RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES & SOLUTIONS IN K-12
SCHOOLS

Keith McBrayer

TC 660H
Plan II Honors Program
The University of Texas at Austin

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Davida Charney, Ph. D

Department of Rhetoric & Writing

Supervising Professor

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Mark Garrett Longaker, Ph. D

Department of Rhetoric & Writing

Second Reader

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Abstract

Author: Keith McBrayer

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Supervisor: Davida Charney, Ph. D

After zero-tolerance discipline policies and other nationwide anti-bullying and anti-substance abuse programs were proven ineffective by the turn of the Century, restorative justice practices in K-12 schools have since grown in popularity in the United States. Current research and student outcomes concur that restorative practices reduce overall suspension rates, increase attendance, and improve school climate and safety. While a growing number of resources are available for schools wishing to implement restorative practices, there are limited studies and consensus on what specific challenges schools will face during implementation and what the best practices are in overcoming them. The available literature presents three major obstacle areas that schools encounter in implementation: 1) creating a school-wide restorative culture, 2) power dynamics and interpersonal politics, and 3) youth and their attraction to violence.

To examine the validity of these obstacle areas, this thesis analyses qualitative data from six interviews with school administrators and a university researcher working with restorative justice initiatives in schools. My thesis presents insights on specific issues within these three obstacle areas to pinpoint where my interviews confirmed or disagreed with the research. My overall analysis found that the first two obstacle areas were largely confirmed by my ground-level interviews while the third obstacle area was largely disconfirmed as a universal issue. Additionally, this thesis presents insights into unexpected and undocumented implementation issues. I conclude with potential areas for further study and recommendations for schools in the implementation process.

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Chapter 1: Restorative Justice Background in Education

Tommy[1] is a freshman in high school in Nashville, Tennessee. Only a month into the school year, he gets in a shouting match over incomplete homework with his biology teacher and slams the door as he storms out. The teacher reports him to the principal and he is suspended for three days. At home, Tommy is bored. His single mom will be at work all day, so she won't be there to cook for him. There isn't much extra food at the house either -- Tommy gets free-and-reduced lunch passes at school -- and he doesn't want to take what will be for dinner for him and his four other siblings. Tommy decides to walk to the Exxon five blocks from his house and see what food he can get there.

That afternoon, Tommy is arrested for shoplifting. The Exxon employee saw him walk out the door, and called the police, who might have been sympathetic had Tommy explained that he couldn't get his food from school that day. Instead, Tommy panics and tries to run when the cop turns his back for a second.

He ends the day in jail with multiple charges for lying to an officer, resisting arrest, and theft. Now he'll miss the next month of school for legal proceedings and his sentence could be up to a year. When he has to call his mom from the box, she bawls hardest when he tells her the cost of the fines.

Prior to this, Tommy had a history of behavior issues, having been suspended multiple times in middle school. He suspected the same might happen in high school, because no one had ever tried to change his behavior -- he'd only been removed from the

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[1] Following narrative is fictional but is an adapted narrative of the consequences of the school-to-prison pipeline demonstrated in Noguera (2003).

classroom when he acted up. By the 8th grade, Tommy had started to believe the labels he'd been given: "problem case," "troublemaker," and "bad student." For this, he felt shame and resentment and isolation. Tommy is 14 now, and even though he had money at the gas station, he gave into the impulse to steal, the adrenaline rush more appealing than paying for the goods stuffed under his hoodie.

Was all this his fault? Tommy certainly made a few wrong choices. But if the school had kept him on campus, he wouldn't have even had the opportunity to mess up. And he would've had a decent lunch at the very least. Even though it was Tommy's fault to not turn in a worksheet, it certainly wasn't his fault that the undertrained biology teacher shamed him in front of his peers.

The sad reality about Tommy's case is that it isn't uncommon and isn't the worst either. When Los Angeles or Detroit students get suspended or expelled from school, they don't spend the day alone -- they have gangs to accompany them into crime. If it's not boredom or hunger that gets inner city kids into trouble it is a childhood best friend or neighbor who is already expelled or a drop out by sophomore year. In these places, petty theft turns into armed robbery and a year in the juvenile system turns into federal prison (Noguera, 2003).

Compare these cases and Tommy's day to what occurred just a mile away inside of a classroom at Valor Collegiate[2], a charter school in the neighborhood adjacent to Tommy's.

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[2] Following narrative adapted from Valor Collegiate short documentary (2018).

Zachary, a fifth-grade student, is in the middle of a circle of his classmates, eyes

tearing up, reading a handwritten apology to his teacher for disrupting class the day before.

"Mr. Nelson, please forgive me. I didn't mean to make you mad," he says.

His teacher stands and meets Zachary in the middle. "Zach, I wasn't mad when we

had the disruptions in class, but I do accept your apology for your actions. Please know

that I really value our friendship and I never want you to feel worried. You are an amazing

young man and I am really lucky to be your teacher."

Zachary is crying as his teacher reaches down for a hug. Today the lesson is totally

clear: Mr. Nelson values each student, even the troublemakers. Restoring harmed

relationships is more important to the teacher than exerting control over the students with

punishments, such as detention or in-school suspension.

Valor Collegiate is one of the schools across the nation practicing restorative justice

(RJ) – a disciplinary system that avoids using detention, suspension, or anything else that

would remove a student from the school. The RJ philosophy holds that students should

take responsibility for their actions by repairing harmed relationships rather than just

carrying out a punishment (Zehr, 2015). Through RJ circles, group interventions, reflective

writing, or mediated conversations, students learn to reconcile and forgive, practicing

social and emotional skills throughout their adolescent development years.

What if Tommy had grown up in a school that practiced restorative justice rather

than exclusionary discipline? What if before middle school he was taught how to behave

in a classroom and build relationships with his teachers rather than just be removed from

opportunities to learn either? What if Tommy had a chance to repair the relationship with

his biology teacher? What if the teacher and principal had frameworks to work with Tommy rather than suspend him? What if his teacher didn't feel the need to shame bad students but instead had been trained to build relationships first?

Unfortunately, teachers only have options according to what sort of frameworks their schools provide. If a school doesn't have restorative justice practices in place, it doesn't matter what kind of teacher the students have. A teacher's only option may be to send a student to the principal or use detention. Alternative options, then, lie in the structure of the school's discipline programs.

In *Justice & Prevention Research Center's* "Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools" updated literature review, they concluded that the research consensus is that RJ is "a promising approach to address climate, culture, and safety issues in school. The community of support for its implementation has grown exponentially over the past several years, but more research is needed" (Fronius et al., 2019). This is from a survey of research and studies across "the geographical diversity of RJ implementation across the United States." While RJ is relatively new to the schools of many states, there are large scale, sustainable programs in a growing number of states including California, Illinois, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania. The practice also spans the array of public, private, alternative, urban, and suburban schools.

Studies of its effectiveness have been published in the following educational journals, to name a few:

- American Educational Research Journal
- Equity & Excellence in Education
- Middle School Journal

- Journal of Character Education
- Journal of Law and Education
- Teachers College Press
- Journal of Educational Psychology
- Journal of School Violence
- Youth and Society
- Journal of Adolescent Health

While the consensus of most research is that RJ decreases suspensions, absenteeism (i.e. improves attendance rates), and improves school climate and safety, there is still some uncertainty on best implementation practices (Fronius et al., 2019). Fronius et al. notes that "the literature underscores the many challenges confronted when implementing RJ in schools. For example, there is confusion about what RJ is and no consensus about the best way to implement it." In this thesis I address some questions regarding RJ implementation that haven't been answered or that haven't been approached the right way, including:

- Why have some schools found great success in their RJ tactics and feel they have a totally transformed student and faculty culture?

- What is it about the implementation of restorative practices in K-12 schools that fails in some schools but succeeds greatly in others?

- What kinds of training and specific actions can school leaders take to enable a school to value, believe in, and implement an RJ approach?

- Which implementation obstacles are to be expected, and what can be done to overcome them?

- What unexpected obstacles not covered in the literature should school leaders prepare for?

This thesis will explore these questions about RJ implementation and more, but first it is crucial to understand why RJ is necessary in schools in the first place.

FROM REFORMING DISCIPLINE TO RESHAPING CULTURE

RJ began as an effort to break the school-to-prison pipeline but developed further into a method of reforming school discipline and developed finally into an approach to reforming a school's entire culture, beyond the disciplinarian's office.

Because the landscape of restorative justice (RJ) in the education system has drastically changed since its inception in the criminal justice system, it could be said the four problems RJ has addressed over the course of its history are: 1) reducing juvenile crime cases, 2) breaking the school-to-prison pipeline, 3) solving behavioral and academic issues, and 4) improving school climate.

The beginnings of RJ practices were first implemented in the juvenile justice system before making it into the classroom. The goal was to reduce the number of juveniles brought into the system for non-violent, low-level crimes. Offenders would engage in restorative dialogue and mediation style conferences. For the most part, these techniques proved successful in repairing harm between stakeholders and the community (Sherman & Strang, 2007). Since then, RJ has been implemented on a broader scale across the U.S in the past decade. This wasn't anything new: New Zealand has been utilizing the philosophy in the juvenile system for over three decades (Zehr, 2015).

Around 2005, the juvenile and school systems started collaborating in reducing the number of students put into the system for petty crimes. Rather than resorting to exclusionary discipline and referring student offenders directly to the legal system, schools helped by keeping offender students on campus and helping them through a RJ program,

ultimately building positive growth and development for the students and also reducing the amount of future crime and unnecessary youth crime cases (Schiff and Bazemoore, 2012).

So now the purpose of RJ is not just to reduce the amount of juvenile crime out there, but to directly reduce the number of students that schools are excluding and thus allowing to get caught up in the juvenile system. In other words, the purpose of RJ went from reducing youth crime to breaking the school-to-prison-pipeline. Take the example of Tommy from the introduction--he was unnecessarily put in a position where he could commit further petty crimes and enter the juvenile system instead of being kept in school and offered chances to grow and make amends. This is the classic school-to-prison pipeline scenario. What was once seen as a purely juvenile system issue is now clearly linked to the school systems, and RJ must start at the school level if we are to successfully keep students in school, and in check.

In the last decade, schools have broadened the use of RJ to address common behavior issues, not just ones that would normally result in exclusionary discipline (Salmivalli et al., 2005). Instead of merely dealing with cases that would usually involve the law, like theft, schools have turned to RJ to help mitigate issues with bullying, truancy, disrupting class, drug use, and violence.

The most recent phase of RJ use in schools has broadened to the scope of shaping school climate. From minute classroom interactions, teacher-to-student language, faculty-to-faculty interaction, the newest wave of RJ is concerned with overhauling the culture of a school, not just dealing with behavior issues as they roll in. There is an intriguing "magic" to schools who have embraced RJ principles in every area of their routines -- they have created a culture where crime, bullying, disrespect, academic issues just don't happen in the first place. Here, the RJ programs have moved from being reactive techniques to being proactive culture setting mechanisms.

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RJ REPLACES INEFFECTIVE OR FAILED SYSTEMS

There have been other attempts at solving many of these issues in education. There have been anti-bullying campaigns, anti-substance-use campaigns, and, most notably, zero-tolerance policies, all having limited success. Antibullying campaigns were started to reduce school violence and improve peer-peer culture. Unfortunately, Smith et al. (2004) found that school-wide anti-bullying campaigns have only marginal effects, if any. While some comprehensive campaigns that were closely monitored had some positive benefits of creating awareness throughout the school, most had negligible results and no proof that these campaigns work better than any other strategies.

Anti-substance campaigns also became popular as an attempt to curb drug and alcohol abuse among adolescents. But according to the research, programs such as the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E) turned out to be as ineffective as the anti-bullying strategies. In a 2004 study, the American Journal of Public Health concluded that D.A.R.E was ineffective in reducing alcohol, tobacco, and drug use among students. The journal states: "Given the tremendous expenditures in time and money involved with D.A.R.E., it would appear that continued efforts should focus on other techniques and programs that might produce more substantial effects." Indeed, it seems that the mass amount of resources poured into D.A.R.E. and anti-bullying campaigns beg for a more apt solution.

Starting in the 1980s, educators and the public alike started throwing around a hot new buzzword: "Zero-tolerance." Zero-tolerance policies started as a strict, no excuses practices aimed at drastically reducing adolescent violence, insubordination, bullying, and delinquency. The idea was that it would nip problems in the bud and deter students from acting up at all. This was a time when a cluster of school shootings had recently occurred, and overall school violence was on the rise (Blair, 1999). Many school leaders decided to

take a public stance by adopting harsh zero-tolerance policies, and this seemed like the best approach for creating a safe environment for students (Martinez, 2009).

What started as a great idea on paper devolved into highly unsuccessful results in practice. The original intent of the movement was to have zero-tolerance on weapons, drugs, alcohol, and fights. But soon administrators progressed the policies to include basically anything a student could be reprimanded for: swearing, truancy, disrespect, insubordination, dress code violations, etc (Martinez, 2009). This watered down the original effect of the policies, treating minor school violations as equal to bringing a weapon into the school, which only worsened behavior and school culture. Students didn't feel any safer and didn't bring less of these things into the school, either. Rather than the promised outcome of decreased suspensions, suspensions increased with the implementation of zero-tolerance (NASP, 2001).

Moreover, removing the "bad apples" from the classroom doesn't seem to help bring classrooms under control either. According to Martinez (2009), administrators "typically justify using removal through suspension or expulsion by arguing that such practices are necessary to maintain an orderly learning environment for others. The typical rationale given for such practices is that by sorting out the "bad apples," others will be able to learn." But teachers who suspended problematic students quickly found another would take their place. The problem was not bad students -- these will always exist -- the problem was bad teachers. If schools want to create good learning environments then the solution is teacher training and effective behavior management in classrooms, not exclusionary discipline.

Martinez (2009) concludes that "zero-tolerance has no place in public schools" because the policies "have become a cop-out for school administrators, allowing them to bar students from receiving an education." Zero-tolerance policies have thus contributed

directly to the school-to-prison pipeline, removing kids from school into pushing them into the system with no chance of further consideration.

If we know these alternative methods don't work to solve the issues that RJ has started to solve, how is RJ doing in schools so far? What is the current climate, perception, and rhetoric surrounding RJ in schools in this most current decade?

CURRENT STATE OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN SCHOOLS

Restorative Justice practices are now seen as a common alternative to exclusionary discipline, zero-tolerance, and similar failed strategies. The perception of zero-tolerance is now that those principles were harmful to schools and students, and the literature almost unanimously confirms this (Fronius et al., 2019).

The current rhetoric surrounding Restorative Justice can still be controversial. Reactions to the philosophy generally split into two camps. Proponents of RJ see it as the solution to the problems created by exclusionary discipline practices (school-to-prison pipeline, insubordinate students, etc). This camp sees RJ as a champion of effectively socializing students and modeling social/emotional learning and relationship building. The critic camp, on the other hand, sees RJ as a "soft" copout where students aren't held accountable for their actions. This camp aligns with traditional punitive values, and the difference in the two viewpoints can be summarized by the following table:

Traditional Justice	Restorative Justice
Views injustice as rules being violated.	Views injustice as relationships and people being violated.
Justice is seen as carrying out a punishment.	Justice is seen as understanding the effects of offense and repairing harm.

Establishes guilt towards the offender	Gives the offender an opportunity to be forgiven by victim
Focuses on the offender, ignores victim	Victim is central to the resolution process.
Only the school and offender have roles in the process.	The offender, victim, school, and community all play roles in the process.

Table 1 Traditional and Restorative Justice Approaches to Offenders (adapted from Zehr, 2015 and Smith et al., 2015)

Zehr (2015) says we can sum the differing philosophies by looking at what questions they are asking. The traditional view would ask: *What laws have been broken? Who did it? What do they deserve?* The restorative approach would ask: *Who has been harmed? What are their needs? Whose obligations are these?*

While the extant literature clearly contrasts traditional and restorative justice, current research does not give so clear a picture of where RJ is being implemented or to what effect. There aren't many statistics on how many schools across the U.S. are moving towards RJ practices. I would love to see a heat map of where in the country RJ is being utilized the most, or how it spreads. It is just as hard to say how 'trendy' RJ really is - we know of schools practicing RJ over the past decade, but do we know how many have begun to do the same in the past decade? What about in the past 5 years? In the past year? How many schools will change their practices this coming year? Is the RJ movement growing linearly? Exponentially? Is it actually declining?

A heat map of participating schools would be especially useful for seeing how it correlates with socioeconomic status (SES) by area. Are schools adopting RJ practices to deal with the school-to-prison pipeline and at-risk students (typical of low SES

neighborhoods)? Or is the RJ movement spreading into more affluent areas for its effectiveness in creating a high achieving school culture?

We do know RJ isn't uniquely practiced in U.S. schools. According to Fronius et al. (2016), the first country practicing RJ in schools was Australia. After finding great success in one campus in 1994, the government provided funding for RJ programs in 100 schools across the state. Since then the philosophy spread to New Zealand, most of the United Kingdom, different European countries, Canada, and finally, the U.S.

Just like there aren't many statistics about RJ in practice in the U.S., there aren't many for the global practices either. Because RJ started outside of the U.S., it would be helpful to see how trends have been behaving in countries like Australia that have a decade or two lead.

Since we do not have comprehensive data on its implementation or its effects, we can't evaluate RJ just yet. Nonetheless, we know what RJ is and why it appeals to some teachers and administrators. So, until comprehensive data becomes available, we should try to understand why sympathetic schools adopt RJ, to what extent, and we should further try to see what troubles they have with its implementation. As we can see from the research, we know why schools are adopting RJ practices. We can see what issues schools and administrators are trying to solve and how RJ practices do a better job at solving these than their archaic predecessors. But why are schools having trouble successfully putting these practices into play? Why are some schools opting out of adopting new RJ programs?

While there isn't much research on how many schools have access to the information, RJ implementation practices and trainings or "best practice" toolkits, we do

have some research on the obstacles schools have to overcome to make RJ programs a working reality on their campuses. Perhaps gaining insight into obstacles schools face when wanting to create an RJ program will give us insight into why schools wouldn't even attempt to move on from traditional practices in the first place. Perhaps if this thesis can shine light onto how to overcome implementation obstacles, then it can ultimately provide recommendations to schools intimidated or overwhelmed from trying or even giving considering shifting their behavior management practices.

THREE OBSTACLES TO SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN SCHOOLS

Research does show schools encounter various challenges when implementing restorative justice programs or practices. In a University of Texas Social Work graduate thesis, Heather T. Jones states that the most salient implementation challenges can be grouped into three different categories: 1) Youth & Their Attraction to Violence, 2) Power Dynamics & Interpersonal Politics in the School Setting, and 3) Creating a School-Wide Restorative Culture.

According to Jones (2013), the first obstacle about violence stems from adolescents wanting to feel some sort of empowerment or excitement. To teenagers, nothing is quite as exciting as a school fight, and to create a school culture where these sorts of altercations no longer happen is, well, boring. Why would students want to buy into a school reform system that takes away the adrenaline highlight of their week? Because RJ programs rely heavily on student buy-in, addressing this obstacle is key in many schools that have a history of aggression and violence in their hallways.

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Jones provides examples of practices that helped mitigate this obstacle and provide excitement and a sense of leadership back into the student body in RJ programs. Schools that had implemented circle practices and restorative discussions that were having issues with students still wanted to engage in aggression found success in giving students more responsibility in the RJ processes. For example, schools that gave students the opportunity to be circle leaders and discussion moderators felt it empowered students enough that it could displace aggressive behavior. Perhaps students did not want to see blood but a chance at leadership and the feeling of being in control. Instead of leaving students to their own devices, schools found they could step in and fulfill those adolescent needs in a healthy manner instead.

For the second obstacle regarding relational dynamics, the issue revolves around teachers being unwilling to change their classroom management styles or feeling afraid that open dialogues with students would put their authority over students at risk. Indeed, restorative justice practices require that teachers change or overhaul their classroom procedures, language, attitudes, and relationships with students. Students often are more on board with restorative justice programs because it feels like it is a leveling ground for the teacher-student relationship, but this is exactly what prevents many teachers from buying in immediately. Teachers who have long been part of traditional systems in schools have an especially hard time imagining classroom management styles where they cannot use threats of principal visits, suspensions, or other punishment as a sort of power leverage.

The third obstacle is less about individual students or teachers but is a challenge faced at the administrative or district level regarding implementation. Schools that fail to

holistically incorporate restorative justice programs into every area of their campuses' routines often don't go on to thrive. RJ programs are best implemented in a holistic fashion alongside a holistic culture change. Certainly, there are many barriers involved in overcoming this obstacle, from lack of funding to naysayers to insufficient faculty training. How can a school get their students to engage in the social and emotional learning that comes with RJ practices if teachers aren't modeling the behavior and engaging in the practices first?

For each obstacle, Jones goes on to provide some effective and ineffective practices various schools had tried to mitigate the obstacles. Later in this thesis, I will explore these obstacles and practices with supporting research in further sections. For now, these obstacles and citation of practices provide a great framework to investigate local schools to see if the research applies. Will the schools and informants I interview agree or disagree with Jones and current research? Are these three obstacles really the most common? Are there more obstacles out there? Do schools agree with Jones' cited effective and ineffective practices? Does anybody agree on what will ultimate help overcome barriers to implementing an RJ program at a school?

Chapter 2: Current Research on RJ Implementation Obstacles

This chapter explains the research findings on the obstacles of creating a school wide restorative culture, combating power dynamics and interpersonal politics, and overcoming youth and their attraction to violence. Each section summarizes effective and

ineffective solutions for each obstacle as found in the literature. The chapter finishes with a discussion of unanswered questions in the current research.

CREATING A SCHOOL WIDE RESTORATIVE CULTURE

Jones admits that creating a school wide culture of RJ "is at once the most elusive and critical step in the implementation of restorative discipline." Indeed, reaching a point of comprehensive culture change is no quick or easy task; it is the capstone of an organization implementing a vision successfully. Jones provides for us a few examples of both ineffective and effective practices in conquering the task of creating a comprehensive culture.

Ineffective Practices for Creating a School Wide Restorative Culture

The first and most common hurdle is that schools often do not have the money and resources to create the change and culture that is desired. Money is important first because it can hire staff dedicated to implementing policies and programs. Creating full time positions, such as an RJ coordinator position, is crucial to the success of maintaining the philosophy and practice successfully in a school. Jones warns about the real consequences of slim funding, citing a warning example that is all too common: "In the Chicago Public School system, for example, insufficient funding has prevented many campuses from hiring full-time restorative justice coordinators."

The woes of insufficient funding don't stop here. Because funding is associated with perceived value, RJ programs often ebb and flow in their community buy-in and support in accordance to how much money they get allocated. When funding is cut, so is administrative and community attention, resulting in programs that fizzle and die out.

Because successfully RJ implementation takes years, schools must allocate funding for the longevity of the process. A common pitfall is when schools allocate resources for a short time period. When that time period ends, so does the support necessary for the program. What can then happen is people say, "Well, I guess RJ doesn't work," when in fact RJ wasn't the problem; rather, this issue was insufficient implementation planning for the long term.

The other hurdles to creating a school wide culture have to do with different levels of buy in. If a school leader is not bought in, the culture and vision have little to no chance of trickling down to the rest of the staff, students, and school as a whole. However, having an enthusiastic principal isn't always foolproof either. A common problem is when one school leader or one single person of influence carries all of the excitement and buy-in. If that person leaves or waivers, so does the success of the vision. Jones found that "instability is often the case when there is not buy-in from multiple stakeholders who are committed to seeing restorative discipline succeed." Ultimately, there must be centralized support (think: funding) and school level support from many different areas of stakeholders. Without a strong web of support, creating a successful restorative culture is bound to tear under its own weight.

The last pitfall Jones discusses here is that schools must not use a "cookie-cutter approach" with the specifics of their RJ implementation. Using generic practices or stealing from another school without adapting it to a specific community can create many issues. In studying schools in Oakland, Jones found that attempts to implement these "cookie-cutter" models (often sourced from middle class schools) failed tremendously in low-

income communities. For example, a common practice at restorative schools is to hold conferences with a troublemaking student and his or her parents. In the Oakland school demographics, this was an ineffective practice because parents were often working multiple jobs, preventing them from being able to show up during school hours, or one or both parents weren't around in the first place. Because these Oakland schools failed to think about the nuances and realities of their community, they failed to draft appropriate RJ practices.

Effective Practices for Creating a School Wide Restorative Culture

If all this sounds discouraging, the research still provides many ways for schools to work towards creating a great culture of RJ successfully. Jones starts with the simple practice of RJ circles. Like so many schools are reporting, Jones agrees that circles are a powerful tool to shape the school culture itself, starting with the students. Circles can and should be taken advantage of to create dialogue about goodwill, respect, trust, discipline scenarios, cultural differences, and diversity issues.

If schools can find the funding for RJ specific staff, Jones is a believer in having a dedicated Culture and Climate Coordinator (how's that for a title?). In the wonderful book *Implementing Restorative Practices in Schools,* Margaret Thorsborne finds that the key to "consistent and good educational outcomes, the type that have led Finland to lead the world, require high quality professional leadership…the position that student learning, both academic and social, needs to be the core imperative of school leadership. That 'the task of school leadership, is above all, to lead learning by creating and sustaining the conditions that maximize both academic and social learning,'" (pg. 49) which is also a nod back to

her warning about having a school leader who must be bought in. So it seems that not only must you have the principal and school leaders bought in, but it also helps tremendously when you can hire an administrator dedicated to the work that it takes to implement RJ practices holistically.

Both Jones and Thorsborne agree that consistency is key in RJ implementation. Jones recommends having allotted class time and weekly routines for RJ practices to happen (say, circle time MWF during class). Thorsborne emphasizes the importance of having RJ be something that is totally integrated with consistency and routine into the lives of students and the school:

> The link between restorative practice and SEL Building SEL needs to be something that we are consciously working on, on a daily basis, on a weekly basis in terms of social emotional building programmes (circles and other pro-social skilling programmes and activities) and on a targeted basis (special SEL groups to deal with issues within the school, for groups and for individuals). This is dependent on understanding the issues within each community and the broader school population, whilst being responsive and creative to meeting these needs. (pg. 48)

Lastly, Jones recommends the importance of collecting data which helps demonstrate progress visually to the public eye. Data collection not only helps with community buy-in but it is necessary for a school to see where it can improve and where adjustments are necessary. Over time, data can be used to pinpoint problematic times in the school year (perhaps the weeks leading up to breaks or a specific day might be historically troublesome) and allow for a school to prepare adequately.

COMBATING POWER DYNAMICS & INTERPERSONAL POLITICS

An initial obstacle to implementing RJ practices in a school is a teacher's natural reaction against the philosophy. According to Jones, teachers are often worried about

giving up power in the teacher-student dynamic, acknowledging how "both teachers and administrators are accustomed to having vertical authority over students, and often rely on threats of punishment, and the fear such punishment creates, to maintain control." The difficult reality of the RJ philosophy is that it flips the power dynamic and asks teachers to step into a horizontal dynamic, where the teacher is relating equally as a fellow human with his or her students. Taking away the possibility for suspensions, expulsions, detention, or just sending a troublemaker off to the principal's office also takes away the teacher's leverage to use punitive threats. A school where only restorative justice alternatives are offered takes great bravery and commitment on the teacher's end. They cannot simply remove the troublemaker from the classroom; they must engage and solve the problem, restore the relationship, or teach a moment or lesson of high-level emotional and social functions and norms.

This, of course, is easier said than done, and will require rigorous staff and culture development, as we have already discovered. Creating an excellent practice of social and emotional learning (SEL) creates other obstacles for teachers too. Jones found that teachers are naturally hesitant for students to see them in a vulnerable position when they are modeling emotional honesty. In restorative circles, for instance, a common fear for teachers is that they do not want their students to perceive them as weak. Even worse, a teacher can fear a nastier group of students feeling victory if he or she cries or has been upset. The other side of this is that students have just as many reservations about being vulnerable in circles or other RJ settings, fearing they may be reprimanded for anything they say. Jones showed this finding with her example of how "one student reported that he was not completely honest during a circle discussion because he feared repercussions from the teacher once traditional power dynamics were restored during regular class time."

When it comes to veteran teachers, old habits die hard, especially when it comes to discipline philosophies. This can create great friction when a school switches over to restorative practices and seasoned teachers are forced to reconcile their years of experience with a totally opposite system and philosophy. This is one of the largest issues for schools to overcome, so Thorsborne provides some insight on how she feels a school might get over the hurdle:

> Operating alongside or over the top of traditional values without seeking an alignment between restorative practice and the old way of doing things (down the track) will eventually cause a problem and lead to a disconnect between what we say we do and what we actually do in practice. Still caning or using other punishments, following a successful restorative process, will ultimately lead to someone asking, 'Why we still doing this?' This will require a review of the whole school discipline process to ensure that the primary aim is to bring about learning, develop responsible behaviours and to stop the unhelpful behaviours, rather than punishing for the sake of punishing, because that is the way we have always done things. (p. 97)

Getting past traditional mindset will be an investigation into the "why" of every action and practices. Tradition for the sake of tradition is a great enemy to any change, indeed, especially when RJ is such drastic overhaul in mindset and practice.

Using up precious time in the classroom is a common worry for teachers, especially when that time is used for something other than content. Jones reminds us how living out a restorative practice – even just having a restorative conversation with a student on the spot – takes far more time than a quick and easy referral. Thorsborne found that "a teacher's initial response to proposals for introducing RP into the classroom is: 'I haven't got time to do this – I have to get through the curriculum.'" (pg. 50). While this is a common complaint obstacle, the research doesn't see it as a valid excuse. Thorsborne follows the previous quote up with convicting evidence: "In an extensive research study, Lingard et al.

(2003) found that academic outcomes are enhanced when schools have a strong emphasis and focus on the quality of relationships as part of that learning environment. This is something that often gets lost in the pressures of standardised testing in place in many education systems" (pg. 50).

Yet another obstacle is that a teacher's attitude towards RJ can drastically affect the quality of practices and the students' experience with RJ. Jones says that if a teacher dislikes RJ but is forced to conduct restorative circles, for example, the teacher will inevitably lead a poor circle experience. The varying quality of RJ in a school for students can then lead to a negative, school-wide impression of the practices. In short, disgruntled teachers will ultimately hurt the overall impressions of RJ's effectiveness in a school.

The last challenge found in Jones' research is that certain faculty will feel threatened by the implementation of progressive practices. Staff whose jobs directly relate to traditional practices, such as drop-out specialists, security officers, campus police, disciplinarians, etc. will likely create pushback or lobby negative attitudes out of a defense for the future of their jobs. This is an understandable reaction, so schools should find ways to adapt these staff jobs to fill restorative roles. For example, why couldn't a drop-out specialist be trained to be the new RJ coordinator if a school gets rid of expulsions?

Ineffective Practices for Combating Power Dynamics & Interpersonal Politics

A first action step to overcoming some of these obstacles is for schools to build in some time during the day to do restorative practices well. Jones says the first issue with many schools is that they simply have no time set aside for RJ or even staff community exercises.

Another common pitfall is that administrators simply do not want to practice the horizontal nature school relationship dynamics themselves (Jones, 2013). As explored in the previous section, because staff culture permeates from the top, we cannot expect students to do anything staff are not practicing, and teachers feel the same way about their supervisors.

While having an RJ coordinator is crucial, as also discussed previously, Jones says that an overachieving coordinator can actually turn into a bad thing. An RJ coordinator who handles all of the conversations and circles and interactions with students will fail to empower teachers to become confident in practicing RJ methods on their own. Additionally, the teachers will be robbed of necessary relationship development moments with their own students. Because one of the biggest impacts of RJ in a school is in the resolution of little, daily conflicts, teachers must learn to engage students in a restorative fashion on their own.

Effective Practices for Combating Power Dynamics & Interpersonal Politics

Faculty can mitigate these challenges by first seeing themselves as the locus of accountability to one another, says Jones, not just to their administrators. This only happens when staff have healthy relationships with each other, which can be fostered through staff retreats, circles, and simply creating space for staff to dialogue with each other. Again, the importance of building in time for relationship building emerges as the theme of successful RJ implementation, and not just for students but for staff (yet another opportunity for staff to "walk the talk").

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Hopefully, this will lead to a culture of mutual respect, which Jones cites as the next sign of a great school. Not only is respect to be modeled among staff, but students need to understand what a functioning relational community looks like too. A teacher at Ed White Middle School in San Antonio said it was crucial that her students "understood that it's not just that they hurt but that I hurt." How powerful is that? There is a small but emotionally advanced distinction in recognizing not only that you have hurt someone, but that they actually *feel* hurt. A student may understand that they hurt someone else, but that understanding is still wrapped up within themselves. To understand that the person they hurt *feels hurt* is to actually empathize and comprehend beyond one's own self and into the space of another person.

On a practical level, Jones says schools should be creating opportunities for staff mentoring. For staff to become fluent in restorative conversations, circles, interventions – whatever the practice may be – role play opportunities, handbooks, and feedback are all necessary in training and professional development. Thorsborne warns that this is no light task, to be sure:

> Care needs to be taken around designing PD sessions for the adults in the school community. Knowledge about adult learning needs and styles would indicate that large groups of people are unlikely to acquire deep skills by attending a one-day course. What is required is high quality modelling, intense practice over time, supported by coaching and problem-solving. Through focus and repetition this leads to new neural pathways in the adult brain, and feedback loops with peers and supervisors/coaches and accountability systems will correct the mistakes we all make when we try something new. (pg. 176)

As it turns out, teaching staff effectively takes as much planning and consideration as catering new content for adolescents. Regardless of the difficulty and time that RJ staff training requires, it is obviously a necessary commitment if a school should succeed.

OVERCOMING YOUTH & THEIR ATTRACTION TO VIOLENCE

The line of thinking in Jones's (2013) thesis is that restorative practices will be hard to implement among students because violence is a "developmental characteristic" of adolescents. According to Jones, adolescents might not be swayed much by RJ circles and peaceful conversations because of their "heightened levels of aggression" and tendencies toward "risk-taking behaviors."

It makes sense when Jones talks about the certain thrill-seeking element of acting out or showing willful defiance towards teachers. (The lines "We don't need no education / Hey teachers, leave them kids alone!" from Pink Floyd's "Another Brick In the Wall" comes to mind.) While RJ circles are meant to promote community and a sense of belonging, Jones cites examples of how school fights essentially did the same thing for students. She teased out an insight about how gathering around a hallway fight gave students a sense of belonging and "togetherness."

RJ circles and practices are ultimately meant to create a culture of respect, which unfortunately teenagers can often try to find through violent actions. Thorsborne reminds us how Howard Zehr, the father of early restorative justice movements, suggested "that all violence by a perpetrator, for example, is an effort to gain respect when s/he has felt disrespected" (pg. 24). While RJ practices ultimately seek to fulfill these natural human emotional desires, the obstacle here is that adolescents can turn to aggressive actions for a quicker fix.

But just because adolescents are prone to these types of behaviors doesn't mean schools should continue doling out traditional punishments. The very psychology that makes adolescents aggressive can take an even darker turn when it comes to non-restorative punishments. Thorsborne dives into some psychology research to draw this insight: "Punishment has a compounding effect on children who are already dealing with multiple

stress and trauma in their lives. Punishment contributes to this stress, something that may be very evident in those children who are easily aroused and explode in anger and rage on being challenged about their behaviour" (pg. 26). This quote tells me why we need RJ practices all the more. Restorative practices seek to amend and to repair areas of stress, harm, and anxiety. Traditional, punitive focused punishments only make the situation worse.

Ineffective Practices for Overcoming Youth & Their Attraction to Violence

Jones cited only a couple ineffective practices in overcoming adolescents' aggressive tendencies: pandering, using circles inappropriately, or pressuring students into engaging. In an effort to get students to engage, teachers or administrators might try to pander and sell RJ circles and practices to the students in ways that can actually diminish the perception and importance of RJ altogether. Jones found that students began to view RJ circles as just another school obligation, which was detrimental to their effectiveness. Jones says, "catering to youth sensibilities in order to make circles more exciting (as illustrated by the case of one teacher who wanted to talk about sex in order to trigger student interest) is not an effective remedy to student boredom. Such catering can easily lead to a lack of professionalism that deters from the tone of honesty and respect that should characterize the circle."

Additionally, teachers who use circles for anything and everything too defeat their purpose. Using a circle to discuss academics or other less weighty matters made for ineffective circle times when it was actually needed. Other teachers just used circles way too often. Similarly, teachers were found to be having circles just for the sake of having them, which meant the discussion had no purpose, which students found supremely "boring."

When pandering doesn't work for teachers, another pitfall includes pressuring students to participate or threatening students with punishment (quite the irony, we know). Jones tells us the consequence of "causing students to feel like participation in the circle is not their own choice" is that is "lessens the likelihood that they will sincerely engage in the restorative process and own it just as they own the vigilante conflict resolution of the schoolyard."

Effective Practices for Overcoming Youth & Their Attraction to Violence

To offset the default student tendencies, Jones says schools should provide leadership opportunities in circles and RJ programs, create safe spaces for students to release anger, altering terminology, and expect and prepare for dishonesty from students.

The largest point Jones makes is that ringleader students can find the same sense of authority, respect, and thrill from actually leading their peers. Jones recommends creating leadership positions within the RJ structures at a school. For instance, students could sign up to be circle leaders or RJ ambassadors. This would help create a sense of pride, leadership, and peer influence for students in a healthy way, hopefully preventing students from resorting to destructive behaviors.

One interesting note Jones cites is that it could be healthy for a school to provide a room for students to yell or release any anger in a safe and isolated space. "In addition to encouraging ownership, various restorative practitioners make a conscious point of expecting, and accepting, intense emotions from adolescents," Jones says, and points out how "some school-based practitioners will allow students to scream, curse, and release anger in the safe context of the restorative justice office until they have worked through

their aggression and calmed down." The idea is that schools should allow students to get out their emotions but also have some positive dialogue, in a safe place, instead of having the students create a disruption around others and then suspend them for feeling those emotions.

Lastly, Jones warns schools to just expect students to come into RJ practices with some level of dishonesty and disrespect. Jones recommends circle structures, for example, to allow for some flexibility and breathing room for these disruptions. One recommendation is to change the terminology and wording around these restorative practices. Because students are prone to act up, using the words "victim, offender, perpetrator, and justice" can be "pathologizing" for students who are just, well, students doing student and adolescent things. By shifting the word choices, schools can separate their processes even further from the justice system, humanizing students instead of incriminating them with labels.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS ABOUT CHALLENGES SCHOOLS FACE

While the three categories Jones (2013) presented in her thesis are plausible, it doesn't seem as plausible to me that these cover the full scope of RJ implementation issues and solutions. Within each of the three categories, what other related subtopics need attention or further discussion? What other categories of implementation obstacles exist outside of the current research? Are schools still dealing with the same obstacles, or have new ones arisen?

Jones' research is nearing almost a decade in age, and the cited evidence and examples is primarily from just a couple school campuses. This thesis is interested in seeing how Jones's and other research from the past decade has aged and holds up to schools currently practicing RJ this year, and if the research is consistent over a larger pool of informants. Do schools agree with some of the older literature? Have schools figured out ways of dealing with some of these obstacles? What new solutions are schools currently practicing?

Lastly, Jones fails to acknowledge limitations of the research and potential for any further studies. What kinds of future studies would be beneficial to the educational RJ field? What sorts of data could be useful for school leaders to have access to? Where does the scope of literature fall short, and what gaps should future research focus on first? How are schools on the ground level collecting data for themselves, and how could that be useful in the future?

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this section I will explain why categorizing schools is useful, how I found my interview informants, provide an overview and background for those participants, describe my interview procedure and questions, preview my data analysis, and acknowledge the limitations of this study.

CATEGORIZING SCHOOLS BY RJ ADOPTER TYPE

The research on RJ in schools has not investigated how obstacles differ for schools at different stages This thesis introduces terms to best describe where a school falls in relation to others. A helpful way to think about RJ implementation within schools is that it

is a spectrum ranging from schools that practice no form of RJ to schools that could not implement the scope of RJ any further and are thriving in their practices. For the sake of simplicity, this thesis will use four terms to classify schools along the RJ implementation spectrum: 1) Nonadopters, 2) Unsuccessful Adopters, 3) Developing Adopters, and 4) Thriving adopters.

1) Nonadopters: These schools practice no form of RJ and adhere to traditional punitive systems. Some of these schools may be aware and educated about RJ philosophies but have not taken any action to change their schools' systems. Nonadopters may not have the funds or even personnel necessary to even start a dialogue, committee, or movement about implementing an RJ program. Some nonadopters may feel doing so would be unnecessary in their schools, or don't experience enough behavioral issues to see a need to switch from the traditional models. Many non-adopters are more affluent, higher SES schools where behavioral management issues are low, and resorting to suspensions or traditional forms of punishment works well enough without the consequences and risks that would occur in low income areas. Some nonadopters would perhaps benefit greatly from an RJ initiative and may even desire to have RJ in their schools but are in such a broken school system or culture that the prospect is near impossible in immediate view. Other schools in this category may not even be aware of RJ practices and have never been educated on RJ or know that alternative punitive models exist.

2) Unsuccessful Adopters: These schools have attempted to adopt RJ practices but have failed or are failing in their implementation. For instance, a school might have tried to roll out an RJ initiative but failed to get enough community buy-in for it to be successful. Perhaps teachers were unwilling to participate, and the program failed to move past a few obligatory trainings and never made it into practice.

Perhaps a program was not successful in shifting student culture and teachers and administrators grew weary of fighting student backlash and issues, so they gave in to resorting back to traditional punitive issues where they could leverage immediate threats and consequences. Unsuccessful Adopters may also be in the process of attempting, or in the process of failing (and may not know it). Perhaps these schools did not have the right toolkits or trainings to even give RJ a fair shot, or did not fully understand the *why* behind necessary implementation procedures. Some schools in this category may have come up short on funding for necessary staff, resulting in an initiative that is unsustainable.

3) Developing Adopters: These schools are finding success in their RJ practices in some way or form. They usually haven't completely integrated RJ into every area possible but are seeing progress in the areas that they are practicing, such as improved teacher-student conflict resolution, reduced suspensions, or improved student climate. Some of these schools may identify as thriving, but in fact could develop their RJ programs and initiatives further. Some schools will recognize their room to grow and are trying to expand their programs, but need more time or data or administrative buy in. Some schools may be capped by available resources, only able to expand or go to a 100% RJ model only if the district allocates more full-time staff members or spaces to conduct RJ within. Developing adopters are an extremely useful resource group to my thesis because these are the schools that are facing obstacles but are finding or working towards ways to overcome those obstacles.

4) Thriving Adopters: These are the example schools that have made great sacrifices to fully commit to practicing RJ in every facet of student and faculty life. These schools often practice no suspensions at all, and make students go through a set of

RJ processes for offenses large and small. The RJ culture is school-wide and permeates in the attitudes and cultures or students, faculty, and administrators alike. These are often smaller schools that can operate with some independence from a greater school district, such as charter school, because the freedom allows them to completely overhaul systems and practices. Thriving schools identify their initiative to be going well, having overcome most of their growing pains and obstacles that non-thriving schools still face. These schools have allocated sufficient funding, resources, time, administrative support, and full-time faculty to run their RJ programs sustainably. These schools feel they are in a position to provide resources, toolkits, insights, best practices, and even trainings to other schools who want to implement or improve RJ at their own campuses. These schools are useful to my research because they can provide proven methods to overcoming obstacles. These schools can provide experiential insights to the full-picture process that it takes to get a school from developing an RJ initiative to a thriving program.

Refinement of these newly introduced terms over future studies could provide opportunity for operational definitions to be used in research about RJ implementation in schools. By having specific terms for schools with different levels of RJ practice and implementation, the literature could more efficiently and accurately describe schools and make distinctions between recommendations.

FINDING INFORMANTS

Before contacting any potential informants, I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (IRB Study Number 2020-02-0130) from the university to conduct qualitative interviews for this thesis. Using the snowball method of contacting informants,

I contacted a total of 11 different school leaders, administrators, social workers, and a university researcher. Out of the 11 contacted, I conducted a total of six interviews. Five of these interviews were the standard recorded phone call interview as the sixth was an email exchange of more specific questions answered over writing.

I searched for informants at schools who were either developing or thriving adopters of restorative justice, for reasons mentioned in the definitions section. I contacted administrators I knew at such schools and asked them to connect me to other qualified administrators, social workers, or other campus school leaders. Most of the informants whom I contacted with but did not interview were either unable or referred me to someone who would be better suited to answer my study's questions. As for Dr. Armour, I cold emailed and was able to make a connection because of being at the same university.

INFORMANT OVERVIEW & BACKGROUNDS

Table 2 shows a summary of the interviewees:

Name	School Name	School Type	Job Title	Interview Type	Adopter Type
John Armbrust	Austin Achieve Public School	Charter, 1st-12th Grade Campus	Founder, CEO	Phone, Standard Questions	Thriving
Samuel Camarillo	Austin Achieve Public School	Charter, 1st-12th Grade Campus	Assistant Principal of Culture	Email, Alternative Questions	Thriving

Dane DeCiero	KIPP Austin College Prep	Charter, Middle School Campus	Campus Social Worker	Phone, Standard Questions	Developing
Scott Anderson	KIPP Austin Comunidad	Charter, Elementary Campus	Assistant Principal	Phone, Standard Questions	Developing
Jesse Heaton	Denver Schools of Science and Technology, College View	Charter, Middle & High School Campus	Dean of Students	Phone, Standard Questions	Developing
Marilyn Armour	University of Texas at Austin	School of Social Work	Professor, Researcher (Phd)	Phone, Adjusted Questions	N/A

Table 2 Interview Participant Overview

John Armbrust

I met Armbrust at a few different teaching events in Austin. Armbrust served as a teacher for over a decade at various low-income schools before deciding to start a public charter school in the highest need zip code area in Texas. Armbrust is the founder and current CEO of Austin Achieve. He started the RJ program at his campuses 5 years ago.

Samuel Camarillo

After my interview with Armbrust, I was connected to Camarillo. He served as a middle school teacher at Austin Achieve before becoming Assistant Principal of Culture, where he works closely with many of the RJ initiatives.

Dane DeCiero

I was connected to DeCiero by one a Plan II Honors faculty who lectures a class on charter schools. For the past few years, DeCiero has been the social worker at KIPP Austin College Prep, one of KIPP's middle school campuses in Austin. He spends about half of his time dedicated to working with and developing restorative practices at his campus.

Scott Anderson

DeCiero connected me to Anderson after our interview. Anderson works at a neighboring elementary campus as an Assistant Principal of Social and Emotional Learning, where he has been overhauling traditional punitive practices with restorative measures for the past few years at his campus.

Jesse Heaton

I met Heaton through my teacher hiring process in the Denver school system. Heaton served as a teacher and teacher coach for about 6 years before moving into a Dean of Students role at a middle and high school campus for the past 5 years, focusing many of his efforts on developing RJ initiatives at his schools.

Marilyn Armour

Armour is one of the few leading researchers in the RJ field, and I was fortunate enough to have her at the University of Texas at Austin. She is a University Distinguished

Teaching Professor and researcher for the School of Social Work and is the founder of The

Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue (IRJRD). Armour is a sort of RJ

school implementation expert. She has conducted a series of studies on RJ in local schools

and implementation practices. Additionally, she was the advisor on the Jones (2013) thesis

and was able to provide insights and updated information regarding that piece of research.

INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

The interviews themselves were conducted either over Zoom online audio

calls or traditional phone calls, with the audio being recorded for transcription of data and

the quotes used in the analysis chapters of this thesis. Interview protocol included a high-

level overview of the objectives of the study and then proceeding with questions. Most

interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes.

QUESTIONS

As following were the standard set of questions asked in the interview:

- How would you describe your school's RJ program: unsuccessfully adopted, adopted but not yet thriving, or thriving? Why?

- Can you give me some examples of why you came to that conclusion?

- Do you identify with any of these three obstacles to implementing RJ: Creating a School-Wide Restorative Culture, Power Dynamics & Interpersonal Politics in the School Setting, or Youth and Their Attraction to Violence?

- (Going through each obstacle) For this obstacle that you identify with, what about this obstacle hindered the RJ program in your school?

- For the obstacles that you didn't identify with, can you give an example of how your school handled this area well? Why wasn't this an issue?

- What else kept RJ from thriving in your school? What went wrong?

- If any of these were issues in the past, how did your school overcome these issues?

As mentioned in the introduction, the three categories that I use as base framework of investigation are from the Jones (2013) thesis, which provided a concise grouping of most implementation obstacles in the literature. As with all interviews, each question organically brought follow up questions and me asking for clarifications or further explanations, all within the spirit of answering the initial main question.

Because Dr. Armour is a university researcher on the subject and not at a specific public school practicing RJ, I adjusted the interview questions to ask for trends that she has seen across the many schools she has worked with.

As for the email interview with Samuel Camarillo, I had further questions about the specific ways Austin Achieve lived out their RJ philosophies. After my initial phone interview with John Armbrust, I was directed to email Camarillo and received written responses for my follow up, school specific questions.

DATA ANALYSIS

This thesis conducts a qualitative analysis on the interview data. I looked at what my interviews confirm and disconfirm about the three obstacle areas and the RJ literature in general. Additionally, I discussed what unexpected obstacles came up in my interviews that are not currently documented by the literature. The analysis portion of this thesis has three chapters for confirmed, disconfirmed, and unexpected hypotheses, respectively. Within each chapter I group different areas of insight under topic headings, with supporting quotes from my interview participants. By cross comparing and contrasting what my informants had to say on specific topics within different obstacle realms, I provide new insights and a report of current, ground level implementation philosophies and practices,

synthesized into implementation advice for schools, presented in the recommendations portion of this thesis in the Conclusions chapter.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

I made sure I had interviews at various school levels, from elementary to high school as this thesis is making insights for the K-12 realm. It should be acknowledged that a limitation to my study was that all the schools in my study were public charter schools. This is in part indicative of the fact that a high proportion of RJ practicing schools are charter schools. These schools are public schools but have more administrative freedom than traditional public schools to create school practices as the school leader sees best.

Because this thesis is conducted out of the University of Texas at Austin, all of my interviews were from local schools with the exception of my interview with Jesse Heaton out of Denver. I do not see this as a research limitation as there doesn't seem to be any geographic impact on RJ implementation.

A more significant limitation is that all of my interview participants are either some sort school administrator or a researcher. All of my interview data will be coming from the researcher or administrator perspective, and will be discussing issues pertaining to teachers, students, and parents. As seen in the informant descriptions, most of my informants are actually former teachers with years of experience under their belt. Additionally, they all have significant experience working with students and parents in school settings. So while my informants are qualified to speak to the matters presented in this thesis, there is this limited perspective in my set of interviews.

I will go into detail in my Conclusions chapter about how further studies could interview a comprehensive array of stakeholders in the school community. Because students, current teachers, parents, or other types of stakeholders weren't interviewed for this thesis, the assertations made in the analysis section should be taken in light of this study's limitations.

Chapter 4: Results on Creating a School Wide Culture

Out of the three obstacle areas this thesis investigated, two out of the three ("creating a school wide culture" and "power dynamics and interpersonal politics") were confirmed by my ground level interviews. These two obstacles were confirmed at large by many aspects seen in the schools I interviewed. These next two chapters will explore how my data supports the current research and literature, and also how my data provides additional insights into the importance of looking into these obstacle areas. This section will delve into issues related to funding and hiring RJ coordinators, maintaining school leader consistency, adjusting practices to a school's demographics, and collecting and presenting data.

FUNDING & HIRING DEDICATED RJ COORDINATORS

While the schools I interviewed had all made some sort of financial and staffing commitment to making RJ happen (by hiring social workers, RJ coordinators, additional assistant principals, or even multiple staff per campus), even these schools weren't totally satisfied with their available staff bandwidth. In fact, everybody I was interviewing was on a full-time salary and dedicating at least half of their time to implementing RJ practices in

their campuses, which often meant they were splitting time between tasks. Dane DeCiero at KIPP told me he spends "about half" of his working hours just focusing on RJ.

When I asked Marilyn Armour what some of the biggest obstacles out there were, she said "Well there's no money, number one," concurring completely with Jones about funding being the first barrier to so many implementation issues. John Armbrust of Austin Achieve told me, "It is a resource commitment. You do have to have RJ coordinators. I've got one of those per school. So for every 500 students or so I have an RJ coordinator, and that person works in pretty close parallel with my social workers…I'd say my social worker is spending half of his or her time working with kids in RJ, so that's one and a half staff positions per 500 kids, which is not a small commitment, for sure."

Armour went on to agree that some sort of RJ coordinator is crucial, saying, "you really need to have a restorative coordinator, on site, that helps guide and direct the campus in terms of implementing [restorative practices], if you're doing a whole school approach." Armour continues, further driving home the obstacle that hiring dedicated staff is dependent on funding, stating, "that's a position where money gets taken away from something else that the school feels is vital." But Armour believes that "it's not actually very expensive" in comparison to the impact and importance hiring such a staff person can have.

Armour warns against "bringing the job onto the back of the assistant principal, or onto the back of the social workers," saying this will create issues because those staff have other jobs to take care of. Armour, in accordance with Armbrust and the rest of my interviewees, makes it clear that a successful school will invest in a full time staff member who can guide the vision and practice. Armour acknowledges that funding is often not only lacking in hiring for these positions but also in the area teacher training, resulting in

skimpy, one day workshops which are from the adequate years of training that is actually necessary.

At the end of the day, even schools with some allocated funding and staff (such as the ones I interviewed) would always appreciate more funding and faculty support – not to mention schools who haven't gotten around to hiring for an RJ coordinator or social worker in the first place. Armour is right that this obstacle will always be an issue.

GETTING SCHOOL LEADERS TO BUY IN

My interviews affirmed the notion that school leaders must be brought in for RJ practices to be successful in a school. Assistant principal Scott Anderson told me how "sometimes the leadership team isn't fully aligned…if the leadership team is not fully behind it then there's always the feeling like 'are we really doing this or are we just trying it out?'" Having a leadership team that isn't convincing about its support creates doubt in teachers and faculty throughout the school, which is the opposite of a school wide pro-RJ culture.

Dane DeCiero told me how "lucky" he was to have a principal and leadership team that were in full support of RJ initiatives. This meant when he wanted to order "thousands of dollars" worth of restorative themed books for one of his initiatives, his principal had already allocated some funds for him to use.

Armour pushes this idea even further and suggests that school leaders can't just be supportive of the idea; they have to be a role model. She says, "unless the principal buys in -- and we don't need support, we need an embrace of restorative – and is actively a part of this and is modeling what is expected of the others in the school…unless the principal does this, it probably isn't going to take root."

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Armour says that the hierarchical nature of a school means that culture is set top down. If a school leader doesn't walk the talk, then how can teachers and faculty be expected to do the same? And if teachers aren't walking the talk, then how will students ever catch on to these behaviors and practices? Thorsborne sums this idea that I kept hitting in my interviews over and over again. She says, "Leadership is values-based and transformational, and leaders walk the talk, and model the required change" (pg. 61).

MAINTAINING SCHOOL LEADER CONSISTENCY

The theme of good leadership continued as a major area that my interviews kept affirming. One issue that Jones cited in her work is the detrimental effect of a school leader leaving and uprooting all the momentum of existing RJ processes with them. Even Thorsborne laments this common problem, saying,

> we also have seen the heartbreak that occurs when a new principal/head teacher is appointed to a school who has no real understanding of the work that has been done to achieve the current restorative culture, nor have they any real deep relationship knowledge and skill. This can undo a restorative culture in the space of a year or two. Change is constant and so is the need to sustain and plan for departures in key personnel and the appointments of new ones. (p. 171)

Indeed, a few of interviews confirmed this matter, and I would wager the ones who didn't touch on it would agree. Armour said a huge problem in RJ implementation across all the schools she has worked with is "the turnover on principals." She says, "you can get a principal who is on board, who has gone through the training and says, 'Yes I support this; I want this to happen,' and they get everything going beautifully and then they leave." The biggest shame of it all? "The person at the top is really the central character of the hierarchical model. And so the principal leaves and the next one comes in and knows nothing about restorative. So that's a problem."

Scott Anderson of KIPP had similar insights. He says, "someone brand new walking through the door, even with all the new shiny things, isn't going to carry a lot of credibility, unless they have a really spectacular track record somewhere else where people can say, 'Yeah, we want to aspire to that.'" For Anderson, the problem of principal turnover is that all the built-up ethos from the previous principal goes out the window. Odds are that the new figurehead simply won't have the same credibility and community pull as the previous leader and will have to spend years building up a reputation, clout, and trust among community stakeholders. Consistency in leadership is important because it takes time and effort and relationships to even get to a place where change can happen in a community. We must not forget school leaders are ultimately dealing with people and changing practices for people, not just policies. Signing a document is easy, but maintaining relational momentum and trust takes much more than just a title.

MATCHING PRACTICES TO A SCHOOL'S COMMUNITY & DEMOGRAPHICS

Because the schools I interviewed identified as developing or thriving adopters of RJ, my interviewees didn't touch on this topic as an obstacle. I suspect if I had interviewed struggling or failed adopters, I would have run into some schools that failed to cater their practices to their specific student demographic. It seemed to me that the schools I interacted with had already overcome and planned through this obstacle; otherwise they would have never gotten as far or become as successful in their practices as they were. This would be an interesting point of further investigation for future studies to confirm further or gain insights into more schools struggling here, as Jones encountered in the Oakland schools.

COLLECTING AND PRESENTING DATA

My interviewees would agree wholeheartedly with Jones that data collection is a crucial habit for successful and long-lasting RJ programs. Dane DeCiero, the social worker for KIPP Austin College Prep, pointed out how he is collecting data to convince an incoming principal and current and future administrators to further RJ programs at his campus. "Our school is really, really big on collecting data…we collect the numbers on who is being suspended and for how long, and how frequently alternatives are being used, and where the data is now…we are using alternatives more than we are suspensions. So I'm going to make a huge push for our principals next year," DeCiero says, as new policies get put in place in the upcoming months. DeCiero explained how he collects data on almost everything relating to behavior management. He documents students' grades before and after incidents, which allows him to see how students who go through a restorative practice alternative fare compare to their suspended counterparts. Dane says, because they are seeing a need for far more alternative approaches to address students more individually and seeing success in the outcomes, he is pushing to ultimately get rid of suspensions and only have alternative, restorative options.

Data doesn't just help craft policy recommendations for the sake of lobbying's sake. It is critical in creating just and equitable practices within schools. In poring over data, Dane found that "kids in special education were being disproportionally suspended." He looked at criteria that would trigger ISS and realized some of the practices were outdated. He's been working at enacting new policies and reducing that disproportionality. Almost every school mentioned using data in some shape or fashion. Austin Achieve used data to

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track their RJ program's recidivism rate and adjusted to be more proactive in preventing students from repeating offenses and having to go through the program multiple times. The purpose of data is clear – it is a necessary and useful tool for schools to get feedback and adjust practices for constant improvement.

Ch. 5: Results on Combatting Power Dynamics & Interpersonal Politics

This chapter deals with the second obstacle hypothesis area where the current research was largely confirmed by my interview data, albeit some new insights. This section will explore issues relating to overcoming control issues by understanding the purpose of RJ, establishing friendships with students first, overcoming traditionalists and laggard teachers, giving teachers opportunity for practice, allowing students to help set the culture, and overcoming school politics and underlying hierarchies.

OVERCOMING CONTROL ISSUES BY UNDERSTANDING THE PURPOSE OF RJ

When asking my interviewees about power dynamics within the school, I pressed in to see if the research was true that teachers want to hold onto their power and shy away from restorative alternatives at first. Jesse Heaton, Dean of Students at DSST College View in Denver, said, "For sure" when I asked him about the issue. He told me that teachers holding onto their power is actually a twofold issue, in his experience. First he said some teachers don't want to do it because they feel they didn't do anything wrong and are simply unwilling to participate. But then he continued with a completely new thought I hadn't come across anywhere in the literature. He explained, "then there's the second more insidious way when the teacher isn't actually interested in taking responsibility or hearing a student's perspective, they are actually just interested in hearing things that the student

has done wrong." This is a fascinating concept of a teacher taking a restorative approach and twisting it into a retributive, selfish act, that ultimately stems from an insecurity of the power dynamic with students. Heaton doesn't condone these teachers; he seems to think it is just a natural tendency that takes training and a bit of heart change. Heaton said he's had to pull a few teachers aside during what were supposed to be restorative conversations and had to reorient their motives.

Scott Anderson has had similar encounters with teachers at KIPP Comunidad. For teachers who really want to suspend or punish a student, Anderson found it is useful to have the teachers examine their own thought processes. He asks them, "What is suspension going to teach them? What is the objective? What is the lesson?" Anderson said the results are humbling for teachers, saying "that questioning I found really powerful to use with staff members because it put them in a place of 'Ok, if I was going to teach this student to do something differently, what it is that they should learn how to do, and what do I need to feel better about this and move on?' That's the restorative piece." Not only does self-examination help teachers see the purpose of what a punishment should accomplish, but it also helps teachers come to terms with their own feelings as well.

Anderson says, "very rarely does a teacher want a student to suffer…What anybody wants in almost any situation is when someone wrongs you, you want them to make it right, to clean up the mess or repair the debt or whatever it is that they did, and you want them to say 'sorry,' that is an authentic apology that comes from the heart. If you can get those two things, most people are ready to move on, kids especially."

ESTABLISHING FRIENDSHIPS WITH STUDENTS FIRST

Just as cited in the Jones (2013) thesis, Jesse Heaton too found in his school that students have a hard time being vulnerable with teachers due to fear in the power dynamic.

He says, "the hardest things to get students to buy into is participating in the process with teachers…I think they are less likely to believe that it is going to lead to change with an adult because they are aware of the power imbalance there…unless they have a pretty strong relationship with an adult." Heaton said for students to have conversations with a teacher whom they do not know very well will feel like a punishment.

In her book, Thorsborne brings up "the *relational conversation*, an idea developed by Jude Moxon, a highly respected restorative practitioner in New Zealand, is a commonsense approach built around the notion that if one needs to correct a young person about a small issue (such as a uniform infringement) it might be best to connect with them first before having to disapprove of the behavior" (p. 40). Demonstrating friendship and establishing relationships with students *first* seems to be a key factor in RJ practices going over well.

Anderson said at his campus, his work as assistant principal starts with the relationships at his school. "With the relationship piece of it, you can get quite a bit of mileage without even having to talk about the discipline piece. And that's what a lot of the training that I've seen goes into. 'Let's get the relationships right.' If we can get the relationships right, then we're not going to have to deal with as much discipline, and it becomes less of an issue." Anderson told me that when you want to make change at a school, "the first thing you do is get your teachers to connect with their students more."

Anderson noted that whenever there is a behavior issue, the first item he investigates is the relationship the teacher has with the student. "Anytime a teacher talks to me about a behavior issue they are having, I'm like 'Ok, what's your relationship like with this kid.' If they are like 'Oh it's pretty good' I'll say, 'What did they have for breakfast? How many dogs do they have? What are the names of their dogs? You don't know? Ok you don't know that kid. You need to go find out more about this kid before we can do

anything because if you don't have a good relationship with them nothing we are going to do is going to work.'"

Anderson told me about an instance where he had a student "back in class within ten minutes" where two years ago, Anderson said the student might have received an all-day punishment. The only reason he was able to deal with the student in a timely manner was because of the relationship he already had built and because the student knew Anderson was on his side.

A school practicing effective restorative principles should be so dedicated to student relationships that large issues will be able to be resolved in minutes. By investing time into relationships on the front end, faculty will be able to save time dealing with less behavior blow ups and keep kids in the classroom and learning content.

OVERCOMING TRADITIONALISTS AND LAGGARD TEACHERS

All of my informants agreed that more experienced teachers were often the hardest to get onboard with a totally new behavior management system. Heaton has found that a thorough try can get a lot of initial naysayers on board. "If you can get someone to do it and do it well, I think that is the best way to convince people, when they can what can come out of a really good restorative conversation."

Armour concurred about this issue as well but provided different insight for overcoming this laggard group. In overcoming the obstacle of staff buy-in, Armour said schools should be smart and recognize that the popularity of a practice is a slow and progressive diffusion. She recommends getting the more enthusiastic stakeholders and fresher teachers on board first, and dealing with any heel diggers and traditionalists last. If a good chuck of faculty members are already onboard with a philosophy, the contagion

effect will be stronger by the time it reaches these groups. Armour recommends this strategy to be paired with stories, data, and strong leadership, as discussed already.

Thorsborne's work offered the encouragement that a convinced traditionalist can be a school's biggest asset in pushing for change and adopting new policies. In my interview with DeCiero, he provided an anecdote which precisely supported this idea. He was so excited to tell me this redemptive, turn-around story: "One of our music teachers is one of our most seasoned teachers, almost 40 years of teaching, and she would not schedule harm circles her first year, she did not want to participate, she did not want to give students a voice, and now she is the biggest advocate." DeCiero says after a few years of resisting, "she had enough exposure to it to come around," and now she is the first to make suggestions and improvements to further RJ practices. "It took four years of chipping away and not shying away from really hard conversations and insisting she participate." In these cases, sheer persistence seems to be effective on even the most hardened teachers.

GIVING TEACHERS OPPORTUNITIES TO PRACTICE AND BE MENTORED

All of my informants agree teacher training is a necessary part of overcoming power dynamics and implementing new philosophies in a school. As one would expect, Heaton confirms that "teachers come in with variety of skills and mindsets," which can create challenges for getting everyone on the same page.

My interviews provided a few different tips for getting the ball rolling on teachers leading effective practices. Heaton believes teachers are set up well with good expectations and "talking through it before hand." With individual prep and guidance, they can get started on the right foot. Remember how a few good victories can really change a teacher's attitude about RJ? Heaton understands this and wanted his teachers to get a good taste in their mouths during their first few goes, even if it took a little hand holding.

DeCiero is more keen to just throw teachers into the mix but emphasizes that persistence and repetition is key. When asked about how teachers can improve in living out new practices, DeCiero told me, "I think it's about practice at bat. Having them try it and get first-hand experience." For teachers who are still uncomfortable or just more inexperienced in the practice, DeCiero then provides some coaching: "We essentially make them do a harm circle with someone who is skilled and experienced in the room and get feedback afterwards."

Interview participants differed on the goal of teacher training, mainly based on the setup of their RJ practices and programs at the school. For DeCiero's KIPP campus, harm circles (conference of all involved parties with a guided set of questions) can be requested at any time by a student, parent, or teacher, which would happen within 48 hours. But his goal is to train teachers on resolving conflicts immediately through smaller, spontaneous restorative conversations. "A harm circle takes 20-30 minutes; I think a better solution is the 5-minute conversation," says DeCiero. He hopes he can train all of his teachers to the point where everyone is skilled enough to be able to handle most issues through on-the-spot interactions rather than scheduling harm circles all the time.

A number of my interviews mentioned mentoring as an import aspect to teacher training, as well. I've already cited how at KIPP teachers often have to sit through a modeled and coached circle experience. Armour summed it up well, saying, "being able to do this well requires an apprenticeship model where people are sitting beside the teacher as they are doing their first circle…that is the role of a coordinator." Here we see the need for a dedicated RJ coordinator come up again, especially if mentoring is to happen. Without

proper training, Armour says this will "leave everybody more vulnerable," especially teachers who feel responsible for their classrooms.

At Austin Achieve, however, the philosophy differed from the rest of my interviewed schools. Students are "sent to RJ," which means they are physically removed from their normal classrooms and the teacher doesn't even need to be that involved. Students will spend their days in the program office, completing a reflective RJ curriculum as well as their classwork. They receive staff and peer support for both. Students are required to stay "in RJ" until the RJ Coordinator deems that they have adequately reflected and understood the harm they have caused and are ready to go express this in words to their offended classroom, peer, or teacher.

ALLOWING STUDENTS TO HELP SET THE CULTURE

A power dynamic that isn't talked about much in the literature is the buy-in and culture shifting that can happen because of student-student dynamics. In the first few years of Austin Achieve's RJ program implementation, Armbrust said he felt it wasn't going to be possible. What changed? "It became possible because of student culture," he said, telling about a graduating class that really bought in and rallied their peers to accept and participate in the new systems.

Armbrust capitalized on this idea and created a Student Ambassador role, where students could choose to be peer models within the program and help others get through the RJ curriculum. Armbrust thinks his RJ program is ultimately successful because students are accountable to their own peers: "the kids who end up in the program have to do reflections and present back to their peers about what they learned and why and how they did harm to the community. That process is so authentic because they work with the

student ambassadors" who provide tutoring and mentorship. "It's really kids supporting kids," says Armbrust.

Heaton found a similar vein in his school. Even though students were apprehensive about engaging with teachers, "it seems like they are more likely to say, 'I'm having this problem with a peer. I'd like to sit down and go through this process." The lesson here is that schools can't just focus on teacher buy-in and training. The most powerful force in overcoming challenging dynamics very well could be found within the student body.

OVERCOMING INTERNAL POLITICS AND UNDERLYING HIERARCHIES

In my interview with Armour, I was made aware of totally new power dynamics neither I nor any research has really considered. Armour mentioned that everything within a school falls along a hierarchy. Take the subjects for example: in some schools the STEM teachers might be better regarded than their liberal-art counterparts, or vice versa. Because school environments and cultures value different areas, some faculty members or areas get assigned more clout than others. This isn't a bad thing for RJ implementation, however; Armour sees this as a strategic implementation opportunity. She recommends using admired teachers to one's advantage and getting those faculty members on board first is a smart move. To understand and play with a school's hierarchical social is like working "an art form," says Armour. It is such an important management skill that Armour believe it is the "core of implementation."

Heaton backs this notion up and adds in an insight as an administrator. "I think you can leverage their peers really well with other teachers. Sometimes it works a lot better if it's not the Dean running the conversation but it's a fellow teacher who has some skill.

There's also a power imbalance with me being in the room, to teachers and students. So sometimes it helps when it's someone without that baggage involved." Here we see that just as students can be motivated by each other, sometimes teachers are the best influences on each other, rather than a top-down administrative mandate.

So while these internal power dynamic politics exist, the insight from my interviews is that schools should view these (inevitable) underlying hierarchies as opportunities to leverage some of those power imbalances to actually set culture change in motion, and catapult RJ as a popular policy right away with the right players.

Chapter 6: Results on Overcoming Youth & Their Attraction to Violence

While the other two obstacle areas that this thesis investigated were largely confirmed by my research, this third hypothesis area was largely disconfirmed by my ground-level interviews. This section will explore how my data contradicts some of the current literature and points provided in Jones's thesis. Additionally, this section will tease out insights from my data in looking at why my interviews contradicted some of current published findings. This chapter will focus on the insights pertaining to creating student leadership roles, adjusting terminology, why student buy-in is the not the issue, and the question of why some students are more violent than others.

CREATING STUDENT LEADERSHIP ROLES & OPPORTUNITIES

The area where I found congruence with Jones's research was in her insights about the effectiveness of student leadership roles. Armbrust, too, found that students had a real yearning for a sense of ownership in the RJ initiatives at his school. During the first few

years of implementation at Austin Achieve, the students "self-initiated a restorative justice ambassador program. They began mentoring the young kids and basically set a culture of 'Hey at Austin Achieve we should do things differently.'" The start of this student ambassador program came hand in hand with the student culture overhaul that Armbrust saw at his school, which turned out to be pivotal in the implementation fire catching at his campuses. So not only did Armbrust see that student leadership roles helped with student buy in, but with the overall effectiveness of the life of the RJ program. Remember that in the previous section, Armbrust attributes the success of his RJ program to peers helping one another through the RJ curriculum.

Armour's ivory-tower perspective is that the university research agrees with this component of the literature as well. She says that schools are bound to fail in their RJ initiatives "where there aren't peer facilitators of groups," because of how important leadership opportunities are for RJ to catch with students. Because adolescents are always searching to establish a pecking order or to find respect and admiration, empowering them through healthy leadership opportunities can help fill that need. RJ programs should capitalize on this student desire to help kickstart initiatives. To not provide these opportunities for the natural leaders in a school means that students, left to their own devices, will certainly find the opportunities on their own, whether that be on the playground, in the hallway, or locker room, which usually won't end well.

SHOULD SCHOOLS ADJUST THEIR RJ TERMINOLOGY?

The idea of getting rid of classic RJ terms like "justice, victim, offender, etc" to make students feel better makes sense in theory, but not something I found many schools practicing, and remember all of the schools I interviewed had already found some level of success in their RJ implementation. Jesse Heaton in Denver did tell me about how it masked

its RJ processes with the familiar "ISS" (in-school-suspension) term for students. Heaton says, "In-school-suspension is really just what we use in code to do restorative work. That's when they are doing the restorative reflection." This is quite different from what was happening at Austin Achieve, where students knew they were "going to RJ" and the words "Restorative Justice" were not shied away from at all.

I'm not sure if Heaton at DSST or Armbrust at Austin Achieve had made these choices for their schools by design, it seemed more like that was the way the schools just happened to proceed with their initiatives. Both seemed to be achieving some level of success, so I'm not sure students really feel any different or the if the outcome would differ for students based on the terminology used. I could see how a school community really entrenched in a history of school-to-prison pipeline cases might be sensitive to some of the RJ terms. This is certainly an intriguing topic where more research and data collection could be had. I think this would be a great opportunity for further research and study.

IS STUDENT BUY-IN REALLY AN ISSUE?

The attitude that Jones presents in her thesis is that the violent nature of adolescents means that students won't really buy into RJ programs at first. Students will naturally resist, and schools must overcome this as an initial barrier. My interviews, on the other hand, presented the opposite notion. My informants believed students were not only the easiest party to convince, but they even immediately loved the idea.

Dane DeCiero summed it up for me right away. "The kids love it," he said. "They are like, 'Oh I get in less trouble and adults have to listen to me?' There's no salesmanship." For all the teeth pulling school leaders have to go through with teachers, it seems students provide almost no resistance.

Jesse Heaton spoke to me about his students' attitudes towards traditional punishments and their new RJ alternatives. He told me, "any kid who's been punished before knows it is a colossal waste of time sitting in a room silently staring at a wall. They didn't learn anything from it. Suspensions -- they're able to say: 'I went home and I watched TV all day. It wasn't that bad.' And so, I think if you can get them in a space where it's like 'how are we actually going to solve this problem?', they'll always admit, 'Yeah, restorative practices are the best way to solve this.'" Even though students may like going home and watching TV at first, they can see through how pointless traditional punishments can be. They know they aren't learning any lesson and will admit RJ actually feels purposeful to them. Students, just like adults, don't want their time to be wasted when they are being honest. Heaton told me at the end of the day, when given the choice, students will choose RJ every single time.

When I asked Armour about what she had seen in all the different schools she had conducted research in, she told me, "for the most part, in my experience, is that students love [RJ] and gravitate towards it. If it's done in a way where it becomes sort of an exercise, they are not going to like it, same if it's done in a way in that they are not fully a part of how [the schools] choose to organize it." So regarding the current research about adolescents' angsty initial reactions to non-violent, peaceable practices, Armour concluded that "for the most part, that has not been a big issue in terms of the groups that I'm aware of." It seems that we need to revisit some of the research on students, or maybe not pin students so quickly for being the aggressive, little resistors adults and research anecdotes may be so quick to highlight.

WHY AND WHEN ARE STUDENTS VIOLENT?

Not only did my informants seem to disagree that students are going to resist buying-in initially, but my informants disagreed with the research on the very nature of adolescent aggression in general.

To start with, Armour said that "violence is much more accepted today, you see it on television, every single ad that there is, it's in the culture"; nonetheless, she then said, "I don't see that as a resistance to restorative work." Just because our culture may be full of graphic violence in the media, this didn't create students who were extra violent or would throw fists at the implementation of RJ practices in a school.

Scott Anderson backs up Armour and told me, "I don't think kids are any more violent than they used to be." He just thinks schools who practice RJ nowadays might actually encounter more incidences because they are chosen to deal with problematic students instead of just getting rid of them: "When I grew up, those kids just weren't allowed to go to school. They were expelled or whatever. We just didn't deal with them." In talking about traditional schools that don't practice RJ in our city, he said, "In Austin, those are the kids that go to the alternate schools. It's kind of like pushing your problems away. In restorative, it's the opposite of that." He says his campus has to make the choice to say: "I'm going to be so deeply invested in this problem that I'm never going to push this kid away." As a result of this, it is true that an RJ school might see repeated incidences from a violent student. But this doesn't mean students are more violent or become aggressive as a reaction to RJ practices. It just means that the school isn't passing the problem off to somewhere else.

When I asked Armour specifically about the overall point the thesis made about schools having to overcome the obstacle of youth and their tendency towards violence before having a successful RJ program. Armour said, "That's one that I don't buy into very

much." Remember, Armour was an advisor on this thesis's work, but has seen a lot more studies come and go since it was published in 2013. Armour gave me an important update about the research I'm working with: "I think it's important to remember that [Jones] did that study in LA before LA put it in the way they are now," talking about how the Los Angeles school districts have since implemented RJ into various campuses. Since Jones's research, Jones told me how the LA schools Jones had studied received "a big mandate and lots of money" to implement RJ throughout the whole system in 2020. Armour would probably advise the thesis differently now. Since doing more research, Armour isn't sure youth and their tendency towards violence is an obstacle towards RJ implementation anymore. "I don't have a lot of data to support that idea," she said, admitting she hasn't really had to battle youth aggression as a hurdle in all of the work she's done with RJ implementation over the past decade.

Scott Anderson believes you can't just make a blanket statement about adolescents having anger and aggression problems. He thinks the issue is more nuanced and that there is actually an explanation to why some kids do act out. "I would say, think about categories of kids," Anderson said. He told me all kids who struggle with some sort of violent behaviors usually have some history with the following three categories: childhood trauma, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), or emotional behavior disorder.

Anderson said for students with trauma, "those kids really struggle with self-control, emotional management. Those are the ones that typically exhibit the most violence," at least at the elementary and middle school level, in his experience. "It is pretty rare that a really well-adjusted kid who has not suffered any kind of childhood trauma wants to beat people up," Anderson said. He said having an emotionally healthy student act up for no explanation is just "not that common."

This of course means RJ programs must respond to violent students in an appropriate way. "Dealing with that underlying trauma, which is not strictly a restorative practice" is necessary, Anderson says. Why? Anderson explains that "if you're not going to punish kids then you gotta deal with what the problem is. For kids who have had that underlying trauma – that needs to be dealt with to get them to stop being violent." RJ programs are going to encounter violent kids, inevitably. But the role of RJ programs isn't just to blame their aggressive tendencies on their adolescence but to deal with it in an appropriate fashion, as this will actually solve the issue.

Anderson told me that students who have ADHD have a "faster emotional thermometer," often escalating into anger or violent incidences because they didn't have the same amount of time to rationalize and make appropriate choices from what they were feeling inside. Emotional behavior disorder works in a similar fashion and is often a result or tied to childhood trauma, according to Anderson.

These are all very specific groups of students who exhibit violent behaviors. Andersons said, "when I think about kids who are violent, they usually fall under one of those three camps." Instead of attributing a blanket statement or generalization of an obstacle unto all adolescents, schools can better get through challenges when they are informed of what they are dealing with.

As an example, Anderson told me that earlier that day, he had a student in his office for hurling a backpack across the hallway in an angry fit after a poor performance on a test. Anderson knew the student well enough to know the student has a background with ADHD and an emotional behavior disorder and was able to handle the situation appropriately instead of dealing out a routine punishment. Rather than viewing this matter as an obstacle, the school should view the source of students' violent tendencies as a helpful and useful tool in dealing with these cases.

Chapter 7: Unexpected Obstacles and Insights

This chapter will cover unexpected obstacles and insights that arose in my interviews that weren't addressed in the research, presented a unique solution, or brought up completely new avenues for research. This chapter will cover findings in the areas of hiring staff, RJ taking up classroom time, exercising patience in implementation, rushing the implementation process, exceptions and safety considerations to zero-suspension policies, misconceptions of RJ, parental and societal attitudes, inconsistencies between campuses, learning from other schools, RJ process timing, and if colleges of education are preparing teachers adequately.

HIRE FOR THE CULTURE YOU WANT, NOT THE CULTURE YOU HAVE

Two of my interviews cited hiring as a way to overcome the obstacle of teacher training and power dynamics. Or perhaps instead of "overcoming" the obstacle, they presented a way to mitigate or circumvent the obstacle all together. Both Armbrust of Austin Achieve and Anderson of KIPP revealed how they will only hire teachers who are completely open to or will be pretty much all on board with RJ principles.

Anderson said, "as part of our hiring process, any teacher or a partner teacher or any sort of student contact has a 30-minute sit down with me where I explain what restorative practices are, and I'm like 'How does that sit with you?'" He says for teachers coming from a school with a punitive background, he will ask the interviewee: "Tell me about the discipline in your school, what do you think about that discipline?" Anderson thinks it's all about teasing out "mindset fit" before hiring someone. Ultimately, he says, "if they don't [fit] – if they believe in punishment – they're just not going to be happy here. That's just not going to work."

Armbrust presented the exact same advice. After Austin Achieve had some issues with some of their teachers wanting to hold onto old practices, Armbrust says, "now we really hire for it," admitting that he can just curtail that issue altogether with good recruiting.

This seems like an obvious thing to do, but it really is such a culture setting technique and way to completely get rid of further challenges with any new staff. I hadn't heard of anything like this in any research that I did. I read pages and pages on advice of how to train teachers or change faculty attitudes. Never once did I read advice being given to schools to hire individuals who agree with the principles and culture a school works so hard to achieve. I think this should be standard advice and practice outlined in RJ toolkits and implementation books.

IS RJ WORTH TAKING UP PRECIOUS CLASSROOM TIME?

An important insight actually presented in the research resurfaced only in my interview with Armour was the encouragement for teachers who are worried about RJ taking up too much time in the classroom. Thorsborne sums up a common fret: "a teacher's initial response to proposals for introducing RP into the classroom is: 'I haven't got time to do this – I have to get through the curriculum'" (pg. 50).

Thorsborne's advice is to look at the literature, reminding us that "In an extensive research study, Lingard et al. (2003) found that academic outcomes are enhanced when schools have a strong emphasis and focus on the quality of relationships as part of that learning environment. This is something that often gets lost in the pressures of standardised testing in place in many education systems" (pg. 50).

Armour brought this same point up almost in passing during our interview, but I think it is a point that all teachers and administrators should be aware of. She says because

teachers have to teach "to a schedule, because of standardized testing, and anything that gets in the way of that is a threat to being able to accomplish that." Enter RJ practices. "The time that restorative takes in the classroom is not huge but it definitely is time, and is time away from, in their minds, what they are otherwise supposed to be doing."

Armour has conducted studies on this however, and, surprisingly, doesn't think teachers should actually be concerned. In some of her investigations she said, "we've had teachers clock the amount of time it takes doing restorative processes" and "clock the amount of time they were spending correcting students' behaviors." The results? In terms of classroom interruption time, "it turned out pretty equivalent."

Armour concludes unapologetically, but what turns out to actually be a great encouragement to do RJ: "you're either going to put in the time on the front end, or on the back end. It'll be about the same amount of time. You have to decide when you're going to do it and what's going to be most successful."

EXERCISING PATIENCE WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Time in the classroom isn't the only obstacle to RJ implementation in school settings. When it comes to long term success, Armour confidently asserts "a major impediment is the issue of time." RJ programs aren't built in a day. They really do take a while to get going and be successful.

But how long should schools expect to battle the eternal clock? "Three to five years minimum," Armour says without hesitation, adding that this time is necessary "before anything is really going to take hold."

John Armbrust, in his 5th year of RJ implementation, has felt this timeline personally. He said RJ didn't even feel "possible in the first 2 years" and that he has only seen it be truly successful to his likes in the past couple years.

At the end of all the obstacles I talked about with Anderson, he told me, "the last thing to understand is that it's a long process. You don't become a restorative school overnight." DeCiero at the neighboring KIPP campus concurred, saying that he felt progress towards getting rid of suspensions altogether is a process of "chipping away," and just collecting data over just more amounts of time, so that the data can be used to sway administrators and create effective practices. Often needed elements to change, such as data, physically cannot be acquired until years and years of time and experimentation have passed.

"So time is an issue, there's no question about it," Armour concludes. Indeed, it seems that time itself is a whole obstacle on its own. Schools simply must exhibit patience and stick it out for at least three to five years if they want a shot at making RJ work on their campus.

WHY SCHOOLS MUST NEVER 'JUMP THE GUN' ON IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

Armour brought up yet another unique issue in our interview regarding giddy administrators. Schools will always try to "find a way around the longer route, if you will," says Armour "So that's a huge issue." Because administrators want to accelerate the lengthy RJ process, they often end up hurting, instead of helping, their implementation altogether.

How can you stop administrators from trying to go through the implementation steps too hastily? Armour suggests that restraint might be the only way. In a training with 2,500 administrators in Texas, Armour and her team refused to give the school leaders anything past the first stage of implementation that should happen in year one. She follows up after a year to provide the next tiers of implementation. She says that if trainings give school leaders too much information about the future too early, "that's where you're going

to jump to immediately and it will cancel out" any progress that the school leader might make in the first year. If you jump the gun, "it won't work. It'll go belly up," says Armour, talking about all the failed RJ initiatives she's seen.

The danger here is that when administrators don't succeed in their implementation, they blame RJ and start spreading the idea that restorative practices don't actually work. But the issue in these scenarios was actually in the implementation process, not in the educational philosophy itself.

ARE THERE NECESSARY SUSPENSION CASES WHEN IT COMES TO SAFETY?

In the RJ world there seems to be a certain pride for a school to claim they are doing "zero-suspensions." This seems like such a victory from the era of "zero-tolerance," indeed. In my interview with Austin Achieve, Armbrust told me, in response to where he thought his school fell in the RJ spectrum of schools, "I would strongly comment there shouldn't be bits and pieces [of RJ]; you should just go for it, or not. I don't know if there is a very happy medium ground. I could be wrong but it really felt like we had to be all in on it to make it work"

So should schools eradicate suspensions once and for all? My interviews with Jesse Heaton and Scott Anderson raised some information that made me reconsider if zero suspensions is always appropriate or safe for schools to actually do.

When I asked Heaton why his school didn't get rid of suspensions entirely, he began to explain: "I think it would be great, but I think the level of support we would need would have to jump a couple levels." On one level this is a funding issue, yes, but Heaton explains why the problem is actually a safety issue. For instance, if a student is under the influence of drugs, Heaton "would want to have someone on campus who was medically trained and could monitor them." Because schools don't know what the student has ingested, this could

create a liability issue if anything happens during the rest of the day. In such an instance, Heaton feels it is wisest to get the family to take care of the student for the rest of the day (the student would still go through RJ processes upon return, but that day would be an out of school suspension, unfortunately). In instances such as fights and violent behaviors, Heaton said he would need dedicated staff personnel and dedicated spaces to deal with an overly aggressive student who wasn't calming down.

In theory, Heaton is on board with the idea of getting to a place of no suspension whatsoever, "if we had unlimited resources," he says. But he doesn't think it's actually practical or safe for even developing and thriving adopters who already have the money for RJ programs and coordinators, such as in Heaton's case at DSST schools. With the "given resources, it would be really difficult," says Heaton, even for well-established programs.

My interview with Anderson brought up a similar warning. While Anderson's campus almost practices zero suspensions, there are still exceptions for safety reasons. "The only time we would suspend a student is when there is no other recourse…when the student is being so unsafe that it's not safe for us to keep him on campus." An example of this would be if a student had brought a legitimate weapon to school and was intending to cause harm to others that day. In this case, it wouldn't be admirable for a school to maintain its zero-suspension streak. I wouldn't even classify these situations as obstacles to restorative justice. These are just incidences outside of RJ's scope altogether.

DO MEDITATION AND YOGA COUNT AS RJ?

In the process of writing this thesis, I came across a few personal instances where someone was mistaken about what RJ actually entails in a school setting. I had multiple people send me articles or news stories about students practicing meditation at school as

part of their ISS or in-school punishment. That is lovely, but that doesn't mean those schools were actually practicing RJ. Remember that the heart of restorative justice is for someone to repair any harm caused, including mending damaged relationships, whether that be with a teacher or a peer or whoever. Meditation might be an improvement to more archaic punishments (and is certainly better than out of school removals) but it still doesn't qualify as restorative justice.

Other times I would talk to educators or administrators in traditionally operating schools who didn't have a grasp on RJ at all. One time in particular I received a comment that, "Oh, I don't agree with restorative punishments at all." When I asked why, the individual responded, "I don't think having a student do yoga instead of a punishment really does anything." I actually agree with this person's conclusion, and so would just about every restorative research paper or practitioner. Yoga, like meditation, isn't RJ either. It might be nice and at least give the student a workout, but I would agree that it does nothing in teaching a lesson or repairing any harm caused.

The reason I bring these anecdotes into this thesis is because, presumably, there are schools and individuals out there who believe they are practicing RJ but are in fact not doing anything much different from arbitrary punitive practices. These schools, which can often receive press for their novel practices regarding meditation and yoga, can create a skewed view of what RJ actually is or lead people to believe RJ doesn't really work at all. Additionally, these sorts of practices often contribute to the idea that RJ is a "soft," and maybe even touchy-feely practice that doesn't measure up to the good-old-days of real punishments, when the reality is that RJ done properly takes an extreme amount of discipline, diligence, and real accountability.

PARENTAL AND SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS ROOTED IN RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

When I asked about other obstacles that RJ brings up for schools, Anderson opened my eyes to something new: "the parent mindset can be a challenge," he said. "We talked about the issue of teacher mindset. There's a parent mindset too." When a parent's student gets hit, "they want to know what the consequence is for the student" that hit their child. Unfortunately, parents aren't always assuaged when Anderson explains the RJ process for an incident. "Sometimes they're not satisfied with that. They're like, 'He should not be in school! When I grew up there was no tolerance for this kind of behavior.'" Anderson says sometimes the only way he can respond is by reminding him that they signed up for a different school experience, "that's what charter schools are for," he says, often adding, "if you want a school with lots of punishments I know a couple, but I don't think your child is going to like that." He has to remind parents that there is no shortage of traditional schools that they are welcome to attend.

The issue of students wanting vengeance (justice) for their children might be a deeper societal problem, Heaton thinks when he brought up this issue as well in our interview. "I think there is the constant barrage of societal expectations that people should be punished for things. That is really difficult to respond to," he said. "I think that comes from parents as well."

Heaton provided me with a mock parental perspective: "When my son gets hit in the face in the hallway, I don't want to hear the restorative practices were going to go through. I want to hear, 'is that kid going to punished?' I want [the offender] to be removed from the opportunity to hurt my son again." Heaton says all this is understandable, but "speaks to all the education we have to do with adults around how to do restorative justice well."

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So not only must schools get over the barrier of education students, teacher, and faculty, they must also educate and work with parents too. I'm surprised this point wasn't found all over the literature. After hearing Heaton and Anderson talk about it, I suspect this is an obstacle for every RJ school to overcome, especially considering how loud and important the parental voice can be in a school community.

CONSISTENCY ACROSS CAMPUSES IS KEY

Armour told me about an issue she has seen come up regarding campus inconsistencies but that she doesn't think is addressed anywhere in the literature. Armour explained to me how it is not ideal "when students have [RJ] in one school and then go to another school and then they don't. So if you have students, for example, that have it all the way through grade school, then they hit a middle school which is doing a traditional model, that's a problem."

The same issue will be even larger if students have RJ from elementary all the way through middle school and then get to a high school without an RJ model. "That's a problem because students have learned to speak out, students have learned to have a voice, they have learned group decision making, and now they are in a setting in which their voice is no longer welcome," Armour says.

According to Armour, the issue of vertical implementation to all schools in a system "is pretty important but I don't think a whole lot of attention has been given to that." I think this issue merits a whole lot more importance. Like many of the other unexpected obstacles and insights in this chapter, this is an issue that seems so obvious when stated but would otherwise fly under the radar until it actually happens. I'm not sure administrators would always think about this issue in their implementation, so I think it deserves more coverage in handbooks, toolkits, and the research out there.

LEARNING FROM OTHER SCHOOLS

In my interview with Armbrust, I learned they modeled their RJ program after a combination of a few schools they had taken the time to go visit. He said, "in the year leading up to our launch, we visited probably half a dozen schools in different regions and states." The schools were doing different components of RJ that Armbrust and his team liked. They put together those pieces and created a program that worked for their specific campus. To pay it forward to other schools who might be interested in starting RJ initiatives, they put together a toolkit (A Google Drive filled with helpful files – examples, slide decks, procedures, resources) to share.

Armbrust gave me a "general rule of thumb: make it a point to visit other schools to pick up best practices." I've included his advice as a section in this chapter because though it is an insightful practice, it may also be an obstacle for schools who wish to do this but might not have the funding or resources to go about traveling and visiting an array of schools. These schools should still strive to learn from others that have gone before them, perhaps relying more heavily on toolkits and other public resources that are growing with the RJ community of schools around the country.

HOW MUCH TIME SHOULD RJ PROCESSES TAKE FOR STUDENTS?

Though my interview informants agreed across the board in philosophy, I did notice their actual practices of RJ differed significantly from one school to the next. What seemed to be the most drastic change between each school was how much time an RJ process could take for a given incident. Recalling from an earlier chapter, DeCiero at KIPP was working

to training teachers to deal with most issues with five-minute restorative conversations so that they wouldn't have to have so many 20-30 minute harm circles. For the behavior issues at his campus, DeCiero felt this to be sufficient.

The RJ process at Austin Achieve can take up to "one week in a full-time RJ placement or one week in a half-time placement if they are following program expectations and demonstrating retention of lessons taught." When I asked how they ensure students don't spend too long in the RJ process, Samuel Camarillo, Assistant Principal of Culture, shared how they "have projected timelines for the scholars and immediately notify parents if scholars are not following expectations. Some scholars stay longer in the process due to not maintaining their GPA, not following classroom expectations, not being able to retain the SEL practices/coping skills taught, or repeating the same behaviors that got them into RJ during the part time shift." According to Armbrust, this process used to take far longer for students a few years back when the program first was implemented. According to Armbrust and these timelines, Austin Achieve is serious about only letting students return to their school community when harm is genuinely understood and can be repaired.

Heaton in Denver told me, "We tie return to class when you have made this right with all the people who are impacted, then you can go back to class. Sometimes that takes an hour, sometimes that takes all day. When you are done fixing the harm you have done to the community, this is over." Here we see Heaton's philosophy is the exact same as Armbrust at Austin Achieve, but it takes about a day compared instead of a whole week.

So which timeline is the correct one? While this is an opportunity for further research and studies, I'm tempted to say all of these timelines are correct. For schools who

might be bogged down in creating the proper RJ process for their campus, it seems that schools just have to do what works best for their student culture and available resources. As long as the purpose of RJ and the philosophy of repairing any caused harm and hurt relationships are maintained, it shouldn't really matter how long that takes.

ARE COLLEGES OF EDUCATION PREPARING FUTURE TEACHERS?

The final unexpected obstacle that came up in my research had nothing to do with school leaders or district funding issues or even students. A huge obstacle actually seems to come with new, freshly college graduating teachers who were never taught anything about RJ or larger issues in behavior management altogether. In my interview with Armour, she blamed the university system for this. "There's a huge issue of colleges of education not preparing teachers to deal with a classroom, certainly not giving them anything about restorative. So that's another issue," she says.

Armour explained to me that "in the colleges of education, they do not give teachers anything about behavior management." She told me they only focus on teaching educational philosophies, which don't really translate to anything in practice. Additionally, these colleges often preach that "if you are strong in your content area, 'you'll be fine.'" And then when teachers hit the ground, Armour says, "they don't know how to manage really complex behavioral situations," which results in teachers who "feel failed – nobody's given them the skills to do it -- and they drop out." Armour told me that "16.5% of teachers drop out every year, and 20% at high-poverty schools," which she attributes to insufficient university curriculums and preparations.

So tradition, naysayers, and difficulty in implementation aren't the only factors that have failed our grade school students. Our universities, too, have failed our students by not preparing their future teachers well enough -- at least according to our leading restorative justice researcher. If the future of education is to keep changing, and the school-to-prison pipeline is to be gotten rid of, and if schools are to keep creating cultures of respect and learning, and if students are to learn how to mend relationships and become emotionally literate, then our universities must lead the way too, shoulder to shoulder with school leaders and administrators and activist teachers. More research is not enough, it's time for colleges of education to progress their curriculum and pedagogy too.

Chapter 8: Further Research and Concluding Recommendations

POTENTIAL FOR FURTHER STUDIES

What Informants Would the Ideal Study Interview?

To be gather a better wholistic understanding of the current RJ implementation state and best practices in schools, further studies should broaden their interview and data collection pool. In addition to interviewing researchers and school administrators, further studies should focus on teachers, students (where the rubber really hits the road), and parents. Collecting more data on these ground level stakeholders could further confirm or disconfirm the literature.

Future studies should seek to interview an array of students, parents, and teachers from schools all across the RJ spectrum. This would be particularly insightful to see how attitudes towards discipline, relationships, and culture vary across schools with different levels of RJ practices. If possible, a study could find even greater insights if it found

informants who had moved from one school without RJ and moved into a school practicing RJ. Interviewing students, parents, and teachers who had seen both sides of the spectrum could provide a controlled comparison of insights into their experiences with each.

Other potential stakeholders could be considered as valuable informants too, such as teacher coaches, non-teaching staff (office faculty, administrative assistants, etc). These could provide more nuanced insights and see the second-hand effects of RJ in a school, such as how RJ values could overflow into overall staff culture and into the realm of non-teaching faculty.

Additionally, future studies should gather informants from all types of schools: Traditional public schools, public charts, and even private schools. What would be incredibly interesting to see would be a study comparing RJ in schools of different SES. How is RJ accepted into wealthier, more affluent schools vs. higher need schools? The mere lack of data in this realm also provided opportunities for general surveying and national data collection of exactly where RJ is practiced around the country (and worldwide).

What about schools that don't practice RJ?

This thesis did not investigate non-adopters or failed adopters. I see these types of schools as huge opportunities for further study. Nonadopters would be useful to observe because they'd provide insight into overwhelming challenges that prevent schools from even trying RJ in the first place. They could reveal why some schools fail to get reached by the knowledge or education of RJ philosophies. Additionally, schools who don't feel the need to attempt RJ at all would allow speculation for what kind of climate drives schools to consider RJ as a necessary alternative. Unsuccessful adopters are could prove useful by confirming the most obvious obstacles that may hinder schools from succeeding

much at all. These would be prime case studies of a failed implementation process, which would provide first-hand accounts of the advice and insights discussed in the literature and this thesis.

What Questions Should Future Studies Investigate?

Future studies should focus on the gaps in the literature, finding useful implementation insights, confirming best practices, and pushing the future of the RJ movement. Questions that could provide significant developments in the RJ field include:

- How long should it take for a student to go through an RJ process? What are the most optimal timelines for different processes?

- Should schools shy away from using traditional RJ terminology such as "offender," "perpetrator," "victim" and "justice"?

- How do student academic outcomes differ with RJ practices?

- What kinds of students are most prone to violence and what can schools do to mitigate issues? For students with emotional, medical, or trauma issues, how are schools to work with these students appropriately, individually, and effectively?

- Should schools adopt zero-suspension policies? If so, what safety precautions must be taken? How can schools achieve this type of policy in an appropriate way?

- Do students do better later in life if they went through a school with RJ?

- How do schools best educate parents, their community, and society as a whole about RJ practices? What proactive steps can be taken towards community education? How are societal retributive attitudes best changed?

- Should RJ be practiced differently at the elementary, middle, and high school levels? How should practices be adjusted for student adolescent development? What psychology and childhood development research can be used to guide RJ practice and philosophy?

- Is RJ right for every K-12 school? Should every school in the U.S. practice RJ? If so, how could it be adopted at a systematic level?

- Should every school in the world practice RJ? How does RJ look different outside of the Western world, and how would that look like in an Eastern school?

- Is it ever too early to start incorporating RJ philosophies in the classroom? Does RJ have a place in Pre-K?

- What would RJ look like at the university level?

- Is there a place for RJ in the workplace? Could RJ philosophies be transferred into Corporate HR frameworks?

CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS ADOPTING RJ PRACTICES

Even without these questions answered, there are so many takeaways for schools to start acting on now. For non-adopters of RJ, I would implore those schools to consider the philosophy and practice. If a non-adopting school is satisfied with their culture and student accomplishments, I would beg them to consider the social and emotional opportunities for its students that goes far beyond intellect and pure academics. RJ in schools is also about educating students as humans, empathetic beings, and future members of society who know and have practiced how to take ownership of their actions, forgive, reconcile, and nurture relationships. It is so much more than just creating scholars. For non-adopters who are too intimidated to try the practice, they should know that it certainly

won't be easy but that implementation is possible (and worth it!) and that many resources exist to help avoid pitfalls.

 For failed or struggling adopters, my call would be to not give up or to get up and try again, all for the same reasons. My recommendations, start with the buy-in of the leadership team. Did the school fail in its implementation because the principal wasn't bought in? Start here – the school leader must be all-in for the policies to effectively trickle down. Grassroot teachers should use data and stories to convince school leaders if that is where a school is at, because a few motivated teachers can only do so much.

If you are a principal who is bought in but still experienced failure or are struggling, my next recommendation is to trust your students. Allow them to flip the culture from the ground up. Embrace student leadership desires and create roles and opportunities for students to lead their own peers and get the movement going. What kind of teachers are you hiring? Principals across the board should hire as a proactive strategy in mitigating laggards and instead bringing in enthusiastic culture setters.

For these and even developing schools, look to model thriving adopters as help. Investigate their framework, policies, and procedures. Ask for toolkits, resources, advice. Send administrators to any trainings. Go repeat the process and learn from as many schools as possible. Partner with a local RJ organization – many major cities have RJ insitutes that offer training or resources. Leverage as much support as possible.

And don't forget – the implementation process will trust your patience. Three to five years of you patience, supposedly, at the very least. Go into the process knowing you won't see much fruit from your labor overnight, or even in a year or two. Administrators must not jump-the-gun on implementation process steps, or worse, blame RJ for their implementation follies.

For schools that are starting to get the hang of some RJ processes and are overcoming the obstacles – these schools deserve a pat on the back but also a reminder that the work is far from over. Continue to push teachers in their training. Focus on staff members developing relationships and friendships first, before almost anything else.

For traditionalist teachers, laggards, and naysayers, use the art of leveraging faculty-faculty influence and using the school hierarchy to the advantage of progress. Make teachers give RJ a few good faith tries for themselves before they are allowed to bash the idea of it. Let RJ speak for itself and convince teachers by allowing them to see it in action. Schools should continue to refine their practices, curating them to their specific communities' identities and needs.

Examine what your values really are and make sacrifices to make them happen. This often means hiring dedicated RJ coordinators, more social workers, an additional assistant principal, or other (often multiple!) full time staff. The Biblical saying goes, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.[3]" In other words, put your money where your mouth is and allocate the resources or staff positions you need to make RJ successful (if it truly is a value).

Once things are somewhat under control inside of a campus, these schools need to turn outward and focus on educating the outside community. Overcome the barriers of societal and parental attitudes with frequent education, tactful presentations and reminders of community values, and a clear communication of school policies and expectations of all stakeholders.

For thriving adopters – my call to you is to return any favors your received and share your best practices and secrets. Make a toolkit and send it to anyone who asks.

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[3] Luke 12:34

Advertise it, even. Compile your resources and present them any chance you can. Contribute to any research opportunities. Allow others to study your school and learn from you.

Lastly, for all types of schools practicing RJ, keep first things first. Be weary of implementation politics getting in the way of the RJ spirit, or when faculty fail to lead by example and instead undermine these very values in trying to force students to practice RJ. Schools must never lose sight of what RJ is really about: creating a community free of injustices, rich in healthy relationships, and ultimately educating students as intellectual, social, emotional, and empathetic human beings who take ownership of things outside of just their own heads.

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Biography

Keith McBrayer was born in Austin, Texas on April 18, 1998. He enrolled in the Plan II Honors program at the University of Texas at Austin in 2016 and will be graduating with an additional degree in Rhetoric & Writing and a Creative Writing Certificate. In college, he was involved with tutoring and mentoring students through the Plan II/KIPP Austin partnership and at Westwood High School through Young Life and was an active member of Beta Upsilon Chi (Brothers Under Christ). After graduation, Mr. McBrayer will be moving to Denver to teach 7th grade Writing & Composition as a Teach For America Corps Member and will be attending the University of Colorado, Denver for a Master's degree in Education.