the staff benefited from the relationship with the RP Coordinator and deeply trusted her as a result of her careful approach to relationship building and her passion for RP. "I feel like we are fully confident and connected to her and her passion and what she does, and we trust her. We don't question what she says. She [says], "This is what I think is best.' 'Okay, great. Let us know what you need from us.'"

Teacher-Administration Challenges

During the first year of implementation the administrative team and teachers experienced a number of challenges.

Planning and Procedures. While the majority of teachers and administrators embraced RP and felt it was aligned with the school's vision, they also struggled with the absence of a

formal strategic plan for RP implementation. Lack of clear implementation objectives and written procedures (e.g., referral process, follow up, coordination and communication with other involved individuals, coverage) was a major challenge for all during the first year of implementation.

If there would be something more clear cut or something concrete...When you do ask them like, “[S]how me the procedure. Where in the handbook does it say this or where does it say that?...” they don’t. I’m disappointed at them. We need to be more practical. We need to make sure we have procedures set and that everyone is held accountable for those procedures, not just some teachers.

At the same time administrators and teachers had different perspectives on what that structure should look like. While some needed a detailed structure similar to the existing reward-based color system, others discussed the need for “a path.” Overall, all agreed that formal written procedures could ensure organizational consistency and accountability as RP was integrated into the school’s fabric.

We need more transparency and we’d like to see the reasoning behind some of the decisions. The transparency is not just so to know what happened in that particular incidence, but I feel it’s more helpful if something else comes up. How can we prevent those incidences? I would really appreciate something in writing laid out by either the [RP] committee or administration.

The administrator team shared the teacher’s concerns. “I think we jumped into it too fast...it started out unclear and murky to me, to be honest, and I think, it’s like flying the plane and building the plane at the same time mentality.” Reflecting back, the administrative team recognized that a more structured approach would have made the process of RP implementation smoother. They wished that Life Anew offered them a menu of RJ practices and provided a general overall outline of what the implementation process looked like. This information would have been helpful in preparing the staff to better deal with anxiety inherent in the organizational change and “feel confident and secure” through the process.

I think having a picture of like, “Here are ten different things that you can do school-wide within restorative practices.” You know, like, the family circles, the team-building circles, the one-on-one, the peer groups, the peer leadership. It would have helped me to have seen a menu of options. Or like, all the ways a whole-school restorative discipline approach can look. And then, just even tentatively saying, year one, year two that we’re driving towards ... even if it changes, right? So we did the year one, basically. But I didn’t have the vision yet for year two or three or where it could head. So I think even if year two actually looks much different from the way you originally planned, being able to say to staff--, “This is a process. This happens over several years. Here’s where we’re starting. Here’s where we think we’re going.” I think that could also give people a lot of confidence and security, versus, we’re taking a leap, which we are. It felt like we’re taking a leap.

Punitive versus Restorative. Teachers and administrators shared significant confusion and frustration with two conflicting approaches to character building and behavior management: RP, a relationally oriented approach to behavior, and the old reward color-based behavior system.

In addition to being perceived as ineffective, several teachers who participated in focus groups viewed the reward color-based system as punitive.

We still have the punitive method in place. After every subject, we do a color check, so either [the students] earn their color or they do not earn the color. In front of all their peers, if they didn't earn their color, they have to say, "No. I did not earn color." [Moreover] as a teacher you're supposed to say, "Okay. Why didn't you earn your color?" So they have to ... it's like this shaming. It can also be a positive like, "Oh look, you're on track." It depends on the kid [...]. If [the color check] doesn't work, then move [the student] from the classroom to another teacher. And then if that doesn't work, [move] to the office.

A number of focus group participants also felt that the color system was ineffective because it was out of touch with the current parenting practices and not age appropriate. "A lot of families have moved on from corporal punishment ... a call home doesn't mean a lot to kids in terms of punishment." Another area of tension was the conflict between the new restorative approach, which prioritized repairing harm and the old punitive approaches. A teacher discussed a case in which the two approaches clashed resulting in an avoidable suspension and ongoing conflict between the two children.

I know their families [and] they fight all the time. So they get into a fight in my classroom. I talk to their parents [and say, "If this happens again, I'm going to have you sitting together in circle." [T]he immediate response from the administration was, "Well, I really wouldn't have handled it that way. We would never have parents together." I was like, "But you're saying you're doing restorative discipline. We always have parents together." [S]o I was upset and I felt discouraged to handle things in my classroom. [T]hen it happened again and one student was suspended and the other one was not because he's in restorative justice circles. [S]o for the next several months, it created a [problem] between the boys, like, "I got suspended and you didn't."

Teachers who participated in focus groups were aware that the law mandated suspension in certain cases, but raised concerns that those measures were not fully integrated with RP. For example, several teachers discussed the case of a child who was suspended for bringing a pocketknife to school. While they understood the school legally needed to suspend the student, they saw multiple missed opportunities to use RP and were concerned because a re-entry circle for the suspended child got delayed.

The kid had to be legally suspended first but the restorative justice took so long that the connection between the two wasn't there. There was no discussion to say, "[W]e

have to suspend you...How does it make others feel when they see you have a knife?" [T]hose questions were [not] asked until three or four weeks later. [S]o it's this imbalance between this restorative method [...] fitting into this punitive discipline system that we have.

A number of teachers who participated in focus groups and administrators did not agree about the appropriateness of RP to address incidents related to physical safety. An administrator described an internal struggle and exasperation because there was no unified organizational approach to handling these types of incidents and teachers acted at times without informing her.

The biggest thing I've struggled with is ...responding to...very severe events on campus [w]here physical safety is...a factor ...and not knowing first or knowing after the fact. [T]he [RP] coordinator may want to come from a place of ... support or confidentiality [b]ut I have a line for myself. [I]f there's ever concern about safety, I need to be able to address it immediately. [I]f that doesn't come to me, I miss an opportunity which is... potentially very damaging for our relationships with families and their trust in the school. I think that's also been a barrier of ... who responds to student needs and what type of needs.

In reaction, focus group participants expressed frustration and disappointment about the inconsistent use of RP throughout the school.

We have 2 separate systems in place and they're not interweaved. [I]n the classroom, it's more of restorative justice ...but when it comes to stuff that is not allowed to be brought to school (cough), it's dangerous...[and] considered like a community violation...and that's when the more punitive stuff steps in....I know this sounds negative, but I don't know how the two can coexist.

Members of the administrative team were aware that working through these conflicting systems would require perseverance and intentionality. "I don't want to switch to something else, just because I know that connection is unclear right now. I want ...something that's going to be stronger, better, more aligned and I think that's going to take time."

Authenticity versus Professionalism. Teachers who participated in focus groups experienced a notable conflict between authenticity and professionalism. RP inspired many teachers to be more relational, honest, direct, and genuine with colleagues, students, and parents. At the same time they perceived professionalism at the school to be about individualism, distance, and indirect communication. Some referred to these expectations as "white professionalism," implying the imposition of values irrelevant to the communities of color the school primarily served. Teachers believed this dynamic undermined the school's vision of building strong school community.

THAT way of communicating with certain Black parents ... Like my first year, the reason I got cussed out is because the mom's like, "Will you just fucking tell me what

[the students] did?" And they're frustrated that moment. It's after work and this parent is like, "You are not being specific with me." And because you're not specific, they automatically put the blame on you as the teacher. "What were you doing wrong?" And so it goes back to the cultural competence of administration and that need for not only culturally-responsive circles but like culturally-responsive communication and support. Because in the circles, you have to be authentic. You have to be real. You cannot bullshit because people from our community instinctively know.

The perceived lack of administrative support for direct communication among teachers who participated in focus groups further exasperated the anxiety they experienced during discussions with parents about their child's undesirable behaviors. Moreover, they felt angry about the pressure to "sugarcoat" communication with parents, especially because they felt that this approach prevented them from truly meeting their students' needs.

I feel like I'm always [...] unprofessional with parents. I do or say things that I probably shouldn't say. So I really struggle because I have to be honest with you but [I also] have to sugarcoat it. And I don't want to sugarcoat it anymore because this matters. I'm trying to change the trajectory. We are trying to change the trajectory of these children's lives and we are all so passionate about that.

They also felt that the expectation of professionalism resulted in a narrow range of acceptable behaviors to use with parents not only when they needed to discuss challenges, but also express care for their student.

Why can't I tell a kid that I love them? It's the truth. I feel like we need to be real with parents but also, give me that leeway as a teacher. We're people. We do love these kids.

Focus group participants feared that the administrators would perceive their honest communication with families and students as antithetical to professionalism. However, they agreed that the expectations to communicate indirectly and maintain a distance with families were not explicit, but rather indirectly implied.

Maybe we're not told this [directly] but I've always felt a vibe that you shouldn't actually tell specifically what happened and you shouldn't go into detail. Like, "No, your child threatened to strangle another child if she did not ... and then he put his hands around her neck and terrified that child." But no I can't say that. I say, "Your child and another child were communicating. He said he was going to touch her ..." That's not right. But I feel like if I say it the other way that somehow it's going to come back on me that I was being unprofessional, I was being a bad teacher. And then I get a slap on the wrist.

Teachers who participated in focus groups saw RP as an effective way to address these challenges, provided they could give the needed and honest feedback to parents, and build strong relationships with families.

I think it's important to be real, to be straight up and then sugarcoat at the end with support. Like I think the white, I think the professional method, the white professional method is like sugarcoat at the beginning and never get to the truth. And I think I can see restorative discipline being more like, "Here's the truth," and then at the end you're like, "Here's how we're going to support you ..."

The administrators struggled with questions related to authenticity and professionalism as well. One administrator wrestled with the differences between RP in the community and within a school, given the formal legal structure of the educational context:

You are fearless about sharing certain things when you don't know these people and they don't have to walk with you every day... Some of the things I say [in the community circles], I may not communicate to everybody at my job ... I've thought about that tons, like [what are] strategic ways to create the Community R] aspect of it, in a setting where these people are practically together for at least a year. [People] have formal roles and then some things that people communicate as an administrator or... a coworker may raise concerns for me ... it's that legal [part] ... It's that weird line [where] you want people to be transparent, you want them to feel safe ...

While the individual members of the administrative team thought about the challenges related to professionalism and authenticity, the team did not have an official position on how the staff should respond to these challenges. "Explicitly we've said, "Here is an avenue for you to be...your authentic self or to allow your students to be authentic. I think that's something that could be more explicit." The teachers who participated in focus groups and administrators needed help with understanding professional boundaries and the power of authenticity within those boundaries. Issues about professionalism and authenticity were experienced in ways that had overtones related to race, deception and political correctness. These issues were also complicated by the realities of school representation, school roles and the politics of different constituencies. These issues are vital because they impact the meaning of accountability and the building of community that are at the heart of the RP endeavor.

Priorities: Instruction versus Community Building. Another source of challenges during the first year of RP implementation was the conflict between the school's commitment to RP and strong emphasis on curriculum and instruction. A teacher expressed her frustration with the conflict: "I feel like a robot sometimes that I have to get through these lesson plans. When what I really want to do is know if a [student] is okay." Consequently, teachers who participated in focus groups worried about the administration's response too if they chose to use RP to tend to the students' needs instead of following the lesson plan. They felt that responding to the students' needs at times required putting the curriculum on hold. Making this change felt risky because the academic achievement metrics were a true priority at the school.

I do feel some sense of confusion on what I'm supposed to prioritize. When we came back from our winter break, we had like this whole caps, the shirt or we even got like a

sweater that says, "Increasing the graduation rate for our kids by 5 times by the year 2020." And we have it everywhere. And it was all focused on curricula mandate and teacher accountability and professional development. I was like, "Okay. Well, what's the character? What's the restorative justice? What's the population of kids that we work with? What is it gonna take to not get our kids suspended and expelled? Or [make sure] they don't drop out from high school?" That's a huge part of it. So I do struggle sometimes. [Am] I'm gonna stop the clock and... just gonna ignore what the objective is on the board and address this issue right now? Somebody shows up in my class and they ask, "What's going on?" [I'd say] "This is what's going on. We cannot function as a class. We cannot learn if this doesn't get addressed. This is impeding the learning or it's affecting the student's wellbeing and that's just the way it's gonna be." But I do feel conflicted by it, because I am being held accountable on that other end, with my student performance and their growth.

Teachers who participated in focus groups experienced the academic outcomes data-driven school environment as overwhelming, at times resulting in "forgetting to even take care of myself emotionally and psychologically" or "neglecting my children." Consequently they frequently felt guilt and concern about the ethics of "telling this child that despite his dad knocking down the doors at his house, he should keep reading." "I remember one time a child finally opened up to me and I needed to address this situation, but I couldn't do anything because I was gonna get observed in five minutes. I know that when I was young we'd carry these things because they weren't addressed." "Don't worry about it. Let's keep going because this week I need to turn [in] all these things and record everything that you've been doing. Otherwise, I'm not doing my job.' And then I get caught up in the data. [I]t's this cycle of nonproductive habit."

For focus group participants, this conflict was especially discouraging because they observed that meeting students' social and emotional needs resulted in better academic outcomes. The following is just one out of the many stories that demonstrated the clear connection between students' wellbeing and academic success:

He started to shine. We started to learn a lot more about him and his academics grew too. Like his math-his first exam was in his 40's and this last one was in his 80's. You could just see his self-esteem improving.

Consequently, teachers who participated in focus groups felt that the administrative team did not trust them with deciding what was best for their students. They felt disrespected. This was especially hard because the focus group participants felt that they knew their students well, at times even better than their caregivers, given the amount of time they spent with them.

Teacher-administrative team challenges went to the heart of what is meant by a whole school approach to systems change. Instead of a band aid approach to school problems, the implementation of RP exposed issues related to the lack of clear planning and procedures, the co-existence of two seemingly incompatible disciplinary systems, a values conflict

between authenticity and professionalism, and confusion in priorities between time for instruction versus time for community building and tending to the student's immediate needs. The tendency to dichotomously position these issues is also reflective of the problems encountered in changing a system using a traditional mindset. RP challenges adherents to move beyond a simplistic good/bad or right/wrong delineation of the issues.

Time Challenges

Inadequate time to implement RP with integrity emerged as one of the main RP implementation obstacles. Teachers and administrators persistently worked with and around the time challenges, demonstrating deep commitment to RP. For example, several teachers attended a circle at the school after work hours. While grateful for everyone's participation, teachers felt strongly about they needed to allocate adequate time for family circles during the school's business hours.

The formally-allocated time for circles during the morning meeting felt too short, especially if the teachers worked with the younger students.

[With]the first grade schedule we have about 10 minutes in the morning for a circle. I've scheduled that for us [but] the reality of having students come in and get breakfast ready and cleaning up that 10 minutes turns into 5 minutes.

The morning circles time felt even shorter for teachers with the large classes.

I actually asked to get observed... because at the beginning of the year I[said], "I don't understand how this is supposed to work. I have 29 kids. How am I supposed to make this work?" I don't have a carpet. We have desks and we have to move all the furniture [...] across the other side of the room and then make space for 29 kids that are very energetic. And... I have to manage [that] at the same time while I'm trying to facilitate the circle with my kids and really hear what they're saying. Since I got observed with them, we realized, "Oh, this is very hard." (Laughs).

Teachers who participated in focus groups were especially concerned about the impact of limited time on the consistency of circles, knowing that "sometime one circle is not enough."

We haven't been able to do it just because of other circumstances and scheduling conflicts. We haven't been able to do it consistently throughout the year... There's been more conflicts in providing these circles that I haven't been able necessarily to see as much growth because I have not been able to continually conduct the circles.

Focus group participants resolved time challenges in different ways. For some this meant letting go of the ideal circle image and adopting the practices to the classroom context:

I've had to... take a very different approach. It's not gonna look like this circle where all the kids are sitting around in a circle where they all get to bring their artifact. It will be, "Everybody stop what you're doing. Set everything down." I sit down at...my

chair at the front of the class and let's just talk about it right now. We just go around the room wherever everybody is sitting...It doesn't look like a formal circle, but the sentiment, the questioning, the opportunity to express themselves... is made.

For others, accommodations meant not using circles regularly, but knowing it was an available tool to use when needed. "I have stopped before and said, 'This is something we need to address right now. We're gonna sit in a circle and we're gonna talk about it.' Like having that tool to pull out when it's needed is beneficial."

Time was also essential in helping staff become more comfortable with RP and learn to trust it.

[IY]ou have to... try each one before you get there and so you think like a year or so later, you've seen a lot of situations. So I feel more confident in saying, "Yup, I'm going to reach out to the Coordinator for this, or I'm going to ask the coordinator for help[or[I'm going to consult with the coordinator [or], I'm going to ask the coordinator to wait."

Having an RP Coordinator on campus remedied some of the time challenges.

[H]aving a restorative coordinator on campus has been major. Because I don't think we would be successful. We wouldn't be able to have these meetings. She is able to do tons of the grunt work for us. If we are needed for a circle, we show up. She's already prepped the students. She's already prepped the parent. She's already talked to the teachers. And so the grunt restorative work is hard.

However, time was again a determinative factor because the RP Coordinator's part time appointment limited her ability to support teachers.

Parents call me constantly, "When can we have the next circle?" It's challenging because they need that third person to actually guide them. We would need at least one RP Coordinator per grade for it to be successful. Because I have kids who are still needing it so much and it's regressing. We started really good. We have one, two circles. It was really awesome, I saw that change. And then because they stopped, it's getting back. It's getting worse. Parents are calling me [saying], "What's going on? Why is he like this?" And then I call them, and then it's just back and forth, since we can't have the complete communication because they work in the afternoons and I can't talk to them during work hours.

Finally, students also expressed concerns about the limited time available for circles. One student who did not get to share his experience during a COSA because they ran out of time described the negative impact of this experience:

One thing I don't like about circles is that some of my teammates...start crying and stuff. I don't really like it because it wasted all of our time last time... It uses up so much time because...we have to say, "It's okay, it's okay." And then it's okay, b-but then she

keeps on crying so then we have to...let her drink some water and go ... And then we walk back to class and then we say, "Goodbye," to Miss [RP Coordinator] and go to class and that's it...I'm always like the last one in circles, like at the end that I won't be able to share.

Staffing coverage. Lack of adequate time combined with an inconsistent staffing coverage caused a number of teachers who participated in focus groups to question the school's true commitment to RP. Using RP in a timely manner was important for its effectiveness. Inconsistent coverage was a threat to the integrity of the practice and caused stress for teachers who wanted to use it. One teacher described the challenges with sporadic staffing coverage:

It just happened to happen at the right time that there was somebody around and I was able to like get half of my class covered for like 15 minutes, so I could address the other half of the class that was directly involved with [an incident]. And then coming back from the field trip, there was [a]15 minute window or somebody happened to be around where I could address this thing that happened. Had it not happened when it happened, what would I have done? I wouldn't have been able to address it. I don't know what...the week would have ended up like for this particular kid. And for my class.

One of the administrators acknowledged some challenges related to the lack of coverage if more than one teacher was involved, "We could get one teacher coverage, but not both. Or one teacher has to skip their planning in order to come to this meeting." At the same time teachers and administrators had a different understanding of the challenges related to time and teachers' authority to make curriculum changes to allow time for RP.

Another aspect of RJ the staff had to learn and adjust to was... respecting the time it takes for the process. I think that's something else we, as a campus, have learned about because we want it to be a quick fix, so kids can get back into class. But sometimes it's not always a quick fix. And sometimes teachers are giving up planning periods to be a part of circles. [...] So I think that's an adjustment that teachers had to learn about scheduling and maintaining the integrity of circle-keeping and the process.

Referrals. Narrowing down students who needed extra RP support has been frustrating for administrators and teachers. The teachers who participated in focus groups used the RP referral form, but struggled with determining who was appropriate for RP and who needed to see the School Counselor. Referral process clarification was a major priority for the second year of implementation. Referring students who were disconnected from the school community to COSAs was easy because RP, with its strong focus on relationships, was an obvious way to meet their needs. The students who experienced "more trauma-related events" such as "wanted to kill themselves, or hurt somebody else, like that level of severity" saw the School Counselor. However teachers and administrators believed that many students could have benefited from COSAs and counseling through an integrated support plan; however, some student situations did not clearly fit the two categories,

[B]asically gray area kids, went to the counselor at first [...] So if it didn't fit into one of those two buckets of major life event, major situation going on, affecting their learning, affecting their mental health and if it wasn't the connectedness, we did tend to go more towards a counselor route for the first year.

Some of the referral challenges and lack of coordination were related to structural issues such as availability of the School Counselor. During the first year of implementation all regional network schools shared one counselor, which meant that the School Counselor was onsite at the school about half a day each week. During that limited time, she could only see a small number of students. As a result, the School Counselor did not meet with the RJ Coordinator or the school administration to coordinate support. The administrative team hoped that the increase in the counselor's availability during the fall semester to 2-3 days a week would remedy some of these challenges. The goal was to ensure that the School Counselor and RP Coordinator overlap so they could coordinate their efforts.

Time challenges are a common difficulty with RP. For the school, they manifested as difficulties with adequate time allocated for classroom circles or for RD processes during school hours, availability of the RD Coordinator, managing time during circle, coverage to support staff involvement and resource allocation and clarity of the basis for referrals between the counselor and RD Coordinator.

Training Challenges

Although all teachers received some RP training, nearly half (47.7%) did not feel confident using it. The inconsistent amount of training, ranging from one hour to well beyond six hour offered at the school, had a clear impact on the staff's ability to use RP. Some teachers and administrators viewed the community building circles (Check in, Check up, Check out) as an easy transition because they were imbedded into the existing morning meetings structure and felt like "kind of a breeze." For others, even the morning meetings were challenging with "29 very wiggly kid bodies."

Doing a circle with 24 six-year olds at one time can be challenging. Like the role you are playing of being a facilitator in that moment versus being the teacher in the classroom can be very difficult. My kids just don't have a lot of patience especially in the beginning of the year to sit around in a circle and hear everyone's feelings. So here they're supposed to be listening but then also... telling this kid like, "Sit the right way" and telling this kid to... turn their voices up. Like I honestly don't do it as much anymore, whole group, just because is sometimes just not worth it to do it that way.

Administrators and teachers highlighted the importance of experiential training (e.g., participating in circles at the school and in the community). They believed that being a circle participant during the initial training, in the community, and at the school was vital for fully grasping the essence of RP. The administrative team also agreed that experiencing an actual circle prior to initiating RP implementation was indispensable for all in charge of the process, to "have the full insight into what they're getting themselves into." This was a hard-learned lesson for the school team. While the administrators shared strong support for circles at the end of the first year of implementation, they experienced tension and

conflict throughout the year partly due to different levels of familiarity with RP.

However, teachers and administrators expressed a strong need for more training, especially more didactic training about the theoretical grounding for RP, evidence for its effectiveness, and types of RP (e.g., family circles, re-entry circles). They discussed the importance of delivering training in a way that meets the needs of staff who easily gravitate towards RP as well as staff members who needed more time and information to trust the new approach.

I attribute [the challenges] to like our first couple of interactions [with] the [training] team behind restorative discipline. ... [T]he first session or experience was very direct and very like immersion in style, without getting, "This is what restorative discipline is, this is the support behind it, this is the philosophy behind it, here's how it will work on our campus." Instead we were kind of [...] fishbowed into it. And so I found myself, personally, trying to understand how this emotionally connects to my own values. And trying to think there, "Okay, how does this work for a school too?" So there was a period where I maybe didn't have trust in the program because I didn't know enough about it.

Even a teacher who had extra training as a member of the RP Committee and frequently used RP with her students discussed the impact of limited training on her confidence. She emphasized the importance of proper training for a successful school-wide implementation, especially given the RP Coordinator's limited availability.

...There's only one [RJ Coordinator]...And she's incredible (laughs). And she's part-time... Do we have 400? It's 300 something, how many students in this school and like how many teachers? And I feel like if we're truly gonna move into restorative justice like we have to get every single teacher...trained correctly. Just so that we can...perform to the best of our ability to help these students. Because even right now there's something like, "Wait a second, did I just say that correctly? Was that the correct way to deal with the situation?"...And I think that ...we all...chose to be in this restorative justice committee... To get the extra training...I sometimes still feel lost ...

While a number of teachers felt confident with using RP for providing support to their students, the vast majority shared the need for more development with using it to address undesirable behaviors and other challenging situations. Additionally, teachers wanted more training on general classroom management as well as adopting circles for various age groups and different situations (e.g., family circle, classroom management, conflict between students). They also requested additional resources such as readings, videos, and circle questions. Finally, they wanted more opportunities to work with the RJ Coordinator to co-facilitate circles, be observed, and receive her feedback and coaching.

[The RJ Coordinator] came in to all of our classrooms and modeled or observed one of our circles. She only got to do it one time.but it was really helpful for me to see what it looked like with my students. It would have been nice to continue that kind of cycle where she could have observed me doing a circle and giving me [feedback] just like we

get feedback on our teaching. It would be nice to have feedback on our circles regularly

Students' Developmental Stage. Implementing RP in the context of a bilingual elementary school added further complexity to the first year challenges. Teachers who participated in focus groups often collaborated with the RP Coordinator to deal with this complexity:

It's like finding the balance between how much language do I give [students] for the circle, and how much can they do organically. We've talked with the [RP Coordinator] about trying to find the ways to break these really adult things down into [the students'] language. We haven't quite gotten there yet. I think the ball is rolling, but it's really hard to do a circle when kids don't understand. And when I'm like, "I can't even break this down to kids who do speak English." Like I don't know how to make this big concept, um, digestible for... them."

A teacher working with the lower grade students learned that patience was key. Using RP in his classroom at the beginning of the year was difficult. The process became easier as the students' vocabulary and ability to patiently sit in a circle evolved over time.

It comes to the point where you just say let's practice as much as we can being repetitive, but it's never gotten to the point where everybody gets to say whatever they want. Because [the students] copy each other. Someone says, "I feel happy" and... then everybody says happy. And then until someone says, "I'm sad" then they're like, "Oh yeah, I'm sad too." (Laughter) It's only until this part of the year where their vocabulary has increased. They're more aware of the situation, whether it's at home or in school with making more friends, understanding sometimes when friends aren't nice, what really hurts them. Well, it's not just "...he looked at me the way that I didn't like." But something more substantial where he's been bothering me at the bus, or he's cursing me, saying mean things to me.

For many focus group participants their strong commitment to the children's social and emotional wellbeing served as an important source of motivation to endure these challenges. They felt that specific training on age-appropriate RP activities could make a meaningful difference in their ability to overcome the challenges and meet their students' needs.

Training challenges focused on needing more time for learning and doing but teachers also wanted more conceptual information to ground their understanding and sense of mastery. The desire for greater competence also had to do with wanting greater versatility and ability to use more intensive practices. Besides mentoring and feedback, they wanted knowledge about modifying RP to manage student variation in language ability and developmental stage.

Communication Challenges

Teachers who participated in focus groups and administrators discussed a number of occasions in which they engaged their colleagues directly to address interpersonal conflict,

demonstrating a strong commitment to building relationships and teamwork. The administrative team used direct communication to address issues with the RP implementation process. Additionally, the second grade teachers discussed a series of difficult dialogues they had with each other over the year that led them to resolving a number of conflicts that were negatively impacting their team's productivity.

Focus groups participants and administrators were also frustrated with the lack of consistent and effective communication. For example, teachers often felt excluded from the communication about the support the students received through the RP program and other support services. It was not always clear who was providing support to the child and when. Lack of coordinated efforts at times resulted in disconnected interventions. Furthermore, balancing the urgency to meet the students' needs in a timely manner and the need to coordinate support with colleagues was a source of tension.

Everybody wants to support students immediately, and if we're not clear on what's happening, it's just not good for the family [...] The situation involving... the [RP] program where I felt better, is the one where I've been able to seek out support and say, "I'm feeling concerned about this. Let's give each other context. Here's what I know from the complaint. Share with me what you might know from your experience too. Let's get the teacher's perspective. Okay, what's a good plan for the student? Let's do a family circle, or let's do a peer circle, or let's do a reentry." Then it feels like we have time to dialogue and prescribe what might be best. Then the follow up is much stronger because we know what we're asking about afterwards.

Teachers who participated in focus groups particularly wanted to be better informed about the students' progress in COSAs. They also wanted to be consistently included in the decisions regarding the best times for students to leave class in order to participate in COSAs.

Communication challenges primarily reflected issues with coordination and inclusion and were most apparent in practices that took students away from the classroom. While these concerns again reflect problems with time, they can have an erosive impact on the building of community.

Despite teacher-administration challenges, time, training and communication challenges, teachers who participated in focus groups acknowledged that organizational change is a long term process. At the same time, the limited time dedicated to RP, lack of staffing coverage, limited availability of the RP Coordinator, the continuous use of punitive discipline, and the absence of explicit RP procedures, caused a number of teachers to question the administrative team's commitment to RP.

I guess my question is more to the school. "So what does this mean? What, what direction do you see restorative justice happening?" Cause I hear about Oakland's high school has like 100% graduation rate...It means every single kid gets... restorative justice. There have been zero suspensions in the past 4 years I think. Like... I'm talking high school. I'm not talking elementary. You know, in a primarily black and brown

community and I don't know. I just...if that's working, what can we do to learn from those models that are working and actually mean it?

Part of the questioning had to do prioritizing and funding decisions. For example, a teacher questioned the impact of the school's funding priorities for RP at the school, implying that finances primarily drive the school's strategic decisions and that the community needs are secondary. "I don't wanna sound negative but if this was something that would bring in funding we would be saying a different story." Beyond these doubts, the majority of teachers whole-heartedly embraced RP and felt grateful that the school was implementing it. They also saw this evaluation and their opportunity to participate in shaping RP at their school as a positive indicator of a long-term organizational commitment to RP.

Discussion

During the 2014-2015 school year this charter elementary school implemented RP to initiate school-wide climate change. Perhaps the most notable aspect of this courageous undertaking is the fact that the school leadership begun RP implementation at the time when the students, parents and teachers were reporting high satisfaction on the annual survey. This speaks to the leadership's level of commitment to fulfilling the school's vision of delivering high quality education in the context of a closely knit and engaged school community, as organizational change requires an enormous amount of energy, resources, and patience. Rather than thinking about RP as a program, the school made a decision to infuse it into the whole school. This meant making a commitment to integrate RP into all aspects of the school community—changing the worldview of students, parents, staff, teachers, and administrators, and shifting "the way we do things around here" (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013, p. 58).

Thorsborne and Blood's (2013) three-stage model for managing whole school RP implementation presented in Table 1 provides a helpful framework for interpreting the evaluation findings. This model is based on John Kotter's change management work and its core idea is that change is a process, not an event. While the school did not use this framework to implement RP during the first year, the framework is helpful for understanding the current implementation process and informing next steps.

Organizational change is not a linear process. In fact, the model elements are interrelated and repetitive. Additionally, any organizational change process can at times be messy and feel like going many steps backward before taking a step forward. However, Kotter's organizational case studies indicate that all steps outlined in the model need to be fulfilled to ensure sustainable organizational change. For RP, this is a long-term process that requires approximately three to five years (Morrison, Thorsborne and Blood's, 2006). Table 2 provides an approximate timeframe in which the indicators of change may be observed.

The Ball Is Rolling

In its first year of implementation, the school generated a remarkable commitment to RP from the administrators, staff, parents, and students. The school has definitely overcome the inertia and "the ball is rolling." Not only did students, teachers, and administrators

report that RP did in fact create an environment in which all felt more connected--one of the reasons the school decided to implement it--but the findings capture a palpable excitement and investment about the RP philosophy among the school community members. Additionally, the fact that 90% of teachers and all administrators participated in more than one circle and more than a third of teachers participated in six or more circles, suggests that the school has progressed well beyond the pockets of RP practice. Teachers and administrators regularly worked with the RP Coordinator to get their students additional support, but also to develop their own RP skills. All expressed strong interest in more training. RP empowered teachers to use the practices in creative and bold ways to resolve conflict or connect with families and students. While the school still used traditional approaches to discipline such as out-of-school suspension, administrators and teachers engaged in a variety of other options for managing behaviors such as COSAs, family support circles, and RP Coordinator and School Counselor referrals. Given all these accomplishments, the school is well positioned to tackle the next level of challenges related to implementation.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the RP implementation at this elementary school is that the majority of staff maintained their commitment to RP despite a number of serious challenges. The absence of a strategic plan for RP implementation, insufficient staff training, shortage of time and limited staffing coverage to use RP, coexistence of the RP and the old reward-based color system, and value conflicts were major threats to the initiative's success, causing some teachers to seriously doubt the future of RP at the school. Consequently, making a strong commitment to addressing these challenges in the second year of implementation will be key for maintaining the momentum and ensuring the continued support for the initiative. For the next stage, it is vital that the school focuses on: 1) developing a Leadership Response Team, 2) solidifying the shared vision, 3) clarifying the values central to the vision, 4) conduct ongoing circles with administrators, teachers, and staff to build relationships and strengthen the community, and 5) develop an implementation strategy with clear objectives.

Table 2. Timeframe and indicators of change, Morrison, Thorsborne and Blood (2006)

12-18 months	Gaining Commitment. Changing dialogue. Pockets of practice. Improved statistics. Increased options for managing behavior.
12-24 months	Altered Dialogue & Processes. Alignment of policy & procedure. Increased skill development. School community commitment.
24- 36 months	Embedding of Practice at All Levels. Altered operating framework. Reviewing policy and procedure. Creative solutions emerge.
4-5	Best Practice. Behavior change embedded. Cultural change across school community.

Table 3. Stages of whole school RP implementation, Thorsborne and Blood (2013)

Stage 1: Getting ready for change	1. Making a case for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify key people to do some ground work • Identify potential threats • Identify opportunities • Begin engaging with stakeholders (staff, students, parents, governing bodies)
	2. Putting an implementation team together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting a team together • Team building
	3. Creating vision for the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a short summary that captures the future • Determine the values that are central to the change • Create a strategy to launch and execute the vision • Guiding coalition becomes fluent with the vision
Stage 2: Overcoming inertia and getting the ball rolling	4. Communicating the vision to capture hearts and minds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk often about the change vision • Address concerns and anxieties • Tie everything back to the vision • Lead by example—communicate by words and deeds
	5. Overcoming obstacles and getting the ball rolling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get rid of obstacles that impede the vision • Encourage risk-taking, non-traditional ideas, activities and actions • Develop skills • Choose the vision over self-interest • Change structure and systems that undermine the vision
	6. Generating short term wins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for sure fire projects that don't require support of critics • Choose early targets that will deliver; not too "expensive" and can't fail • Acknowledge and reward staff who have helped meet targets
Stage 3: Implementing and embedding change	7. Keeping the pressure on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used increased credibility to change further everything that doesn't fit the vision • Hire, promote, and develop people who can implement the change vision • Reinvigorate with new changes
	8. Maintaining the gains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use stakeholder feedback and achievement data to change behavior • Improve and widen leadership • Maintain the pressure of values and behaviors

Leadership Response Team (LRT)

Evidence suggests that those schools that successfully implement RP usually have a core group of leaders that drive the change. At the school the administrative team and the RP Coordinator provided leadership during the first year of implementation. While the RP Committee was formed to assist with the implementation, the group primarily focused on the professional development of its members. As a result, the school now has a committed, passionate, and capable group of RP practitioners who are willing to play a more active role. Merging this group with the administrative team would be one way of broadening and enriching the LRT. In addition to teachers and administrators, LRTs usually include at least one staff member who is not a teacher, people who can design and deliver effective internal professional development (may be the RP Committee members), and staff with special expertise (e.g., data collection, measurement). Thorsborne and Blood (2013) also recommend including a staff member who is willing to participate, but has doubts about RP to serve as a “devil’s advocate.” The LRT should also consider ways to meaningfully incorporate the voice of students and caregivers into the group’s process. Besides consulting with parents about a formal mechanism for communication between themselves and the LRT, the school might consider a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) as one possibility.

Solidifying the Vision and Clarifying the Values

The struggles among teachers who participated in focus groups between (i) the focus on academic achievement and students’ social and emotional needs, (ii) authenticity and professional boundaries, and (iii) relational and punitive approaches revealed a lack of clear organizational values and priorities. Insufficient training, RP Coordinators’ part-time appointment, procedural issues related to time, and staffing coverage further exasperated these conflicts. The conflicts could seriously undermine the school’s stated community building vision if they remain unresolved.

While the school administrative team initially observed the natural fit between the school’s existing vision and RP, the school never formally integrated the two. The vision is important for the organizational change process because it guides the journey of implementation, including the development of implementation objectives. The charter elementary school may create a new school vision or modify the existing one to reflect the new restorative approach.

A vital part of creating that vision could be staff circles on the various challenges identified in this report. These circles could be aimed at sharing and understanding the dilemmas in order to reduce the potential for dichotomous thinking or a too rapid solution without adequate exploration of everyone’s concerns. After this process, staff would be well prepared to engage more in a process of shared visioning for the school.

Thorsborne and Blood (2013) describe four key stages for creating a vision: 1) developing a vision statement 2) determining the values central to the change; 3) creating a strategy to launch and execute the vision; and 4) developing staff members ability to fluently describe the vision. Determining the central values that underpin the vision and how they relate to the RP implementation is crucial. The values need to become explicit and universally

known by all community members. If the organizational values are not clear, then the behaviors derived from them cannot be explicit. Consequently, it is hard to know when the values and expected behaviors are breached and how to address those breaches. Once the values central to the organizational change are clear and explicit, it will become easier to address the kinds of conflicts presented in this report through establishing: (i) clear behavior expectations for students and adults and (ii) policies and procedures that translate the central values into actions.

Providing opportunities for ongoing dialogue to better understand and build on the expressed community needs through the evaluation process would be important for solidifying the shared vision. This evaluation report is a first commendable step in ensuring that members of the school community voice their needs and have an opportunity to influence the organizational change. Understanding the needs of parents and staff other than teachers would broaden the conversation.

Developing a Strategy to Execute the Vision

As teachers and administrators emphasized, it is important that the school community, and especially the RP leadership, be clear about the short, medium, and long-term goals for RP implementation. Because of the organizational change complexity, it will be important to develop preferred outcomes that align with that vision. Given the evaluation findings, these outcomes will need to relate to: (i) developing RP-related policies and procedures, (ii) providing training, (iii) addressing time and staffing coverage challenges, (iv) ensuring RP resources including RP Coordinator's availability, and (v) developing integrated RP-based approaches to discipline, behavior management, and character development. The strategic goals should be realistic and follow logically over time, allowing RP gradual growth, monitoring, gap analysis, and celebration when each goal is achieved.

Strengthening Relationships: Administrators, Teachers, and Staff

While the school gave full attention to student care during the first year of RP implementation, the lack of care for teachers specific to time issues, training needs, values conflicts (e.g., understanding of professional boundaries), and mixed messages about priorities is notable and potentially erosive of their support. It will be important to engage all teachers in discussing the evaluation findings and designing the follow up action steps.

As noted earlier, the school's administrators, teachers, and staff could also benefit from engaging, on ongoing basis, in circles to (i) build relationships; (ii) increase empathy through understanding what the school community members have to live with in their roles; (iii) explore and clarify community values; and (iv) develop shared understanding for practice expectations. Because the effectiveness of RP depends on the quality of the relationships, the goal of these circles should be community building. While taking action may be a natural outcome of these dialogues, development of community relationships based on mutuality should always be the primary purpose.

Finally, privately and publicly recognizing the creative and persistent efforts of the teachers and staff who are true RP champions is another way to strengthening the school community and the RP initiative. Recognition may involve ensuring resources and granting

permission to staff to visit other schools implementing RP or attending national RP trainings and conferences (Thorsborne and Blood, 2013).

“Organizational Change is a Matter for Both Heads and Hearts”

The evaluation results revealed the complexity inherent in implementing restorative justice in schools and the need for extensive planning. However, as the school considers the outcomes and uses them to plan next steps, it is crucial to understand that sustainable organizational change requires focus on thinking and feeling (Thorsborne and Blood, 2013). As the evaluation findings demonstrate, many members of the school community experienced a powerful personal change through engagement with RP, which allowed them to be more authentic, empowered, and connected with others, despite the loose implementation strategy. Intense emotional transformation already resulted in a notable organizational change. While the school needs to focus on the “head” aspect of implementation such as developing strategy, structure, policies and procedures, it will be as important to continue to capture the community members’ hearts.

Conclusions

The conclusions consist of recommendations to put into action over the next two to three years. Evidence indicates that the application of these recommendations should address many of the challenges that emerged during the first year of RP implementation.

Recommendations

- Develop a Leadership Response Team (LRT) that includes diverse stakeholders (e.g., administrators, teachers, RP Coordinator, staff who are not teachers, school counselor). Consider meaningful ways to include parent and student voice into the work of LRT. Spend time strengthening the relationships among the team members and creating a safe space for productive conflict. Ideally this group would embody RP, modeling the behaviors and attitudes they want others to exhibit. Consider using an external facilitator to assist the group with this process so that all group members can fully participate.
- Engage teachers, staff and other stakeholders in developing the school-wide RP vision, clarifying values, and outlining a strategic plan consistent with the vision. The strategic plan should focus on four areas: systems (e.g., disciplinary system, behavioral system), learning and growth (e.g., professional development), resourcing (e.g., yearly cost for PD, staffing coverage, staff travel to observe other schools and attend national trainings), and policy (e.g., vision, mission, values, RP implementation procedures in various settings, referral process). The focus should be on developing flexible processes and procedures tailored to the school community needs rather than rigid and scripted “cookie-cutter” responses.
- Use Thorsborne and Blood’s (2013) Stages of Whole School RP Implementation tool (Table 1) to monitor the implementation process and ensure that all eight steps are

completed. While the order of steps is not important, completing all eight steps is crucial for successful RP implementation.

- Replace color-based behavior management system with values-based relationally oriented RP approach to manage classroom dynamics. Pilot the plan in several classrooms. Make any necessary changes based on the pilot, then implement school-wide. Review as necessary for modification and to ensure that the plan does not become rigidified.
- Increase RP Coordinators' availability to at least 30 hours per week.
- Provide frequent ongoing high quality RP training with didactic and experiential components. Provide opportunities to practice RP interventions and receive feedback. Integrate content on critical consciousness, anti-oppressive practices, and meaningful inclusion into the RP training.
- Engage the RP Committee in developing a resource library of articles, books, and activities, including age appropriate RJ practices.
- Develop a firm staffing coverage plan to ensure teachers can facilitate and participate in circles.
- Conduct ongoing circles with administrators, teachers, and staff to: (i) build relationships and strengthen the community; (ii) increase empathy through understanding what the school community members have to live with in their roles; (iii) explore and clarify community values; and (iv) develop shared understanding for practice expectations. Focus on the process and development of shared understanding rather than immediately fixing challenges.
- Engage the school families through the use of RP practices. Offer family circles and RP training for parents. Enlist families in creating a forum to give parents a voice and formal avenue for involvement with RP implementation.

These recommendations can be modified and expanded for better application. Even with a host of challenges surrounding implementation, the school made a significant noteworthy progress in its first year. The lessons learned in the first year combined with the school-wide support for RP will be invaluable in institutionalizing RP over the next several years.

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Appendix A: Assessment of Teacher and Staff Level of Engagement with RP Survey

Assessment of Teacher and Staff Level of Engagement with RP Survey

Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions about the Restorative Practices (RP) at your school. We are administering this Restorative Practices Implementation Survey during the Spring semester as a part of an effort to better understand the impact of the implementation of RP on your school. Your school began implementing Restorative Practices in July of 2014. Restorative Practices (also called Restorative Circles) is used in schools throughout the United States as a preventive approach to addressing concerns before they result in behaviors that may require discipline. Restorative Practices support the development of citizenship by recognizing and teaching the value of relationships, peaceful problem-solving, respecting differences, accountability, speaking and listening, and collaboration. It is also used to resolve school-related conflict such as bullying, truancy, and disruptive behavior.

Questions on this form intend to gather information about how you personally think, feel or act. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. The purpose of this survey is not to examine individual responses but rather collective responses of whole school implementation. Your participation in the survey is voluntary. You may choose not to answer a question and you have the right to stop the survey at any time. Thank you.

1. How many total hours have you spent attending professional development to learn about restorative practices since the implementation effort began in July of 2014?
 - a. None
 - b. 1 hour to 3 hours
 - c. More than 3 hours but less than 6 hours
 - d. 6 hours or more

2. How familiar are you with restorative practices?
 - a. I am not at all familiar with restorative practices
 - b. I am slightly familiar with restorative practices
 - c. I am moderately familiar with restorative practices
 - d. I am extremely familiar with restorative practices

3. I feel confident in my ability to use Restorative Practices in my role at the school.
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Agree
 - d. Strongly agree

4. Based on experience, Restorative Practices are an effective approach to building and sustaining trusting relationships and community.
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Agree

- d. Strongly agree
5. How many circles with students and other staff outside of the classroom have you participated in?
- a. I have never participated in circle
 - b. 1-2 circles
 - c. 3-5 circles
 - d. More than 5 circles

The following questions will tell us more about the individuals who completed the survey.

1. What is your PRIMARY role at the school?
- Afterschool Program Coordinator
 - School Counselor / Nurse / Social Worker
 - Special Education Teacher
 - Teacher
 - Staff [please specify] _____
2. How long have you had this role? If you've been in the role for less than a year, use 00.
 __ years __ months
3. Which one or more of the following would you say is your race/ethnicity? Check ALL that apply.
- American Indian, Alaska Native
 - Asian, Asian American
 - Chinese
 - Filipino
 - Japanese
 - Korean
 - Black or African American
 - Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin
 - Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano/a
 - Puerto Rican
 - Another Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin
 - Pacific Islander
 - White
 - Other [please specify:] _____
 - Decline to state
4. What is your gender identity?
- Female/woman
 - Genderqueer
 - Male/man
 - Transgender
 - Transgender male/trans man/FTM

- Transgender female/trans woman/MTF
- Some other gender [please specify]: _____
- Decline to state

	What worked well this year? What should we continue doing next year?	What should we change? What should we stop doing? What should we do instead?
RD with Students (includes referral process, 1:1 support, peer circles)		
RD in Classroom (includes team building circles during Morning meeting and other restorative practices)		
RD with Staff (includes training, staff circles, etc.)		
RD with Families (includes Family circles, family support)		

Appendix B: Focus Groups

Focus Groups Participants Demographic Survey – Staff and Teachers

Focus Group Date: __/__/2015 Focus Group Time: __: __

Thank you for participating in a focus group to help us understand the impact of implementing Restorative Practices on CASE. The following questions will tell us more about the individuals who participated in the focus groups.

1. What is your PRIMARY role at the school?
 - Afterschool Program Coordinator
 - School Counselor / Nurse / Social Worker
 - Special Education Teacher
 - Teacher
 - Staff [please specify] _____

2. How long have you had this role?
__ years __ months

3. Which one or more of the following would you say is your race/ethnicity? Check ALL that apply.
 - American Indian, Alaska Native
 - Asian, Asian American
 - Chinese
 - Filipino
 - Japanese
 - Korean
 - Black or African American
 - Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin
 - Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano/a
 - Puerto Rican
 - Another Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin
 - Pacific Islander
 - White
 - Other [please specify:] _____
 - Decline to state

4. What is your gender identity?
 - Female/woman
 - Genderqueer
 - Male/man
 - Transgender
 - Transgender male/trans man/FTM
 - Transgender female/trans woman/MTF
 - Some other gender [please specify]: _____

Focus Group Questions-Staff and Teachers

1. Please describe your reaction to Restorative Practices (RP) from the time you first learned about it to now. How has using it and learning more about it affected your attitude about it?
2. What changes have you noticed in your school since RP has been introduced to the school district? (E.g. Changes in how you and other staff respond to students? How students behave with each other? The way you deal with discipline?) Tell us some stories of using restorative practices that stand out as meaningful or challenging.
3. What have been the most challenging situations for you? What part of RP has been the hardest to implement? What part has been the most rewarding? If you have not used the approach, please describe what stands in the way.
4. What support, if any, have you received from the school administration? How has it helped or hindered your implementation of the RP approach?
5. What would need to happen for RP principles to become a fully integrated part of how teachers, staff, and administrators approach discipline?
6. If you were advising another Teacher or a Staff Member implementing RP in their classroom, what would you tell them?

Focus Group Questions-2nd Grade Teachers

1. Please describe your reaction to Restorative Practices (RP) from the time you first learned about it to now. How has using it and learning more about it affected your attitude about it?
2. What changes have you noticed in your group since you started participating in a circle with other 2nd grade teachers? Tell us some stories related to participating in the circle or being impacted by the circle that stand out as meaningful or challenging.
3. How has participating in the circle impacted your sense of connection, you feel to the group if at all? The rest of the school community if at all?
4. What do you think the impact has been on your ability to be authentic and transparent?
5. What has been the most challenging aspect of the circle for you? What part of RP has been the hardest? What part has been the most rewarding?
6. How is your classroom different, if at all, as a result of what you learned or experienced in this circle.

Appendix C: Administrator Interview Guides

Administrators Interview Guide

Your school begun implementation of the Restorative Practices Program last summer. The purpose of this study is to assess the implementation of the Restorative Practices program and the benefits of the program on the school climate and student behavior. In this interview I will ask you about your experiences with the program implementation as well as your observation related to any changes or lack of changes in the school since the program started.

1. How did you get involved with RP implementation at your school and what role have you played in the implementation effort?
2. How was RP initially introduced to you, and briefly walk us through your implementation journey to date?
3. When you think about RP implementation at your school, what stands out?
4. What impact have you observed as a result of the implementation of RP within your school community?
 - a. How does RP impact transparency and authenticity of the members of the school community? (e.g., being comfortable with telling the truth; being honest and able to communicate directly)?
 - b. How does RP impact physical and emotional safety of the members of the school community?
 - c. How about connectedness between members of the school community?
5. What implementation challenges have you and/or your school community experienced? What do you believe has contributed to these challenges?
6. What implementation successes have you and/or your school community experienced? What do you believe has contributed to these successes?
7. What next steps do you believe need to occur to further strengthen the RP implementation effort at your school site?
8. If you were advising another Administrator implementing RP in their classroom, what would you tell them?

Appendix D: Restorative Questions

When responding to conflict, a restorative approach consists in asking the people involved these key questions:

1. What happened, and what were you thinking at the time of the incident?
2. What have you thought about since?
3. Who has been affected by what happened, and how?
4. What about this has been the hardest for you?
5. What do you think needs to be done to make things as right as possible?